Evaluating Websites

The critical evaluation of information is an essential skill when conducting quality research. It is also a skill that can be used throughout your life. It involves a combination of common sense, knowledge, skepticism, and verification. Some general criteria to consider as you evaluate websites include:

- **Authority**
  - What is the domain of the URL? .com, .gov, .edu, .net, .org? (ex: www.adelphi.edu)
  - Affiliation (institution, organization, etc.)?
  - Author's qualifications / credentials / position / education--has the author published much on the topic?
  - Does an institution or "parent organization" support or endorse the information?
  - What is the mission of the organization? Is it a national or international institution?
  - Does the author cite other sources?
  - Is it a personal web site? (even within a .edu site look for a ~ indicating a personal site)
  - Is there contact information?
  - Do other reputable sites link to the page? (put url into Alexia.com)

- **Currency**
  - Is the information, or perspective, up-to-date for your purpose?
  - When was the information written or made available? Check the copyright or publication date and time period. Sometimes you have to do a lot of searching to find a date on websites.
  - Are there recent updates or a "What's New" section?
  - Are the web page links current or expired?

- **Accuracy**
  - Is the information factual, detailed, correct and comprehensive?
  - Is a reference list or bibliography included?
  - Can the information be verified by research, statistics or studies?
  - Is it credible, probable or possible?
  - Can you find two other sources that confirm the information?
  - Are there content, spelling, or grammatical errors?

- **Coverage**
  - Is there sufficient depth to the information presented?
  - Is the content objective?
  - Has the information been abridged (shortened)?
  - How does this information compare with other sources in the field? Does the information support other sources or update information already found?
  - Is the reference list/bibliography appropriate? Is there a list of sources?
  - Are there errors in the content, even typographical ones?

- **Purpose**
  - What is the purpose of the website or webpage?
  - Does it educate, inform, advocate, sell, or entertain?
  - Are the author's affiliations reflected in the message or content?
  - Does the publication appear to have a bias?
  - How valid are the author's conclusions? Are they based on personal opinion, interviews, research, or experience?
  - Who published or funded the information?
  - Has the information been reviewed or edited?

- **Intended Audience**
  - Who is the publisher?
  - Is the publication directed toward a particular audience (general public; scholars; practitioners; specialist; consumers)
  - Is this reflected in writing style, vocabulary, or tone?
  - Where was it published?
  - Does this publisher produce other titles on this topic for the same audience?