

## **Evaluating Web sources**

### **Library 100**

When using Web sites, one helpful approach is to ask the question: Is this Web site for popular, general, or academic use, i.e., faculty and students? Other questions have to do with the Content, Credibility, Bias, and Timeliness of the site.

#### **Content/coverage**

- Is the information valuable to your research?
- Is the coverage in-depth, or is it superficial?
- Is the Web site from a commercial site (.com) or from an organization (.org), a government office (.gov), or an educational institution (.edu)? This won't always correlate perfectly, but noticing provides clues.
- Does the Web site link to other credible sources?
- Are there cited references? One way to determine accuracy is to check an author's citations.

#### **Credibility**

- Who is responsible for the content? Are the author's credentials listed?
- Is the author affiliated with an organization?
- Is there a mission statement or an "about us" link that describes what the organization or institution does?
- Is the information published by or located on a reputable organization's Web site?
- If it is an article in an online journal, is it published in a peer reviewed publication?

#### **Bias or pre-judging**

- Does the author or organization promote a single one-sided point of view?
- Is the author or organization making an argument for personal or monetary gain? Is the material written objectively, or is it biased and subjective, expressing only one point of view?
- Are there commercial ads on the page? Is the site just trying to sell you something?

#### **Timeliness**

- Is the information kept up to date? Look for a notation about the last update or copyright date (near the bottom of the Web page)

## **Citing Sources on the Web**

Cite what information is available. In documenting your resources, you are providing others with a way to find the sources you have used. In citing Web resources, it may be difficult to find the author, or there may be no publishing organization listed, but look for this information.

### **Information you need to collect for a citation to something on the Web:**

- Author or editor (if given). Invert the first author's or editor's name, e.g., Smith, John. If no author is given, start the citation with the title.
- Title of the individual Web page in quotation marks
- Title of the entire Web site, in italics.
- Name of the publishing organization or institution, if given. If no name is given, write N.p.
- Date of publication, copyright, or last update. If no date is given, write: n.d.
- Medium of publication: Web
- Date you saw the Web page online (this is the access date)
- URL for the Web page if the page cannot be found easily using a search engine; enclose URL in angle brackets, e.g., <<http://libwww.cabrillo.edu>>

The MLA Handbook states, "You should include a URL...only when the reader probably cannot locate the source without it or when your instructor requires it."