How to Evaluate the Legitimacy of a Web Resource

Traditional print resources that have established guidelines, standards, and people who edit their books, but the web is somewhat untamed and free from these practices. Thus, it is important for **you to verify** the validity of information found on the web by considering the following questions.

- **Who** wrote the information? What are the author's credentials? (Was the web page created by a group, an institution, or an individual?)
- **What** is the bias of the web page? Is the information balanced?
- **Where** does the web page reside?
- **When** was the web page created?
- **How frequently** is the material updated?

Look for Clues

Read the **Home Page** or main page of the web site carefully. Look for

- a link to information such as **About this Site**, **Credits**, **Contact us**, or **For More Information**
- an **e-mail address** and send a message with your questions
- a link to an **FAQ**, or frequently asked questions place on the web site

Analyze the URL

URLs tell you where a page resides. You can often guess the university or government agency just by analyzing the web address.

.com = company
.edu = a university or college
.gov = branch of the federal, state, or local government
.mil = branch of the U.S. military
.net = internet service facility or internet provider
.org = not-for-profit organization

Example

This **URL** is from the University of Virginia: http://www.virginia.edu
(**www**=world wide web; **uva** = University of Virginia; **edu** is the suffix for educational institutions)

This **URL** is also from UVA: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/SADLIER/IRISH/Irish.htm
A **tilde**, **~**, as part of a URL, means that the page is assigned to or created by an individual. The individual could be:

- an authority in his field with pages posted at a university
- someone with a hobby interested in a particular subject
- a student with a web page at a site like GeoCities, or
- anyone in the world who has decided to post information on a web page

Website Authority and Date-Created Verification Tips

To find out who created the page and the last time the page was modified (if this information is not present on the website):

Go to: http://www.whois.org
Type the **web page URL** you need information about into the box under the heading "**Who is.net, Your domain starting place...** " Click on Search and scroll down to read the information in the Whois Output box.

OR

Go to the Google search engine (http://www.google.com).
Type **info:and the URL** into the search bar. For example: **info:www.iecc.edu**

Internet Explorer: Select **Properties** from **File** Menu.
Creation and modification information will appear in the Properties dialog box.

(If this information is unobtainable, use the date that you accessed the site for your bibliographic citations. Check with your instructor to see if the site is acceptable to use in your work.)