Warning: This website may be hazardous to your grade!
Evaluating web sites for academic research

Use the following guidelines when determining the reliability of a webpage for research:

1) **What type of site is it?** It’s helpful to know where the authors are coming from:
   - **Popular** (slick, 2nd or 3rd hand information; main purpose to entertain or promote a viewpoint)
   - **Substantive** News or General Interest (general info, appealing to broad audience)
   - **Scholarly** (author is credible; bibliography present; language academic/technical)
   - **Sensational** (language is elementary, inflammatory, or sensational)

2) **Authority** with regard to topic—**who** is responsible for the site?:
   - Author of site (individual/institutional affiliation, organization)
   - Credentials, expertise, experience in subject matter
   - Contact information provided (name, e-mail, postal address)
   - URL type may suggest reputable affiliation or commercial interests (.edu=educational institution; .org=non-profit organization; .com=commercial enterprise; .net=Internet Service Provider; .gov=governmental body; .mil=military)
   - When in doubt about sponsorship, look up the site on [www.easywhois.com](http://www.easywhois.com).

3) **Objectivity**—**what** is the purpose of the site? Does it push any particular viewpoint?
   - Check the statement of purpose/scope, and disclosure of sponsorship (look for “about us”), in addition to any “hidden” biases evident through your critical reading of text, or independent research done on the organization or author.
   - Who is the intended audience?
   - Information presented as factual or opinion, primary or secondary in origin?
   - Criteria given for inclusion of information?

4) **Accuracy**—**how** accurate is the information?
   - Facts documented or well-researched
   - Facts compare to related print or other online sources
   - Links provided to quality Web resources

5) **Currency**—**when** was the information posted and/or written?
   - Evidence of current content
   - Pages date-stamped with latest update

6) **Usability**—is the site well designed and stable?
   - Site organization logical and easy to maneuver with links back to home page
   - Content readable by intended audience
   - Information presented is error-free (spelling, punctuation)

Adapted from: “Web Site Evaluation Form”. Libraries & Media Services, Kent State University

Prepared by Iowa City Library, Kirkwood Community College April 2008 refdesk@kirkwood.edu (319) 887-3612
Information you’ll need to cite an Internet source (bibliography):

- Author
- Title: of document, and of sponsoring site
- Date of publication (date on the page)
- Date of access (date you viewed it)
- URL (website address) Divide a URL after a slash or before a period.

APA Format Example:
When you have used links from a Home Page to get to the site you used, use the URL of the Home Page.


MLA Format Example:
The URL of the exact document you consulted should be given, but if the URL is long and complicated, it is preferable to give the URL of the site’s home page, if such a page exists. Follow the URL with the word: Path, a colon, then list the links. Example: <http://www.smu.edu> Path: Abstracts; K-O.

Author. “Title.” Title of the Internet Site. Date of Site. Name of Organization. Date accessed. <web address>.


Tips on Effective Web Searching

For the link to “Undergraduate Research Engine”, a Google search engine especially for college students, go to the Iowa City Library’s website: www.kirkwood.edu/iclibrary and click on the Undergraduate Research Engine link.

- “” Always use quotation marks when searching for a phrase. E.g., “global warming” or “american library association”

- (minus sign) works like NOT, excluding pages with the following word from results. E.g., +pollution -air

- * When searching for a person’s name, an asterisk will search for the name both with and without a middle name or initial. E.g., “george * bush”

- site: or –site: On google.com, use the site limit to narrow down your results. E.g., depression treatment site:edu will show results only on .edu sites; “prescription drugs” –site:com will show results from any site except a .com.