



**“Trust me ...”**

## **Evaluating Information on the “Free” Web**

# “Free” vs. “Fee”

- **“Free” Web** refers to information accessed via the Internet that is free of charge to the user.

Vs.

- **“Fee” Web** refers to information accessed via the Internet that has been/must be purchased *[the library’s databases are included in the “Fee” Web category]*.

# **All information costs \$\$\$**

## **WHO IS PAYING???**

- A nonprofit organization
- An educational institution
- Advertisers
- A library purchasing for its patrons
- YOU!!! *[your taxes support the cost of government information, e.g. Census Data]*

# [ How will you know ... ]

- If “Free” Web information is reliable ... or NOT?!?!?!?

*Knowing who is paying for the information can assist with your evaluation process ...*

# When a library selects information ...

- *The information has been evaluated.*
- Criteria used by librarians includes:
  - A positive evaluation/recommendation from a reputable reviewing source
  - Recognized publisher
  - “Test of time”
  - The information will provide support for the academic curriculum.

# **Examples of “Test of Time”**

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- *Time Magazine*
- *Newsweek Magazine*
- *New York Times*
- *Washington Post*
- *World Almanac*
- *Encyclopedia Britannica*

# More “Test of Time” Examples

- *Billboard*
- *Rolling Stone*
- *The Economist* <http://www.economist.com>
  - If you looked at this weekly periodical in its print format, you would find:
    - no editorial board listed
    - no “signed” articles ...
    - Is this a reliable source of information?

# **This is what librarians know**

... about *The Economist* from an objective evaluation source:

“Founded more than 150 years ago ...  
read in more than 180 countries ...

**well respected** and **authoritative** for  
information on world politics ...

A **MUST-HAVE** for **ALL** libraries.”

[Katz, Magazines for Libraries]

# Evaluation Criteria

- A typical “checklist” for information found on the “Free” Web includes:
  - Authority [Author or Publisher]
  - Date of publication
  - Content
  - Type of site [.com, .org, .edu, .mil, .net]

# Should you use more criteria?

An **ABUNDANCE** of evaluation criteria & “checklists” exist, including:

- “Making a **Comparison** with Other Sources:
  - Is the source unique in terms of its content or format, or does the source offer any unique features or facilities?
  - What is the purpose of the source compared with others? ...

## [ ... **More criteria:** ]

- What is the coverage of the source compared with others?
- How authoritative and reputable is the source compared with others?
- How accurate is the source compared with others?
- How current and well maintained is the source compared with others?
- How accessible is the source compared with others?
- How easy is the source to use compared with others?

# [ ... and even **MORE** Criteria! ]

- Criteria exist for evaluating specific types of internet sites:
  - Organizational sites, personal home pages ...
  - Mailing lists, newsgroups ...
  - Full-text documents
  - Databases
  - Electronic journals & magazines
  - Sources of news information
  - Advertising ... and other commercial information
  - Image-based and multimedia sources
  - Current awareness and alerting services ...

# [ YIKES!!! ]

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- How many questions should you ask?
- One set of criteria for evaluating “Free” Web sites lists at least 112 questions!

[Meola, 2004, p. 337]

# According to a Recent Survey

... of more than 1,000 college students  
from all regions of the United states ...

“College students believe

**ACCURACY** is the ‘most important’  
attribute of information ...”

and they also value:

**Currency**

**Authority**

# What about Bias?

- Bias is defined as “*a partiality that prevents objective consideration of an issue or situation*” [WordNet 2.0, 2003 Princeton University]
- Is the source still reliable if there is a bias?
- “Be skeptical about the information you gather. You don’t need to be cynical, but **a little skepticism is healthy ... and smart.**”

[Kevin Engel, quoted in Walker, 2005, p. 412]

# [ Can you trust it? ]

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- Note the site: **FactCheck.org**

<http://factcheck.org>

- **Who** is checking FactCheck?

# **Compare and Contrast Information Sources**

- Locate more than one site  
on your topic &

**Verify**

**Verify**

**Verify . . .**

# **Compare information about the GUN CONTROL issue:**

## **WHICH DO YOU TRUST & WHY?**

- Dept. of the Treasury: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms

<http://www.atf.treas.gov>

- National Rifle Association of America

<http://www.nra.org>

- Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

<http://www.bradycampaign.org>

# **More sites to compare on the GUN CONTROL issue:**

- GunCite

<http://www.guncite.com>

- Mothers Arms – Protecting What's Ours

<http://www.mothersarms.org>

- Women Against Gun Control

<http://www.wagc.com>

- Open Directory Project

[http://dmoz.org/Society/Issues/Gun\\_Control](http://dmoz.org/Society/Issues/Gun_Control)

# **Compare the following for HEALTH INFORMATION:**

## **WHICH DO YOU TRUST & WHY?**

- Healthfinder <http://www.healthfinder.gov>
- Medlineplus <http://www.medlineplus.gov>
- WebMD <http://www.webmd.com>
- An article in *Consumer Reports* magazine  
<http://www.consumerreports.org>
- Pharmaceutical company  
<http://www.pfizer.com>

# **Ways to Find Reliable Information**

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- **Search Engines**
- **Gateways and Virtual Libraries**
- **Clearinghouses *[or a gateway to other gateways]***
- **Subject Catalogs & Directories**

# Which is Best?

<b><u>MORE</u> Value Adding</b>	Gateways & Virtual Libraries	<b><u>FEWER</u> Resources</b>
↑	Subject Catalogs & Directories	↑
↓	Search Engines	↓
<b><u>LESS</u> Value Adding</b>	Metasearch Tools <small>Cooke, 2001, p. 57</small>	<b><u>MORE</u> Resources</b>

# [ Search Engine Examples ]

- Yahoo!

<http://www.yahoo.com>

- Google <http://www.google.com>

- Advanced Google Search engines:

- Google Scholar <http://scholar.google.com>

- Google Uncle Sam <http://www.google.com/unclesam>

- Vivisimo [Metasearching]

<http://vivisimo.com>

# Gateway & Virtual Library Examples

- University of Michigan Documents Center  
<http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs>
- Michigan Electronic Library (MEL)  
<http://www.mel.org/>  
Scout Report  
<http://scout.wisc.edu/Archives>
- Infomine: Scholarly Internet Resource Collections  
<http://infomine.ucr.edu>
- The Internet Public Library  
<http://www.ipl.org>
- Subject Guides available at Rider University Libraries  
<http://library.rider.edu>

# **Clearinghouse Examples**

- The Riley Guide [a Career Clearinghouse]

<http://www.rileyguide.com>

- Job Hunters Bible  
[a Career Clearinghouse]

<http://jobhuntersbible.com>

# Subject Catalog & Directory Examples

- Yahoo!

<http://www.yahoo.com>

- Galaxy

<http://www.galaxy.com>

- LookSmart

<http://www.looksmart.com>

- NBCi.com

<http://www.nbc.com>

# TIPS to remember:

- Compare and Contrast Information Sources
- Verify information to determine if it is accurate
- Be skeptical – watch for bias
- Have you identified the most recent information for your topic?

## [ ... more Tips: ]

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- What do you know about the **Author** or **Publisher**?
- What is the expertise and reputation of the Author, Publisher or Institution providing the information?

# **Evaluating is an Art**

- As you practice the skill, you will gain confidence in identifying information sources that are:

**Accurate**

**Current**

**Authoritative**

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