



Sidney Silverman Library

How do I Use and Evaluate Internet Sources?

When should I use the Internet

The Internet is a good source for some, but not all, types of information. It is a fine place to find news, government resources, opinions, entertainment, computer and other technical information, company data and pictures. Often specific facts may be found more quickly in a reference book such as an almanac.

Many indexes to periodical articles, also known as databases, are accessed via the Web. These are excellent sources of information for college level research. They are freely accessible on campus. Off campus, a Bergen Community College student, faculty or staff member can access them after providing his/her last name and seven digit ID number. The Sidney Silverman Library subscribes to Academic OneFile (GALE), Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), Lexis-Nexis Academic, ProQuest Research Library and many other specialized databases.

Why evaluate Internet sources

The Internet is like a stack of paper to be sorted: lots of advertisements, catalogs, school papers, college term papers, junk mail, and periodicals that range in quality from the New York Times to tabloids like the National Enquirer. Because there is such a wide variety of material on the Internet, and no one to edit or approve the content, evaluation of the information you find is even more important for Internet sources than for traditional sources such as books and magazines. On the other side of this page, are guidelines to help you in your evaluation process.

Judging what you find on the Internet

Authority

- Is there an author? Is there information about the author or sponsoring agency/ organization?
- Is there a way to contact the author?
- What is the domain? (.com=commercial, .gov=government, .org=nonprofit organization, .edu=educational institution)
- Are there citations for the sources?

Accuracy

- How does the information compare to information on the subject from books or periodical articles?
- Is the text grammatical?
- Are the spellings correct?

Currency

- Is there a date for when the page was created and/or last updated?
- Are the links active and current?

Content

- What is the purpose of the site? To inform, persuade, entertain, or sell?

Objectivity

- Is there advertising on the page?
- Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- If the site deals with controversial issues, is the author's bias clearly stated?

Always print (or download) the pages you cite. Information on the Internet is not stable and you may not be able to access the page later.