EVALUATING WEB INFORMATION

Is the Internet the right place to be?
Sometimes, but you can waste hours swimming through the masses of Internet information, when two minutes with a reference book could answer your question.
So plan your Internet time and searching, rather than simply "jumping in."

Is the Internet the first place to search?
Not usually -- if you are beginning your paper.
Use HPU Pipeline to find what background information the library has to start your topic.
Maybe -- when you know where to look for a quick piece of information.
Use reference sources, like Librarian’s Index to the Internet <http://lii.org>, to find quick information.
Maybe -- if you are just getting ideas about a topic.

Evaluation Criteria

To determine if the information you have found is something that you would feel comfortable using in a research paper, you will need to evaluate the quality of the information and its source. These criteria should be applied to ANY information you find, but are particularly important for the Internet, where all levels and types of information becomes mixed together.

The criteria given here are built upon the CRAAP Test, which was developed by the Meriam Library at the California State University, Chico. The official CRAAP Test, retrieved 6/15/06, is available at http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/evalsites.html

Use these questions to evaluate any resource you plan to use in writing your research paper.

Currency – the timeliness of information
When was the information published? Has there been any revision to the material? A Web page should show when it was last updated.
Are the references as current as the publication?
Does the date of the publication fit the needs of your paper?
Web – are the links active?

Relevance – the importance of the information for your needs
Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
Is the information scholarly enough for your needs? Do you understand what is being said?
Have you compared this source with other sources in order to select the best one?
Is the page user-friendly and useful, with minimal advertising and with links to appropriate sites?
Authority – the source of information
Who is the author or publisher or sponsor? A Webmaster may not be the actual author of the information.
What are the credentials or organizational affiliation of the author?
Does the author have the qualifications needed to write on this topic? Does the topic fit with their training?
Is an email or contact address given for the author or publisher or organization?
On the Web the URL will give some information about the site (.com, .edu, .gov, .org). (“Internet Basics” lists domains – some are more reliable than others). Note – anyone can create an organization and get a .org domain address.

 REMINDER: what looks like a reliable source (.edu) may actually be someone’s personal opinion and not reflect the institution/organization. Look for the ~ symbol in the URL. (Example: hawaii.edu/~personalname.html).

Accuracy – the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the informational content
Where does the information come from? What was the original publication information, if it was first published elsewhere.
Is the information supported by evidence? Look for references identifying sources for factual information.
Was the information reviewed or refereed? Scholars go through this process before their articles are published in journals.
Is the information verifiable in another, credible, source?
Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors?

Purpose – the reason the information exists
Is the material meant to inform, sell a product, persuade to an author’s opinion, entertain, other?
Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions clear?
Is the information fact (with references) or opinion or propaganda?
Is the writing unbiased and free of emotion or is it clearly slanted to a particular aim or audience?
Who is the intended audience (scholars, buyers, voters)?
How is the site presented? Is it well-organized? Are the graphics clear and helpful or distracting?

 NOTE: you can sometimes find more information about a source by slowly removing the elements between slashes, starting at the right end, until you reach the home page of the domain. Look for a link that says “home” or “about” or something similar.