The AABC's of Critically Evaluating Web Sites

Why should you evaluate Web sites?

- The quality of Web sites varies
- Anyone can put anything on the Web
- It is YOUR responsibility to present authoritative, credible sources to support your research.
- Unlike print sources, most Web sites do not go through a review process

As with print sources, you should be concerned with:

CRITERIA →	Authority	Currency	Coverage	Objectivity	Accuracy
IN OTHER WORDS →	Who	When	What	Why	How Well

Evaluation of the Results List

Look carefully at the results that your favorite search engine returns BEFORE you open any of the Web sites. You can determine a lot about a web site just from the information in the results list.

- URL information (first on the list/placement on list)
- domain
  - .com (commercial)
  - .edu (for educational institutions)
  - .net (originally intended for Internet service providers, but now used for many purposes)
  - .org (for non-profit organizations, industry groups, and others),
  - .gov (U.S. government agencies),
  - .mil (for the military),
- title of Web site (the use of particular words can tell you a lot)

The AABC's

Author/Source:

- Is there an author of the work? If so, is the author clearly identified?
- Are the author's credentials for writing on this topic stated?
- Is the author affiliated with an organization?
- Does the site or page represent an organization, institution, corporation or government body?
- Is there a link back to the organization's page or a way to contact the organization or the author to verify the credibility of the site (address, phone number, email address)?
- Is it clear who is responsible for the creation and/or maintenance of the site or page?

Age

- Is there a date stating when the document was originally created?
- Is it clear when the site or page was last updated, revised or edited?
- Are there any indications that the material is updated frequently or consistently to ensure currency of the content?
- If there are links to other Web pages, are they current?

Bias

- Is the page free of advertising? If the page does contain advertising, are the ads clearly separated from the content?
- Does the page display a particular bias or perspective? Or is the information presented factually, without bias?
- Is it clear and forthcoming about its view of the subject?
- Does it use inflammatory or provocative language?

Content

- Is this page part of an edited or peer-reviewed publication?
- Can factual information be verified through footnotes or bibliographies to other credible sources?
- Based on what you already know about the subject, or have checked from other sources, does this information seem credible?
- Is it clear who has the responsibility for the accuracy of the information presented?
- If statistical data is presented in graphs or charts is it labeled clearly?
- Is the page or site a comprehensive resource or does it focus on a narrow range of information?
- What is the emphasis of the presentation? Technical, scholarly, clinical, popular, elementary, etc.

Hints, Tips, and Tricks:

Cutting back the URL to the domain name:

- http://www.siue.edu/MUSIC/ACTPAPERS/v4/Walcott4_3.pdf
  to
  http://www.siue.edu

Google:

- **"Google" the name of the web site and/or the principle people**
- **Find out what other sites link to the web site:**
  link:www.stormfront.org

Check out:

- Librarians' Internet Index: **lii.org**