

Evaluating Websites: Bogus Websites and Hoaxes

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Evaluating Websites

- How can you tell if the information on a website is fact or fiction?
- Two experts give us guidelines to use:
 - Joyce Valenza
 - Kathy Schrock

Kathy Schrock Guide

- Check out the Kathy Schrock Guide to Web Evaluation
- <http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/eval.htm>

WEB SITE EVALUATION (Joyce Valenza, 2004)

1. Content

- Does the site cover the topic comprehensively? Accurately?
- Can you understand what is being said? Is it written above or below your level of understanding?
- What is unique about this site? Does it offer something others do not?
- Are the links well-chosen? sufficient?
- Currency: Can you tell: the date the information was created? the publication date? the date the material was last revised? Are these dates meaningful in terms of the subject matter?
- Would you get better information in a book? an encyclopedia?
- Would you include this site in your bibliography?

3. Bias/purpose

- Why was this site created? (to persuade, inform, explain, sell, promote, parody, other?)
- Is it a personal, commercial, government or organization site?
- Is there any bias? Is only one side of the argument presented? Does it appear that any information is purposely omitted? Is there a hidden message? Is it trying to persuade you or change your opinion? Is the bias useful to you in some way?
- Can you distinguish facts from opinion?
- Would you include this site in your bibliography?

2. Authority/Credibility

- Who is responsible for this site? Who sponsors it? Hint: truncate each section of the URL back until you are able to find the sponsor.
- What are his/her credentials?
- Have the authors of the site cited their own sources? Are the sources documented appropriately?
- What is the domain name? Does it end in .com, .gov, .edu, .org, .net? Is it a personal page?
- Is that a meaningful clue in evaluating the site? (You can't always judge a web page by its suffix. Some commercial sites provide solid information. Some university sites offer less-than-serious personal pages to graduate students.)
- Who else links to the site? (You can perform a *link check* in AltaVista or Google by entering "link:webaddress" in the search box. Is it linked to by reliable sites? What do other sites say about this one?)
- Would you include this site in your bibliography?

4. Usability/design

- Is the site easy to navigate (user-friendly)?
- Is there a well-labeled contents area?
- Do all the design elements (graphics, art, buttons, etc.) enhance the message of the site? Is there consistency in the basic formats of each page?
- Are there any errors in spelling or grammar?
- Do the pages appear clean, uncluttered?
- Do the links on the site work?
- Would you include this site in your bibliography?

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Critical Evaluation

- Hackers, jokesters, pranksters, and wasters of time/talent spend countless hours creating bogus or fake websites. These hoaxes have countless hits in which the unknowing public cites them as fact rather than fiction.
- *Critical Evaluation* is the use of web site evaluation criteria to know the difference between factual web sites and fictional ones.
- Review the following “hitlist”

Verify a Hoax

Check these sites to verify spoofs, hoaxes, urban legends or myths you may have read about:

– [About.com Urban Legends](http://urbanlegends.about.com)

<http://urbanlegends.about.com>

– [CDC Health Hoaxes & Rumors](http://www.cdc.gov/hoax_rumors.htm)

http://www.cdc.gov/hoax_rumors.htm

– [Hoaxbusters](http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org)

<http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org>

– [Vmyths](http://www.vmyths.com)

<http://www.vmyths.com>

– [Snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)

<http://www.snopes.com>

Bogus Websites

- Open the Critical Evaluation List
- [Critical Evaluation Websites-bogus&hoax.doc](#)
- Select 10 websites to review
- Critique each website in the four areas:
 - Content
 - Authority/credibility
 - Bias/purpose
 - Usability/design
- Submit to the digital drop box

Web address: _____

Content

Authority/credibility

Bias/purpose

Usability/design

Challenge Points

- Locate a bogus website that is not on the list. Critically evaluate the web site and submit digitally.