EVALUATING WEB SITES

No person or group checks the information that is published on the Internet for accuracy or authority. You are responsible for evaluating the authority and accuracy of any information that you intend to use for research purposes. To do so, consider the following:

1. **What are the clues to “good” information?**
   - **Date** — is the date the information was written and/or last updated clearly marked?
   - **Author** — who is responsible for the information on the page? Does the page list professional credentials or experience which qualify that person/organization as an expert on the topic? What experience does the author have with the topic being discussed?
   - **Affiliations** — is the author identified with any group or organization, which might influence his viewpoint?
   - **Contact Information** — is there a way to contact the author (email, phone number, or postal address)?
   - **Background** — is the information presented verifiable in outside sources?

2. **Who is responsible for the information being presented?**
   - Is it from an individual or an organization?
   - What are the goals of the author in presenting this information?
   - Are the qualifications that allow the author to speak authoritatively on the topic listed?
   - Are the background and expertise of the individual/organization given?
   - If you have questions about any of these, email the author and ask.

3. **Where is the information coming from?**
   - **Domain names** give basic information on where the data is originating. The domain name is the first piece of information after the http:// of an Internet address. For example, the domain name for Mt. SAC is www.mtsac.edu.
   - **Extensions** are part of the domain name (such as .edu) and indicate the type of organization that is responsible for the information. Common extensions include:
     - **.gov** — A U.S. government web site. Governmental agencies publish most of their information online. --Some level of editorial control over the content.
     - **.edu** — A college or university web site. The schools publish information, as do faculty, staff, and students. --Limited editorial control of content.
     - **.org** — An organizational web site. Professional (American Medical Association) to political (NRA). --Some editorial control of content, but must consider organizational goals.
     - **.net** — An Internet service company. Internet service companies allow subscribers to publish web sites. --Only the author has editorial control of the content.
     - **.com** — A commercial web site. Commercial web sites deserve the most scrutiny by researchers. --Author has editorial control, which is intended to sell you something, whether a product or opinion.

4. **Did someone else consider this information to be acceptable?**
   - Was it reviewed or recommended in a professional journal?
   - Was it linked from another site whose authority and reliability you trust?
     --Most **search engines** do not screen or evaluate the sites that they index.
     --Directories and **pathfinders** are based on the selectivity of their creators.

5. **Can you write a 1-2 sentence explanation of why your Internet source is authoritative enough to include in your list of works cited?**
   --Your audience will be looking at your works cited to determine how credible you are as an author.