

Information literacy—the ability to efficiently find, critically evaluate, and ethically use information from a variety of sources.

“Efficiently Find Information . . . from a Variety of Sources”

Destiny—to find the physical items available in our library (books, videos, etc.).

Subscription databases—collections that allow easy access to millions of articles—most of those articles originally appeared in reference books, newspapers, magazines, or journals.

Information found on free-web sites:

Even though you may use Google (or Bing or any other similar search engine) all of the time, there are some things you need to keep in mind when using free-web sites for _____ research:

- No search engine searches the entire Web. Try using other search engines if the one you rely on most of the time isn't getting you good results.
- Go _____ the first few results—they are **not** automatically the best just because they're first.
- Search engines do not evaluate the _____ on a free-web site. When you locate information that appears to be good, you still need to evaluate to determine whether the information is credible and reliable.

Remember that the Internet itself is NOT a source. It's a computer network. Google and Bing are not sources—they're search engines that help you find many (but not all) of the sources that are stored out there on the Internet. The web page about your topic that you found on the Mayo Clinic web site or the reference article that you found in *Modern World History Online* are both examples of sources—not the Internet nor Google.

Making use of certain search strategies (exactly which ones will vary depending on the particular search) can help you get better results. If Google is your search engine of choice, make use of its _____ Search feature (click on Settings (bottom right on the search screen and on the navigation line on the Results screen).

- “All these words”—your specific keywords.
- “This exact word or phrase”—instead of _____.
- “Any of these words”—for synonyms.
- “None of these words”—to decrease the number of irrelevant results.
- “Then narrow your results by . . . “ site or domain to specify .edu, .gov., etc. You might also wish to narrow in other ways—by last update, by region, etc.

“Critically Evaluate”

“Imagine going to the mall to buy some clothes. Walking into the first clothing store you see, you start pulling items from the racks without regard to their size, color, or style. You purchase these items without trying them on.

This would be absurd and a waste of money. Similarly, you shouldn't just Google your topic or search your library's catalog or subscription databases and use the first few sources you find, regardless of their content. Doing research is not about finding any kind of information on your topic; it's about finding good, credible, and relevant information. An important research skill is the ability to evaluate any type of informational source to determine whether it satisfies your needs and will be appropriate for your particular research assignment.”

From *An Educator's Guide to Information Literacy*

Evaluation requires examination of a potential research source—really looking at it before deciding whether to use it. Listed below are five questions that can be used to evaluate a research source. These questions apply to all sources—but are especially important to think about when using free-web sites for research.

Why is it particularly important to evaluate _____ sites?

- Anyone can put anything on a web page. The search results screen that links you to great information may also link you to inaccurate and misleading information.
- Most print material must go through a quality check (editing)—this is not true for many free-web sites.
- Important _____ information that is usually easily found in a book is often impossible to find on a free-web site—and that information plays an important role in critically evaluating a source.

1) Who _____ this?

- Look for _____ or Biography.
- Go to other sections of the website or back to the home page.—but be careful once you get away from the specific web page. You're looking for the author of that SPECIFIC page—not just any person associated with the site.

2) Who _____ this? Knowing who the _____ organization is can usually help you determine accuracy, bias, purpose, etc.

- Look for About This Site or a similar link.
- Strip the URL back to go to the home page of the site.
- Look at the _____ type (.edu, .gov, etc.).

3) _____ was this written? Knowing the purpose (to entertain, to persuade, to inform . . .) will help you determine a particular site's appropriateness as a research source. You may choose to use a biased site—but you need to know that's what you have.

- Look for About, _____, Purpose, Philosophy, or similar links.
- Look at the wording (you may be able to identify a biased site just by the tone and language used).

4) _____ was this written? Is the date always important? That depends on the topic. Civil War facts—not so much. Latest treatment of a disease—absolutely! And _____? They're meaningless without a date.

- Look for words like copyright, _____, revised, or modified.

5) How _____ is this? This can be difficult if you don't know much about the subject—but there are things you can look for that can help.

- Look at the accuracy of the spelling and grammar on the web page.
- Look for a list of _____ the author used.
- _____ what you found in other sources with what's written in this source.

One of the problems with free-web sources is that it may seem as though you're finding good answers to these questions when, in fact, you may not be. Doing your best to evaluate them, however, is an important part of research. If you can't find answers to essential questions, choose a different source.

“Ethically Use”

Acknowledging your sources by creating a source page using *NoodleTools* is part of the ethical use of information. The other two main topics—plagiarism and copyright—will be discussed next week.