Evaluating the quality of information

Documentary information sources:
evaluating their quality

• We should always be critical when using information sources, in view of
  » the widely varying degrees of quality of information sources, and of
  » the costs associated with searching, finding, using information.
Which criteria do you know for the evaluation of the quality of a documentary information source?

Documentary information sources: evaluation criteria (1)

- Is the information valid, reliable, trustworthy, genuine, authentic?
  - Is the author honest?
  - Is the source objective, not subjective, without cultural or political or ideological or commercial bias?
  - Is the origin an individual or a company or an organisation?
  - Is the publication sponsored by some company or organisation?
Documentary information sources: evaluation criteria (2)

• Is the information accurate, correct?
  Who is the author or producer?
  Has the source an author or a producer with a high expertise, a good reputation, good qualifications?
  Can the author be contacted for clarification or discussion?
  Was the information reviewed, edited, improved, corrected, censored, approved, verified, before publication?
  Do experts agree on the information provided?

Documentary information sources: evaluation criteria (3)

• Is the information source unique?
  Does it offer a great amount of primary information, which is not obtainable from other sources?
• Is the information complete?
  Is the work available in its entirety?
• Does the source offer a wide coverage?
  Is the source comprehensive, substantive?
• Is the information current enough, up to date?
  Is a publication date provided?
  Is an expiration date provided?
Documentary information sources: evaluation criteria (4)

- Does the document provide suitable references, so that you can verify statements and find older suitable information sources?
- Good clear format and lay-out of the information / User-friendly information system / Easy for users to orientate themselves within the resource and to find their way around it?
- Good user support / Good customer support?
- Is the type of distribution medium appropriate? (print, e-mail, online,...)

Documentary information sources: evaluation criteria (5)

- Is the information what you want? If not, then reassess your needs and consider other types of information as well.
**Documentary information sources:**

**evaluation criteria (6)**

- Is the information suitable for your level of understanding of the subject?
  Is the document popular, suitable for the general public, for students, for professionals, for scholarly/academic use…?
  Does it report new, primary research (survey, experiment, observation, measurement, invention) or is it a review of sources published earlier?
- Does the information repeat or confirm what you already know, or is it complementary, contradictory, new?

**!! Task - Assignment !!**

You can read a brief text about how to evaluate the quality of documentary information sources:

Ormondroyd, Joan et al.

**Critically analyzing information sources.**

Available from:

http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm

[cited 2004]
Evaluating the quality of information

Computer-based information sources: evaluating their quality

Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 1)

Besides more general criteria applicable to all information sources, for those sources that are based on computers and networks we see the following criteria:

• Easy to navigate?
  » User-friendly information system?
  » Easy for users to orientate themselves within the resource and to find their way around it?
  » Is the resource organised into manageable chunks of information that can be browsed easily?
Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 2)

- Is a contents page or index offered that describes what is contained within the site?
- Are there good navigational links within the pages (e.g. 'back', 'forward', 'home')?
- Are the links clearly labeled?
- Is the navigation process supported by images?
- Is there a single downloadable file for documents that exist as a series of separate pages?
- Is there a search facility within the resource?

Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 3)

- **Good user support?**
  - Good support that is offered to users to help them answer queries and problems that arise whilst using the resource?
  - Good computer-based, contextual help, documentation, training materials or tutorials?
  - E-mail contact(s) and telephone number(s) available?
Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 4)

• Based on appropriate technologies?
  » Are technologies and standards used that will enable users to access and utilize all aspects of the resource?
  » Does the resource avoid that proprietary software should be used?
  » Does the resource avoid the use of proprietary extensions to HTML, which some browsers will not be able to recognize?

Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 5)

» Does the format allow access to the resource for all users, even for instance sight impaired and those who can only navigate by using the keyboard?

• Information integrity / High stability of the contents / Low volatility of the contents?
  » Is there adequate maintenance of the information content?
Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 6)

• System integrity?
  » Site integrity relates to the stability of the site over time. This usually relates to the work of the site manager or web master.
  » Realise that individual sites can be moved or withdrawn at any time by those responsible for publishing information on the Internet, and that addresses, file structures, formats and interfaces can be altered without warning.
  » Is the site current and up to date?

Computer-based information sources: evaluation criteria (Part 7)

» Is the site proven to be or expected to be durable in nature?
» Is the site adequately administered and maintained?
!! Task - Assignment !!

Read
Jacobson, Trudi, and Cohen, Laura
Evaluating Internet resources. [online]
Available from:
http://library.albany.edu/internet/evaluate.html
[cited 2005]

Computer-based information sources:
The Internet Detective tutorial

- A detailed tutorial in English about how to assess the quality of WWW-based information resources could be accessed online free of charge through the WWW until 2005
  http://www.netskills.ac.uk/TonicNG/cgi/sesame?detective

- Since 2005 only summaries are available from
  http://www.sosig.ac.uk/desire/teachers.html
!! Task - Assignment !!

Use *The Internet Detective* to learn more about assessing the quality of WWW-based information.

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**Computer-based information sources:**

*Web Detective tutorial*

For people who can read Dutch:

Een site over evaluatie van WWW sites in het Nederlands is gebaseerd op die originele Internet Detective in het Engels en is beschikbaar via [http://www.webdetective.nl/index.html](http://www.webdetective.nl/index.html) [2006]
Computer-based information sources:
Web Detective: screenshot of homepage

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