Assessing the Quality of Information


Who is the Author?
- Is he/she an authority on the subject?
- Is there a reason to trust what is written?
  - Their position
  - Their biographical information
- Be suspicious if you don’t know who wrote a web page.

What is the Organization?
- Is this an official web site or only one person’s opinion?
- Does the organization have a stake in the issue?
  - Are they selling something?
- Does the organization have a political or philosophical agenda?

Who is the Author?
- Suppose you are interested in finding information on sunscreens.
- Who is the author of these web articles?
  - http://www.telemedicine.org/sundam/sundam2.4.2.html
What is the Organization?

- The domain name in the web site URL sometimes will tell you something about the organization.
  - **.edu** An educational institution  
    (Wofford:  www.wofford.edu)
  - **.org** Nonprofit and trade organizations  
    (AMA:  www.ama-assn.org)
  - **.gov** Government  
    (US Senate:  www.senate.gov)
  - **.com** Businesses  
    (Ford Motor Company:  www.ford.com)
- But not everything.
  - Just because a site is a .edu or .org domain, doesn't prove that it's information is good. There just is a better chance.

What is the Organization?

- Which of the web sites below do you think are the most trustworthy?
  - http://www.telemedicine.org/sundam/sundam2.4.2.html

References to the Literature?

- Does the article contain references to the literature?
- Doe the article contain links to other reliable sources?

References to the Literature

- Which of these articles does a better job referencing the literature?
  - http://www.telemedicine.org/sundam/sundam2.4.2.html
How Timely is the Document?
- When was the article last updated?
- This may be obvious
  - http://www.e-drexler.com/
- Or it may be in the source code
  - http://www.library.jhu.edu/researchhelp/general/evaluating/
- Or there may be no information at all.

How Timely is the Document?
- How current is the information in each of these articles?
  - http://www.telemedicine.org/sundam/sundam2.4.2.html

Scholarly Work?
- Encourages debate and discussion
- Balanced
- Attempts to describe alternate viewpoints
- Describes its limits and admits ignorance if necessary

Propaganda?
- Emotional
- Uses inflammatory language
- Not balanced
- Ignores, or makes fun of, alternate viewpoints
- Certain of its position to the exclusion of others
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Don’t neglect this – I probably will ask about it on the exam.

Citing Electronic Sources

- Different guidelines exist for citing electronic sources.
- **Ask your instructor what he/she wants.**
- Use MLA in this the Project 1 report