General Evaluation Criteria for Information Sources

Authority:
- Who is the author (background, experience and expertise)?
- Is he/she an expert in your topic area?
- Does the author belong to a university, organization or agency? Is it reputable?
- Has the author published other material in scholarly/peer reviewed publications?
- Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies?
- Can you find the author’s name in a biographical source (e.g. Who’s Who)?
- Is the publisher reputable (e.g. university press, scholarly journal)?
- Which edition is the source (a later edition may indicate revision and reliability)?

Coverage:
- Who is the intended audience? (general, specialized, scholars, etc.)
- What is the level of the information? (elementary, advanced, highly technical?)
- How comprehensive is the information (in-depth, basic, overview etc.)
- Does it use specialized language or is it easily understandable?
- Does it cover a particular geographic region, time period, group of people?
- Is it a primary or secondary source?
- Does the source contribute new information to your existing research?

Purpose:
- What appears to be the main purpose of the source (Present objective facts? Sell a product? Make a political point? Express an opinion?)?
- Does the writer state his/her purpose in writing the information (check the preface)?

Factual Accuracy:
- Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched (based on what you know about the topic)?
- How does this source’s information compare with facts given in other sources?
- Are facts easily verified through footnotes or references to other credible sources?
- Are charts, tables, or statistical data clearly presented with citations to background sources?
- Has this information been excerpted from a longer work?

Bias:
- Can you detect a particular bias or slant?
- Is there evidence of inflammatory or subjective language?

Currency:
- When was the information created, published, compiled?
- Is the information regularly updated?
- Is the date of publication important to the subject matter (e.g. scientific research may require up-to-date information)
- Is it current or out-of-date for your topic?
- Have you checked to see if more recent information is available?

Relevance:
- Is the information useful for your current research project?
- Is it too general, narrow or off-topic?

For additional information:
http://libweb.sonoma.edu/assistance/research/evaluate.html
http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm
Additional Evaluation Criteria for Web Sites
You should use these web evaluation criteria IN ADDITION to the general criteria listed above.

Authority:
- Is the author/writer of the page clearly identified?
- Can you find information on his/her credentials for writing on this topic (look for Who Am I, Background, Resume, About pages on the site)?
- What server (computer) is the information stored on? Check the domain name/organization type (.org, .com, .lib, .edu) in the URL. (Try: http://www.betterwhois.com to find out more about a domain name)
- Is this a personal web site or does the information appear on a page that belongs to a university, organization or agency? Is it reputable?
- Can you find contact information for the author, organization and/or verify credibility on the page (address, phone number, e-mail address)?
- Has the author written materials for other reputable sites?
- Are there links to the source from other reputable sites (check to see if the site is listed in a well-regarded subject directory such as: http://www.lii.org)?

Coverage
- Is the page aimed at a particular audience or level of expertise?
- Is the site a broad resource or does it focus on a narrow range of information? Does it make it clear what its focus is?
- To what level of detail in the subject does the resource go?
- Does the site contain original information, or simply links to other sites?

Purpose
- What appears to be the main purpose of the site (Present objective facts? Sell a product? Make a political point? Express an opinion?)?
- Does the writer or webmaster explain the purpose or mission of the site (look for About Us, Mission pages)

Factual Accuracy
- Is factual information on the site supported through links to other credible sites?
- How did you find this site? Remember, most search engines do not discriminate between high-quality and questionable pages.
- Are there obvious typos, misspelled words or poor grammar (these are indicators of poor web site quality)?
- Does the page contain photos that support the content (be aware that digital images can be easily manipulated)?

Bias
- Does the language or content of the site indicate a bias?
- The site name and page title might also immediately point to biased information.

Currency
- Can you find out when the information was published?
- When was the page last updated (look at the bottom of the page)?
- Does it look like the pages are kept up-to-date?
- If there are links to other Web pages, are they current or broken?
- Is this the most recent version of the site (click refresh on your browser menu bar)?
- Have you checked to see if more recent information is available?

Relevance
- Is the information useful for your current research project?
- Is it too general, narrow or off-topic?
Site Design

- How well-designed is the site?
- How easy is it to find information within the site? (Consider the navigation system, site search options, site maps, quick access drop down menus)
- How usable is the site? Can visitors get the information they need within a reasonable number of links (preferably 3 or fewer clicks)?
- Is the page layout clean and attractive to look at?
- Are the graphics, illustrations or photos professional and attractive?
- Is the content easy to read (consider typeface, column width, type size, type color etc.)?
- Does the text follow basic rules of grammar, spelling and literary composition?
- Is each page identified with a title?
- Do the site owner’s name and the copyright date appear at the bottom of each page?
- Are there contact addresses for the author/web master?