What’s the reason for evaluating Web site?

Nowadays the web is growing enormously and available and accessible quickly. K-12 education as well as higher education is integrating the Web for academic purpose and it becomes a gateway to information not easily found in the past. Students see the Web as more convenient and easier tool to do research because few skills are required and the web can be accessed from home, dorm, library, computer lab etc. In contrast, students also find the Web frustrating and time consuming and often are overwhelmed with enormous information. What is more problematic is that the Web information in many cases lacks quality control and governance and it results in questioning reliability and stability about some of Web information. Unfortunately, many students don’t know how to navigate web effectively or will not check a source’s authority and detect bias. In this point, I am sure that the skills for evaluating the Web would be valuable knowledge when student do their research and will be a good guide when they create their own web page, as well.

In this paper, I will focus on Content evaluation in specific and provide guidelines for Web content accessibility. And finally I will add examples of evaluation instruments, which I found in the Web.

Content evaluation

It is an undoubted fact, which the content - information presented by the web is the most important component. There were many sites, which inform about the methods of
content evaluation. The 5 categories were pulled out of the Web sites commonly. For user to see whether the content is valid and reliable or not, at least the followings need to be examined.

**Accuracy**
Because anyone can publish anything on the Web, web resources rarely have editors or fact-checkers. So it need to be checked if there is an editor or someone who certifies/checks the information. To be specific, we need to check if the sources for any factual information are clearly listed and they can be verified in another source. (If not, the page may still be useful to you as an example of the ideas of the organization, but it is not useful as a source of factual information.) We also need to check if the information is free of grammatical, spelling, and other typographical errors. (These kinds of errors not only indicate a lack of quality control, but also can actually produce inaccuracies in information.)

**Authorship**
A site should enable the user to easily find out about the author: where they work, what their credentials are that makes it appropriate for them to write about the topic, and how to get in touch with them for further questions. Web page authors have to expect that they will get e-mail from interested students asking for further explanation of the topic covered.

**Objectivity**
Frequently the goals of the sponsors/authors aren’t clearly stated. So we need to find out
if organization’s biases clearly are stated and show minimum of bias. If there is any advertising on the page, we must be careful if it is clearly differentiated from the informational content.

**Currency**

Publication or revision dates are not always provided. So we need to look to see if site has been updated recently, as reflected in the date on the page and material contained on the page is current. If a date is provided, it may have various meanings. For example, we may get information on when the material was first written, when the material was first placed on the Web, and when the material was revised.

**Coverage**

Web coverage often differs from print coverage. Frequently, it’s difficult to determine the extent of coverage. Sometimes web information is just-for-fun. So we should look what topics are covered and what intrinsic value is and how in-depth the material is.

**Interface design and Accessibility**

Compliance with these guidelines provides an added benefit to those users with text-based browsers, slow modem connections, no multi-media capabilities on their computer and or people with disabilities. These guidelines that I summarized from the Web Site ([AUS Standards for Accessible Web Design](#)) have been originally adopted from [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#). 1.0 W3c Recommendation 5-May –1999
(WCAG).

**Graphics**

- Provide an alternate text (ALT tag) description for ALL graphics on the Website. The ALT-tag allows for a text description of a graphic to reside beneath the actual graphic.

- When using banners with animated text (or any graphics or movies that need lengthy descriptions), the use of description tags (D-tags) are a good alternative to the length restrictive ALT-tag.

- A D-tag is a capital "D" that appears next to or below an image, that is a link to a page with a description of the graphic. Because D-tag descriptions appear on their own page, they can be as long as the author needs them to be. Therefore, users can receive more information about the physical description of a graphic image than the ALT-text allows.

**Image Maps**

When using image maps, always provide an alternative text list of the hyperlinks just under the image map. Another measure includes providing a separate text-only page, which translates all of the links within the image into text links.

**Links**

- Make link text descriptive but not verbose. Words like "here" or "click" do not convey relevant information about the link. Link text should consist of substantive, descriptive words, which can be quickly identified by users.

- Always use a vertical bar to separate links, which occur consecutively. As text
browsers read one line at a time, the problem of distinguishing between consecutive links on the one line arises. For such consecutive links on one line (usually found as text anchors), add a space and a vertical bar on either side of the links. This will also separate the links for visual users.

Tables
Whenever using tables, ensure that the textual information is displayed in a linear form across a whole line. This is because when word wrapping occurs within columns of a table, this creates problems for browsers such as Lynx (a text browser used by the sight-impaired) as it reads across the screen in a way that runs all of the text on a line together. If an entry in a cell occupies more than one line, the first line of each cell would be read, then the second etc. If word wrapping in a table cannot be avoided, the same information can be presented on an alternate text-only page without tables.

FRAMES
When using frames, always provide an alternative non-framed version of the content. This can be achieved by incorporating the “noframes tag,” which is the default for browsers that cannot view frames. To incorporate the "noframes tag," the following must be done. For a Web page (parent page) that consists of two frames (frame1 and frame2), the content of frame1 and frame2 should be combined. This information should then be supplied within the "noframes tags" of the parent page. For example: The parent page will consist of the following information.
Form

Provide an alternative form that can be downloaded, filled in, then mailed or faxed. A phone number can be another option whereby the person may call and request the forms.

Background Colors

When defining color schemes in the body tag, ensure that all color schemes are defined. This includes:

* Background image (if using a background image)
* Background color (always define, even when using a background image)
* Color of link
* Color of activating link
* Color of visited link
Audio Clips

Supply a transcript or a description of the sound for all audio sound files. Many users of the web are hearing-impaired, or do not have sound capabilities on their computers. The inclusion of transcripts for audio clips broadens the access to this information.

Non-Standard Format

If using non-standard HTML formats or higher-level features such as JavaScript or Java, always provide an alternative text-only page, which translates all of the information included in the original page to text only. Such formats often cause problems for Braille translation, screen readers and some browsers. Users should be able to switch back and forth between text-only and enhanced versions of the page. Always provide HTML, or at least ASCII forms, of all documents presented in PDF, PS, WORD or other formats.

Multiple Browser Testing

As a minimum, pages should be checked on current versions of Netscape Navigator, Microsoft Internet Explorer, and Lynx.

Besides this guidelines, there is a wonderful site called,  Bobby which a Web-based public service offered by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) that analyzes web pages for their accessibility to people with disabilities as well as their
compatibility with various browsers. Bobby's analysis of accessibility is based on the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Translations of the guidelines are available. Here we can submit our own web pages to see if Bobby will approve ours in terms of accessibility.

Evaluation instruments on the Web


To help students get started with critical evaluation of a Web page for authenticity, applicability, authorship, bias, and usability, a series of evaluation surveys have been developed by Discovery.com.

♦ Elementary School Level (PDF version)
♦ Middle School Level (PDF version)
♦ Secondary School Level (PDF version)
♦ Virtual Tours (PDF version)

2. WWW CyberGuide Ratings for Content Evaluation

CyberGuide was created to help students explore and evaluate existing county government sites. Karen McLachlan, Library Media Specialist at East Knox High
School, Ohio developed these guides to use with teachers and students to evaluate content and graphic design of home pages.

- **WWW CyberGuide Ratings for Content Evaluation**
  
  http://www.cyberbee.com/guide1.html

- **WWW CyberGuide Ratings for Web Site Design**
  
  http://www.cyberbee.com/guide2.html

3. **Evaluation Rubrics for Web sites**

- **Web Evaluation for Primary Grades**
  
  Using 25 points, young children can begin learning how to assess the content of Internet information.

- **Web Evaluation for Intermediate Grades**
  
  This 50-point evaluation guide, is a step up from the primary rubric.

- **Web Evaluation for Secondary Grades**
  
  Using 100 points, students can use this evaluation tool to assess Web site content.

4. **Argus Clearinghouse**

   It provides a central access point for value-added topical guides. Guides that have
been accepted by the Argus Clearinghouse are rated on the five criteria;

- Level of Resource Description
- Level of Resource Evaluation
- Guide Design
- Guide Organizational Schemes
- Guide Meta-Information

Guides receive a rating of 1-5 checks for each criterion and each month the Argus Clearinghouse staff chooses an exceptional guide as the Digital Librarian's Award recipient.

**Reference**

Argus Clearinghouse

http://www.clearinghouse.net/ratings.html#top

AUS Standards for Accessible Web Design


Bobby

http://www.cast.org/bobby/

Checklist for an Advocacy Web Page
http://www2.widener.edu/Wolfgram-Memorial-Library/webevaluation/advoc.htm

Evaluation Rubrics for Web sites
http://www.siec.k12.in.us/~west/online/eval.htm

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators
http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/chaff.html
http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/eval.html

Why It's a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources
http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/eval.html

WWW CyberGuide Ratings for Content Evaluation
http://www.cyberbee.com/guide1.html

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