

Evaluating Information Sources

Make sure you know who is responsible for information found on a web site. You cannot evaluate what you cannot verify. If you have any uncertainty about the author or publisher of the page you are trying to evaluate, then it would be unwise to use that information source. Look for another source.

Questions to ask: when reviewing a web page, can you identify and verify the author's:

- name?
- professional or institutional affiliation?
- position title or academic rank?
- training or experience with the topic?

What to look for:

- Has an instructor mentioned this author?
- Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies?
- Go to the home page of the hosting web site and search for the author's name using any available internal search engine or directory (works best for academic web sites). This may help establish affiliation.
- Use standard print sources such as Who's Who in America (at E176 .W64 in the Sawyer Library) or other biographical sources (start with Library of Congress Classification "CT" in the Sawyer Library).

Question to ask: can you identify the sponsoring or publishing body of the web page?

What to look for:

- Does a university, governmental agency, or other reputable organization maintain the site?
- Does the page include any of the following?
 - a header, footer, watermark or wallpaper that shows its affiliation as part of a larger web site.
 - a link at the bottom or top of the page that allows you to go to the home page of the web site.
- Does the site claim to represent a group, an organization, an institution, a corporation or a governmental body? A web page's URL address can help you identify the sponsor or source by analyzing the domain:
 - Non-governmental and/or professional organization web pages: look for .org (organization)
 - Governmental web pages: look for .gov (government)
 - Corporate/business/for profit web pages: look for .com (commercial)
 - Educational institution web pages: look for .edu (educational)
 - Personal web pages frequently have a tilde (~) in the URL and may include .com, .edu, or .org

Evaluating Information Content: An Author Example

This is "The Arachnology Home Page" (located at <http://www.ufsia.ac.be/Arachnology/Arachnology.html>; last accessed: 2002 August 15). Please note the listing of the scientific names for several species of spiders. This site looks very professional.



We are interested in discovering the web site's authorship. Scrolling down to the bottom of the home page, we find the information in the red oval:

The Arachnology Home Page Administrator: Herman Vanuytven [Contact](#)
([personal home page](#))

We will follow the "Contact" link.

The Arachnology Home Page Administrator: Herman Vanuytven Contact (personal home page)

Disclaimer: the fact that a site is mentioned on "The Arachnology Home Page" doesn't mean that the administrator agrees with the content of it.

Dutch speaking people are invited to visit also this other project I'm working on
BIBLIUS 5: Een programma voor kleine en persoonlijke bibliotheken



<http://www.ufsia.ac.be/Arachnology/Arachnology.html>

The red underlining reads:


"I'm an amateur arachnologist from Belgium. One of my hobbies is the study of spiders"

While the author may be active and knowledgeable about spiders, he is not qualified to be cited as a researcher in this field. As a result, while links from this web site may lead to quality information, this home page should not be used for academic research papers.

ARACHNOLOGY

The study of arachnids

THE ARACHNOLOGY HOME PAGE



Contact me

Hello,

I'm an amateur arachnologist from Belgium. One of my hobbies is the study of spiders living in this country. I know only little about the spiders outside Europe. So it's useless to send me questions about specific American, Asian or African spiders. Most of the time I can't answer them.