

The Web vs. Library Databases – A comparison

	<u>The Web</u> (Google, Wikipedia, About.com, etc.)	<u>Databases</u> (Academic Search, Lexis-Nexis, etc.)
Authority	Varies at best. Difficult to verify. Cannot limit to professional, scholarly literature. Information on the Web is seldom regulated, which means authority is often in doubt.	Easy to determine. Most databases have scholarly/peer-reviewed filter or contain only scholarly literature. Authority and trustworthiness are virtually guaranteed.
Number of Hits	1000's, sometimes millions of hits, much of the same information repackaged or duplicated. Duplicates are not filtered out.	Dozens to hundreds of hits (sometimes 1000's but not 100's of 1000's) - a more manageable number, and duplicates can be filtered out.
Relevance	Lack of subject focus can result in numerous irrelevant hits – or “junk” – to wade through. Much Web information is opinionated and biased. Unless you are using a subject-specific search engine, expect “everything and the kitchen sink” in the results. Quantity ≠ Quality	Focus by subject (business, art, American history) and/or format (journals, books, book reviews), which often means more relevant information and less time wasted dealing with junk. Information comes from legitimate, quality-controlled sources.
Search Features	Varies by search engine, but often limited. Can limit by document type (.doc, .pdf) or language, but limiting by publication date, format (article, book, etc.), scholarly/peer-reviewed and more is unavailable.	Numerous advanced search features determined by database subject focus, e.g., limiting by publication type, date, language, document format, scholarly/peer-reviewed status. The list of features is as long as the number of databases available.
Access to Published Information	Web information often lives and dies on the Web and can come from anyone with Internet access. Seldom is the information coming from legitimate published sources: magazines, academic journals, books, etc. When it is, the user usually has to <u>pay</u> to access it.	Databases deal <u>only</u> with published information; that is information that originally appeared in print: magazine and journal articles, books, etc. They are more stable than the Web. Through the library's paid access, all of this information is available to you, the user, for <u>free</u> .

5 Criteria for Evaluating Web Sites (Applicable to Any Media):

To determine whether a site's contents (or **any** media's contents – books, newspapers, television, etc.) can be trusted, it is best that that you carefully **evaluate** the site. See below for questions to ask when determining whether a site (or other media) contains sound information.

1. **Audience** – To whom is the site directed – children, adults, students; a certain ethnicity, gender or political affiliation? Is it understandable by the layman, or is it highly technical requiring specialized knowledge?
2. **Authority** – Is the author of the site listed? Can you determine his/her expertise? Is contact information given – phone number, address, e-mail? With what organization is he/she associated?
3. **Bias** - Does the language, tone, or treatment of its subject give the site a particular slant or bias? Is the site objective? Is it designed to sway opinion? Organizational affiliation can often indicate bias.
4. **Currency** – Is the site up-to-date with working links? Are dates given for when it was created and last updated? Is the topic current?
5. **Scope** – Is the site an in-depth study of the topic going several pages deep, or is it a superficial, single-page look at the subject? Are statistics and sources referenced properly cited? Does the site offer unique information not found anywhere else, e.g., print sources?

Thanks to the University of Maryland and the University of Dallas for providing the content for this tool.

Peer-Reviewed or Scholarly Journals vs. Magazines: What's the difference?

One of the main reasons researchers turn to databases is to have the ability to search for peer-reviewed articles. The following briefly explains how peer-reviewed articles differ from popular articles.

Popular Magazines (*Time, People, etc.*)

Intended for a general audience.

Articles written by journalists who may or may not have special training in what they are writing about.

Articles do not have footnotes.

For Profit.

Not Peer-reviewed.

Scholarly/Peer Reviewed Journals (*Journal of the American Medical Association, etc.*)

Intended for an audience with knowledge in the field.

Articles are written by scholars, whose names are listed along with credentials.

Articles are footnoted and list sources used.

Usually not for profit.

Peer-reviewed.

How do I find peer-reviewed articles and journals?

Use a scholarly database rather than a general database (Historical Abstracts vs. Academic Search).

When available, limit to scholarly/peer-reviewed journals when you search your database.

Check in *Ulrichsweb* (library database) to see if the journal you want is peer-reviewed.

Web Page Evaluation Checklist

Use this checklist when evaluating materials you find on the web.

What is the URL or Web address of the Web site you are evaluating?

http://

What is the title of the Web site?

I. AUTHORITY AND ACCURACY

It is important to find out *who is* the author and what are the author's *qualifications* or *expertise*, in order to determine the credibility and reliability of the information you find on the website.

Who is the author of the Web site?

What part of the URL (Web address) gave you clues about authorship? **Check all that apply:**

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> (.com) a company | <input type="checkbox"/> (.org) non-profit organization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (.edu) academic institution | <input type="checkbox"/> (.uk) country sponsored site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (.gov) U.S. Government agency | <input type="checkbox"/> (www.jamieoliver.com) a personal Web page |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (.mil) U.S. military site | <input type="checkbox"/> Other? Please describe: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (.net) network of computers | <input type="text"/> |

What are the qualifications of the author or group that created the site?

II. PURPOSE AND CONTENT

Determine the purpose of the Web site by looking closely at the content of the information. Some sites provide links to information *about our organization* or a *Mission Statement*, detailing the purpose in creating the Web site, while the purpose of others might not be obvious at first.

What is the purpose of the Web page or site? *Check all that apply:*

- a personal Web page.
- a company or organization Web site.
- a forum for educational/public service information.
- a forum for scholarly/research information.
- for entertainment.
- an advertisement or electronic commerce.

- a forum for ideas, opinions or points of view.
- Other? Please explain:

In your own words, briefly describe the ***purpose*** of the Web site.

What does the Web site provide? *Check one:*

- Balanced, objective or factual information.
- Biased, subjective or opinionated statements.

Are the arguments well supported?

Does the Web site provide any contact information or means of communicating with the author or Webmaster?

III. CURRENCY

The currency or regularity of updating information is vital for some types of Web sites, and not so important for others. For example, Web sites that provide historical information, such as the presidential papers of George Washington, do not have to be updated as often as sites that provide news stories or stock market information.

When was the Web site last revised, modified or updated?

Is currency important to the type of information available on this Web site?

Is the site well-maintained?

IV. DESIGN, ORGANIZATION AND EASE OF USE

Design, organization and ease of use are important considerations. Web sites can provide useful sources of information. However, if they are slow to load or difficult to navigate, search and read, then their contribution and usefulness will be lost.

In your opinion, how does the Web site appear overall? *Check all that apply:*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Well designed and organized. | <input type="checkbox"/> Poorly designed and organized. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easy to read and navigate. | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficult to read and navigate. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HELP screens are available. | <input type="checkbox"/> HELP screens are unavailable. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A search feature/site map is available. | <input type="checkbox"/> A search feature/site map is unavailable. |

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