

How to Evaluate Web Content

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Of the approximately 800 million pages comprising the publicly accessible World Wide Web, it has been estimated that only 16% have been indexed by search engines, and just 6% feature content related to education or science.¹

Due to the sheer volume of Web-based resources, it can be tedious and time-consuming to locate and retrieve **meaningful** and **reliable** content, especially related to medicine.

Many variables and factors relate to the **critical consideration** or **evaluation** of resources available on the Internet.

Frequent visitors to medically related sites might notice a designation from the Health on the Net (HON) Foundation <http://www.hon.ch/>

In addition to providing a medical search engine <http://www.hon.ch/MedHunt/>, this Swiss-based organization uses various criteria to "honour" sites that conform to the **HON Code of Conduct**.

This code relates to revealing qualifications for providing medical advice, maintaining confidentiality, referencing source data, indicating when information was last modified, providing contact information, identifying funding or content sources, describing the site's advertising policy, and differentiating between promotional content and original content.

Other criteria can factor into the relative **usefulness**² and **authoritativeness**³ of resources available on the Internet and used by consumers to better understand health and disease:

What is the authority of the content creator?

Is the creator a lay person with the disease or a world expert in the diagnosis/treatment of the same?

For what audience is the material intended?

Casual bystander, student or researcher? Current or future customer? Third grader or university professor?

Accuracy of the information

Does the site feature accurate facts, correct spelling and presentation of current knowledge or practice?

Does the site make any outlandish claims or gross generalizations, or provide unsubstantiated or undocumented information?

When was the content posted? When was the site's information last updated?

Point of view or bias

Who developed the content?

Is the author the same as the publisher? Does it matter? Can you contact the author for more information?

Did the publishers obtain permission to publish this information on the Internet? Does the site have a disclaimer or copyright statement?

As you learn more about search engines and directories, and improve your search precision, consider each site's **authority**, **accuracy** and **point of view**. Take note of criteria used to evaluate Internet resources, and develop your own methods to assess the value of site content.

References

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 2. Rettig J, LaGuardia C. Beyond "Beyond Cool." *Reviewing Web Resources*. Online 1999; 23:51-5.
 3. Kim P, Eng TR, Deering MJ, Maxfield A. Published criteria for evaluating health related web sites: a review. *BMJ* 1999; 318:647-9.
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