Tips to Evaluate Internet Resources

How does the Web site use the Internet's capabilities?

Look for sites that enable you and your students to:
- Read current text relating to a particular subject;
- View dynamic and up-to-date photographs, illustrations, animations, and video;
- Listen to recorded audio clips as well as live audio;
- Download simulations and games relating to curriculum units and access other multimedia content offering interactive, panoramic views of a space or object;
- Visit sites displaying real-time data;
- Send and receive email from keypals (electronic penpals);
- Contact and query mentors and experts;
- Participate in collaborative, problem-solving projects that involve information searches, group creations and virtual gatherings;
- Join an information collection project that includes contributing to the creation of a database and pooled data analysis;
- Publish resources and projects created by you and your students.

What is the quality of the related links? Ask:
- Are the links active and clearly described? Do they point to current information?
- What is the quality of content found on these related sites?
- Is the content found on these related sites appropriate for classroom use?
- Does the site suggest how the related sites could be used to enrich the curriculum?

Is the site well designed? A site should be attractive and easy to navigate. Ask:
- Is the navigation clear and consistent throughout the site? Is it easy to find what you're looking for?
- Do the multimedia elements (graphics, sound, video) work well with each other? Do they provide information?

Who is the target audience? Some sites have a very specific appeal; others are much broader. Ask:
- Does the site appeal to a specific grade level and/or curriculum area?
- Is the site intended for just students? Just teachers? Both?
- Are the concepts introduced and language used consistently age- and grade-appropriate?
- Will students require guidance in reading or navigating the site?

Does the site support my curriculum unit? Quality sites provide unique and/or up-to-date resources for in-class use. Ask:
- Is the information provided both current and congruent to the topics you are teaching?
- Is the information provided accurate and pedagogically sound?
- Does the site provide resources that allow you to do something in the classroom that you would otherwise be unable to do?
- Are charts, maps, etc. included? Are they well done and meaningful?
- If not included, is the absence noticeable?
- Are the sources listed primary or secondary or both?

Is the information reliable? Ask…
- Who is the author of site content? Does he/she have a particular bias?
- Is the site supported by an educational institution, a commercial company, a non-profit company, or an individual?
- Can one easily get in touch with the people responsible for site content? Is there an email address for the Webmaster of the site?
- Is the information current?
- Is the information credible? Is it factual and accurate? Is the information a form of advertising? Does it try to persuade the reader of something?
- Are there reviews of the site? Has it received any awards? Is the evaluator a credible source?

How many versions of the truth are you looking for? Too often students accept information that looks authentic as the truth, and this is one of the dangers of Web site information. Since ANYONE can publish on the Internet, learning how to validate information is an important skill. One of the most expedient ways to validate a Web site is to look for clues in the Web address or URL. Knowing how to recognize bits of information in the URL can provide information about a site, its publisher and its relationship to other sites. This is called the *Grammar of the Internet*.

Sites to use when teaching about reliable and credible Websites:
Check here for sites to use with your students.

- **All about explorers: http://www.allaboutexplorers.com**
    - If you teach anything about exploration, this site is a must. It's smart, slick and cleverly done, plus has a host of great activities.

- **California's Velcro Crop under Challenge**
  http://home.inreach.com/kumbach/velcro.html
  - o Did you know about the Velcro shortage in California? Use this fun site to help students separate fact from fiction on the Web.

- **Dihydrogen Monoxide** www.dhmo.org
  - o Who knew water could be so hazardous! A good site to use with middle school students. Have them click through the forward links on the site. Does the Web site reference any other authors?
- **Dog Island Free Forever** www.thedogisland.com A puppy dog paradise. Great site for all ages.

- **Feline reactions to bearded men**
  http://improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html
  - o A fun site to use when teaching kids how to validate Web resources. Science teachers take note! This site pokes fun at the scientific method.

- **Martin Luther King** www.martinlutherking.org
  - o This seemingly innocent Web site address calls for the abolition of Martin Luther King Day and promotes White Pride. Content is inappropriate for all ages.

- **Stormfront**: www.stormfront.org
  - o The publishers of this site also host the Martin Luther King site. It may be blocked by an Internet filter.

- **The Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus** http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus.html
  - o Does the Octopus really exist? A great site to use with all ages. Have students click through the links and read Web addresses carefully.

- **Victorian Robots** www.bigredhair.com/robots/index.html
  - o A great site to use with all ages. It has even stumped historians. Have students truncate the Web address so they are just left with the domain name, www.bigredhair.com. This will give them some insight into the validity of this site.

Investigate http://www.novemberlearning.com/Default.aspx?tabid=160 for a tremendous resource on how to help students become intelligent users of the Web. Alan November is a well known consultant with an excellent Website full of valuable resources.