EVALUATING WEB SITES

Reliability (Author/Sponsor):

- Can you determine the author or creator of the site?
- Does the site contain any information on credentials?
- Are the credentials adequate? (For example, does the author of a medical site list his/her education and background?)
- Are the author's credentials and experience relevant to the subject of the site?
- Do the author's credentials include affiliation with one or more respected organizations, such as a university, government agency, or well-known organization like the Red Cross?
- Is the site itself sponsored or cosponsored by a respected individual or organization?
- What does the URL tell you about the site?
- Does the site include contact information (street or Web address, fax, or phone number)?
- Does use of the site require you to pay a fee or to provide personal information? (It shouldn't.)

Currency:
(particularly important in science, medicine, technology, and other constantly and rapidly changing fields)

- Are all entries dated?
- Are the dates current?
- When was the Web page/article last revised?
- When were the links last updated/revised?

Content/Evaluation:

- What is the purpose of the site? Can you find a statement of purpose or a mission statement?
- Is the content consistent with the stated purpose?
- Who is the intended audience? Is the content appropriate for the intended audience?
- Do the links lead to worthwhile, quality information (relevant to the subject, reliable, useful)?

Bias:

- Is the information balanced? Is more than one side of the subject or issue presented? Are all sides presented in a fair and reasonable manner?
- Does the reputation of the author/organization suggest a possible bias toward the subject matter? (For example, the National Rifle Association may not present a balanced view on the subject of gun control.)
- Does any information about the Web site indicate a possible conflict of interest? (A Web site whose mission statement claims "to tell the truth about abortion" should not be sponsored by either a pro-life or pro-choice group.)

Functionality:

- Is the information within the site well organized and easy to find? (That is, is the information pertaining to the same subject area grouped together under an appropriate and easy-to-understand subject heading?)
- Are the links well organized and easy to find?
- Do the links work or do a significant number of them seem to lead to pages that can't be found?
- Do the graphics and artwork serve a function, or are they merely decorative?
- Is the text readable—not too faint or hard to differentiate from the background?
- Do icons represent what is intended?
- Are the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure on a professional level?
- Most importantly, can you "get around" in the site and find the information you need?