

Into the Stacks

Richard M. Johnston Health Sciences Library
Volume 2, Number 1 January 2004

Feature

Evaluating Information on the Web

(adapted from Johns Hopkins University Libraries)

Use these 7 key points to determine whether the information you are viewing on the Web has merit.

1. Who is the author?

Authorship is perhaps the major criterion used in evaluating information. When we see information, we want to know what qualifications the author has to speak to this topic.

2. Who published the information?

On the Internet, ask the following questions to assess the role and authority of the "publisher,":

- Is the name of any organization given on the document you are reading? Are there headers, footers that show the document to be part of an official academic or scholarly Web site?
- If not, can you link to a page where such information is listed?
- Is this organization recognized in the field in which you are seeking information?

3. What is the writer's point of view or bias?

Information is rarely neutral. Writers always have a point of view regarding the meaning of the information they are presenting and many writers select data to include that prove a point the writer is trying to make. Even writers who are trying to be objective may weight the information in one way or another. When evaluating information from the Internet, it is important to ask whether the writer might have a particular point of view or bias. The popularity of the Internet makes it the perfect venue for commercial and sociopolitical publishing.

4. Does the work show "scholarship"?

"Scholarship" refers to evidence of the author's knowledge of his or her discipline and its practices. Scholarship is demonstrated by how the author situates his or her work in the context of what other knowledgeable persons have written on this topic.

5. Can you verify that the information is accurate?

Verifying the accuracy of information, you hear or read is extremely important, especially when you know little about the author or the subject. If the information is reliable, you should be able to verify statistics and other facts using a non-biased source such as a medical society or national non-profit health agency.

6. How current is the information?

For documents, whether real or virtual, the date of publication is the first indicator of currency. For some types of information, currency is not an issue - authorship or place in the historical record is more important (e.g. T.S. Eliot's essays on tradition in literature). For other types of data, such as health information on the Web, currency is extremely important, as is the regularity with which the information is updated. Check for the following criteria of currency:

- The document includes the date(s) on which the information was gathered.
- The document refers to clearly dated information (e.g. "Based on 1990 US Census data").
- The document includes a publication date or a "last updated" date.
- The document includes a date of copyright.

7. Does the information come with advertising?

Internet search engines are not the same as library databases, which may be most apparent if you see "ads" popping up along with the information you are searching for. Library databases contain information, such as subject headings, author names, and abstracts. Library databases have been created by information professionals to make it easier to search for specific information located within library collections, such as in books and journals and videotape collections. Some Internet search engines are also databases, but they are not like the databases found in libraries. Some search engines support the cost of the search engine by selling space to advertisers. Many Web sites are also supported by advertising. The amount of advertising in a document, whether a printed magazine or a Web site, may be used to evaluate the quality of the information.

Remember . . .

All information, whether in print or by byte, needs to be evaluated by readers for authority, appropriateness, and other

personal criteria for value. If you find information that is "too good to be true," it probably is. Never use information that you cannot verify. Establishing and using criteria to filter information you find on the Internet is a good beginning for becoming a critical consumer of information in all forms.

Welcome Victoria Goode

Please extend a warm welcome to Vicky Goode, a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Library and Information Sciences. Vicky is working toward her MLIS Degree with an emphasis in medical information centers. She will be working at the Health Sciences Library two days each week from January through April 2004.

Patient and Family Education Center

National Burn Awareness Week

By Victoria Goode

February 1-7 is National Burn Awareness Week. The Richard M. Johnston Health Sciences Library would like to help in the observance of this week by making materials available in the library and through the library's website.

Here at West Penn Hospital, due to the large burn unit that we have, this week should have particular meaning to the doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals that help these burn victims during the long and arduous path towards recovery. The library is making some materials available in its new patient and family education library, along with new websites that are helpful to the patients themselves and family and friends who wish to educate themselves on burn treatment, prevention, and online support.

Some of the materials that will be made available include:

Love, Greg and Lauren: A Powerful True Story of Courage, Hope, and Survival
Written by: Greg Manning

This book is about Cantor Fitzgerald sales exec Lauren Manning. Upon entering the lobby of One World Trade Center the morning of September 11th, 2001, she was hit by a fireball that exploded from an elevator shaft. On fire, she ran outside, where a stranger put out the

flames. Lauren was burned over 82 percent of her body, but she was determined to live, for the sake of her husband and her ten-month-old son. This is her story of survival.

Internet Resources:

www.burnsurvivor.com

www.burnsurvivorusa.com

American Burn Association: www.ameriburn.org

The Phoenix Society: www.phoenix-society.org

The Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation:

www.aarbf.org

Appreciation for your support to the Library Fund

The Hospital and the Richard M. Johnston Health Sciences Library would like to thank the following donors to the Library Fund who help make acquisitions possible:

- The Governing Board of the Women's Committee
- John J. Moore
- Mr. and Mrs. David W. Steinbach
- Dr. and Mrs. C. Lee Walter

[In a separate shaded box]

If you are interested in making a donation to the Library, please contact Mary Jo Dorsey at 412-578-4708 or email at mjdorsey@wpahs.org or Beverly Beisgen at the WPH Foundation at 412-578-4049.[end shaded box]

Library Committee

The most recent meeting of the Library Committee was held on December 16, 2003.

Topic covered included a guided tour of the new library homepage and relevant electronic information resources as well as plans to transfer the library website from the WPH intranet site to the internet site so that it may be used outside of the hospital.

Welcome to Dr. Mary Wurm Schaar, a new member of the Committee. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Library Committee, please contact Mary Jo Dorsey at 412-578-4708 or mjdorsey@wpahs.org.

Library Education and Outreach

If your department would like to schedule a Library Orientation presentation at a noon conference or any other time, please contact Mary Jo at 412-578-4708 or email at mjdorsey@wpahs.org.

Recent classes include: *HTML basics* and *What you didn't know about PubMed*