

LiSS Podcast 6

(Intro)

This is LiSS podcast number 6.

Titled, 'Evaluating information on the web' podcast by Emma Turzynski.

For further details go to www.cumbria.ac.uk/liss

(Main Body of text)

This podcast looks at evaluating information on the web, and examines some of the ways in which you can determine the quality and usefulness of a website. There is a huge amount of information on the web, but not all of it is trustworthy or suitable for academic use. In fact, only 6% of information on the web has been designed for educational purposes, so you need to be very careful when looking for websites to use in your studies.

It is very important that you evaluate the information you find online before using it. Library resources are likely to have been quality checked at least twice before being made available to you – firstly by the editor or publisher, and secondly by the lecturer or librarian who decided that it was suitable for the university's collection. On the internet, however, no quality checks are required. Anybody can publish anything on the web, so it is up to you to decide whether or not to trust the information on offer.

There are a number of checks that you can do to find out if a website is trustworthy. Firstly, use the domain name to get an idea of the type of site you are looking at.

- Sites with .com and .co in the address are commercial sites. Some of these sites may be useful, but you need to treat them with caution, as they may have been created for advertising or promotional purposes.
- Sites with .org in the address are owned by non-profit organisations. Again, these could be useful, but they are sometimes biased towards a particular view, so you need to use your judgement and evaluate them thoroughly.
- Sites with .ac in the address are UK academic sites, and those with .edu are American educational sites. The standard of information on these is likely to be high, but you will still need to check that they are appropriate to your level of study before using them, as they could have been developed for schools rather than universities.
- Sites with .gov in the address are UK government sites, whilst doh.gov.uk and nhs.uk are UK health sites.
- If a site is a personal web page, it may contain the name of a blogging tool or personal publishing platform, for example blogspot.com or wordpress.com. You will need to evaluate these sites very carefully before using them, as they are probably not intended to be used for academic purposes. They can also be published by anybody with a computer and access to the internet, so may contain poor quality, false or misleading information.

You should also ask yourself what you feel about the overall presentation and content of the site. You can often get an idea of quality by scanning through the information and getting an initial impression of the type of site you are looking at. If the site seems relevant, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it accredited by a reputable organisation? Not all trustworthy websites are, but some will be, and these are likely to contain good quality information. Look for logos, 'About us' pages and mission statements to find out.
- Who is the website aimed at, and why? Check the 'Help' or 'About this site' if you are unsure.

- How current is the website? Check when it was last updated or, if this information is not available, check whether or not the links are still active. Websites that are not frequently updated may contain out-of-date information, so proceed with caution.
- How authoritative is the person or organisation responsible for the site? Check whether there is a contact email address, and whether the author has written anything else on a similar topic. Also, check to see whether the website refers to other credible sources to back up its arguments. If what is written is supported by references or citations, it is likely to be of a higher standard than if it is purely opinion based.
- How detailed is the information, and is it at the right level? As with all information, you need to make sure that it is suitable for academic use, and that it is appropriate for your level of study.

As you work through these checks, you should always ask yourself how accurate the information seems. Use what you already know about the subject to make an informed decision, and cross-reference some of the details you are unsure of with other sources, such as text books.

One way of finding good quality websites that have already been assessed for relevance is by using a searchable directory such as Intute. This is an online resource which provides links to websites for your subject. All of these have already been checked and evaluated by specialists in the field, so you might find it helpful to use these as a starting point when searching for information. Help and guidance on using Intute is available on the LISS website, along with tutorials showing you how to track down the best websites for your subject.

There is also a link to a website evaluation ticklist attached to this podcast. You may find it useful to print this out, and use it to remind you of what to look for as you search for information online.

(Outro)

For further details on this podcast and to listen to others in the series please visit www.cumbria.ac.uk/liss