Evaluating Websites

Because anyone can publish on the Web, it is important to be able to distinguish between reliable and unreliable web sites. Consider all of the following criteria when evaluating a web site.

<table>
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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Factors</th>
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| Authority  | Who wrote it?  
|            | What are their qualifications?  
|            | Are they experts?  
|            | Is this content peer reviewed?  
|            | Who published/hosted it?  
|            | Is the publisher/host reputable?  
|            | Does the site have a peer review process?  |
| Objectivity| Why was this site created?  
|            | Is this fact or opinion?  
|            | Is it biased?  |
| Accuracy   | Is this true?  
|            | Can you tell where they got their information?  
|            | Can you find this information elsewhere?  |
| Currency   | When was this information published or last updated?  
|            | Is it current enough for your research?  |

**TIPS:**
- The author and publisher/host may be the same. For example, if you don’t see an author’s name on an organization’s website, then the organization is both the author and the publisher.
- You may not find all of your answers on the web page provided. You may have to look at other pages on the web site (look for an “about” link, for example) or search the web for more information about the person or organization that created the web site.
- Many sites with peer-reviewed content will state this on other pages of the web site. You may find information through the “about” link, or try searching the site for “review process,” “submission” or related terms. Keep in mind that if a site does have peer reviewed items, it doesn’t necessarily mean every page on the site is peer-reviewed.
- **Weigh all four criteria** when making your decision. For example, the information may appear accurate, but if the authority is suspect you may want to find a more authoritative site for your information.

**EXERCISE**
You are researching climate change for this course and find the following web sites. For each web site, write 1-2 paragraphs answering the question: “Is this web site a reliable source or information?” Explain why or why not. Be sure to address each of the above criteria in your explanation.
List of Web Sites for TAs:

Note: Split discussion sections into groups of 5 and assign two different sites to each group so no two groups in the section have the same 2 sites.

USGS Global Change Science
http://www.usgs.gov/global_change/

Science and Environmental Policy Project
http://www.sepp.org/key%20issues/keyissue.html

Cooler Heads Coalition
http://www.globalwarming.org/node/34

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - National Climatic Data Center
http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo/globalwarming/index.html

American Meteorological Society

US Environmental Protection Agency
http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/index.html

Environmental Defense Fund
http://www.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=65

World Resources Institute
http://www.wri.org/

American Institute of Physics
http://www.aip.org/history/climate/impacts.htm

Natural Resources Stewardship Project
http://nrsp.com/default.html

World View of Global Warming
http://www.worldviewofglobalwarming.org/index.html