The Weakest Link: Evaluating the WWW of Web Sites

Weigh the answers to these questions when deciding whether or not to use a Web site as a source.

Who

a. Is there a named author?
b. Who is the author? Is there information about his or her background? Is he or she qualified to write about the subject?
c. Does the author list his or her sources?

What

a. What organization is responsible for the Web site?
b. What group funds or sponsors the Web site?
c. What is the selection process for adding content to the Web site? Is there information about the submission process? Can anyone be published on the Web site?
d. To what audience is the Web site targeted?
e. What is the purpose of the Web site? To inform, to persuade, to sell, etc.?

When

a. Is recent information on the subject needed? When was the Web site last updated?
b. Are the facts consistent with other recent sources?

Notes:

1. Beware myths. Web sites with a “.edu” or “.org” in the URL are not automatically acceptable while a “.com” may not be automatically unacceptable. Use the WWWs to evaluate ALL Web sites.

2. Library resources like journal article databases and e-books accessed via the Internet are not considered Web sites.

3. Consider the subject and purpose of the research and how that can impact the WWWs. Information about Shakespeare’s plays may not need to be published in the last five years while information about medications must be current.