

How to evaluate a web site

1. Ease of use

- Can a new visitor find information quickly and easily?
- Is the site aesthetically pleasing without causing distractions or eyesores? Is the use of animation and graphics appropriate to the content?
- Does it "look good" on your monitor?
- Can you find information on the site again, using only the navigational tools on the site? (I.e., without using bookmarks or searches.)
- Are there too many links? Are there too few links? Can you readily think of some helpful additional links (especially to pages within the site) that they have not included?
- Are links clearly labeled and intuitive? Are textual alternatives given for graphical interfaces? Are textual alternatives given for audio cues?
- Is the site accessible to the "differently abled?" In particular, would a visually impaired person find the site impossible to navigate? Does the site require excessive number of clicks, causing difficulty for persons without use of hand?
- Does the site load quickly enough? Would a user with a slower modem find the site too large to view? Do you get impatient while browsing the site?

2. Content structure

- Does the site have a coherent theme? Is it explicitly stated and explained? Is the theme well-selected and interesting in itself? What are the questions the site tries to answer?
- Does the site cover the central topic thoroughly, without introducing extraneous themes? Are the extraneous themes relevant?
- Is the information organized in a way that is common and accepted in the field? If not, does it make sense?
- Is the information extensive on important subtopics? Are there obvious omissions?
- If the site relies extensively on other sites to provide information, are the linked sites actually and directly relevant to the topic? Do they link to the relevant location directly?
- Is the site purely informational, or does it have a dynamic relationship to an organization, event, or activity in the "real world"? Is the relationship clear and well represented on the site? Can you use the site to go beyond the information and be an active participant?

3. Content audience

- Whom does the site aim to inform? Is the intended audience appropriate to the topic? (I.e., does it try to teach brain surgery to infants?)
- Does the language used in the site consistent with its intended audience? Does it provide explanations for esoteric categories and terms?
- Is the tone of the language (casual, formal, crazy, etc.) appropriate to the intended audience?

- Can you understand the site? Do you feel like you would like to meet the people who put it together?
- Does the site feel institutional and impersonal or human and passionate? Is that appropriate to the intended audience? To the topic?

4. Content validity/reliability

- Is the information provided correct? If it represents controversial viewpoints, are alternative viewpoints provided? Does it give a fair representation of the state-of-the-art on the topic and/or provide a clear reasoning for unorthodox views and methods? If it is meant to be "just a personal opinion," does it provide enough information to support that opinion and allow you to make the judgment for yourself? If not, is that appropriate to the topic and/or audience?
- Is the information provided trustworthy? Does it provide citations, sources, and bibliography, or credential of the author(s), to support the validity of its claims? If not, is that appropriate to the topic and/or audience?
- How often is the site updated, and in what way? Does the site present clear plan of work for future expansion or edition? Is the plan of work appropriate to the field and/or audience? Does the information on the site require frequent, moderate, or rare updates, and does the site promise to do so?
- Is there a channel for feedback from the user? Is the feedback channel easy to access? If you sent feedback, what is the quality of their response?
- Are there typos, errors, broken links, etc.? Do they get fixed quickly enough?

5. Subjective evaluation

- Do you like the site? Why? How does the site relate to your interest, the way you do things, your world-view, your personality, etc.? Does the site in any way connect with or illuminate some part of you didn't know about before? Does the site make you feel like you've learned something new, interesting, and important, not necessarily on the topic?
- Would you recommend it to your friends? Do you know anyone in particular who would like or relate to the site? How so?
- If you were teaching this course yourself, would you recommend the site to your students? To someone working on a paper on the topic? Would you use it in or outside the classroom as a replacement for or an addition to a lecture or a textbook?

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