WEBSITE EVALUATION GUIDE
Prof. Paul R. Petrie—Southern Connecticut State University

The web includes some fabulous resources for literary study. It also includes quantities of inaccurate, misleading information, a multitude of low-quality critical-interpretive materials, and many sources whose purposes and intended audience make them inappropriate for use in a serious course of study. In order to use web resources effectively, therefore, you must learn to vet them carefully before using ideas and information gleaned from them. Here’s a list of questions to help you do just that:

• Authority & Authorship
  o Does the site list its author or sponsoring organization? Has someone taken public responsibility for its content?
  o What authority does the writer or sponsoring organization have concerning the topic of the website?
  o Does the site include credentialing information and/or a way to contact the author(s)?

• Publisher
  o Learn to read site origin for what it tells you about possible purposes or biases of the site’s publishers that may mitigate its usefulness as a research source.
  o Does the site address end in “.edu” or “.org”, or “.com” or another extension? (The latter may indicate a bias based on the desire to benefit commercially.)
  o What authority or expertise does the site publisher have for the website’s topic?

• Purpose / Audience
  o What, and whose, purposes does the site seem designed to serve?
  o Does the site exist to advertise a product? Advocate a position? Make a particular argument? Disseminate general information? Offer a variety of competing opinions or ideas?
  o Is it written for students? (Middle school? High school? College? Graduate school?) Professors and scholars? The general public? Consumers?

• Content
  o Is the content reliable and accurate?
  o Does it tally with information you have gained from other sources, including non-web sources?
  o Does the site include ample bibliographic information, ie. footnotes/endnotes, bibliography, and/or works cited list?
  o What kinds of sources does the website cite? Do they seem likely to be authoritative / accurate?

• Timeliness / Maintenance
  o When was the site last updated?
  o Are there numerous broken links on the site?

Other Website Evaluation Resources

• University of Maryland Libraries, Online Web Evaluation Checklist: www.lib.umd.edu.guides/webcheck.html

• California State University, Chico: CRAAP Test for Evaluating Websites: www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/eval_websites.pdf