What if I still have questions?

- Contact your Faculty librarian
- Visit the How do I find, access and use information libguide @ http://library.sun.ac.za

**What is Objectivity / Bias / Reliability?**

Based on information about the author, publisher, or sponsoring organization, you can evaluate the objective behind the information. Look at the material in question and decide if it is factual, opinion, or propaganda by asking the following:

- Are the arguments and conclusions supported by appropriate sources, data, and research?
- To what degree is the author objective and impartial in the presentation of the material?
- Does the article fit well with the rest of the literature on the topic or does it deviate significantly?
- Is the Website trying to sell an idea or product?

Even if a document on the web has a clear objective, the information contained within it may be valuable since different sources of information are appropriate in different situations. It is up to you to decide if the information meets your needs and to use it responsibly.

Depending on your subject area, you may need current research or historical information. As a general rule, the sciences rely more on current research while the humanities often depend just as heavily on historical research. It is important to ascertain:

- When was the material published?
- Is it out of date for your project?

**Library and Information Service**

JS Gericke Library

Private Bag x5036
Matieland
7602

**Some of the content used with permission, The Ames Library, Illinois Wesleyan University.**
Evaluation criteria for websites

Authority / Credibility / Authorship

Defines who created the content, the individual or group’s credentials/expertise and provides contact information

Authorship

Anyone can publish anything on the web, so it is important to identify a web document’s author and verify his/her qualifications to write on a particular topic.

To determine the qualification of an author:
• Where does he/she work?
• What is the author’s educational background?
• Is the author well known in the field?
• Is the author’s work cited in other sources or bibliographies?
• Is the author from a respected institution or organization? What are the goals and values of this institution/organization?

If the above information is not clearly available on the document in question:
• Go to the home page of the Web site and search for the author’s name and/or affiliation with the site.
• Search for the author’s name in Google and Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com)

What if there is no personal author?

If a document has no obvious author, evaluate the publisher, institution, or organization responsible for the Website.

Publisher or Sponsoring Agency

The mission and function of the publisher or sponsoring organization will greatly impact the content found on its pages. Webpages may be created by individuals or institutions (education, government, commercial, etc.). When evaluating the publisher or sponsoring agency, look for:
• The name of the organization responsible for the information
• A link at the bottom or top of the page that links back to information about the Web site or sponsoring agency (often found in “About us” section)
• Try to determine who is hosting the site: education (.edu), government (.gov), business (.com), organization (.org)

Accuracy and reliability

As a whole, you want to ensure that the information is accurate. Look for the following:
• Where else can you find this information to verify its accuracy and reliability?
• A bibliography and/or clearly identified and referenced sources of data
• Spelling or grammatical errors
• Links: Are they current? Have they expired or do they generate errors?
• Outdated information

Audience, Scope or Relevance

For whom is the information intended? It will help you determine how you can most effectively use the information. Questions to ask are:
• Is the source for a general audience? The language in these Web sites will be more generic, sources may not be cited, and the level of content may be less detailed.
• Is it an academic (scholarly) source? The language will be highly specific, and works will be cited.
• Does the source cover your topic comprehensively or only one aspect?
• Is the content and the language used at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?

Currency / date

Some written works are ageless (i.e. classic literature) while others (e.g. technological news) becomes outdated quickly. It is important to determine if currency is pertinent to your research. Look at clues within the document that may give an indication of age such as:
• References to specific data sets (e.g., the 2000 Census) or current news events
• Date of sources cited