Critical Thinking and the Internet
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After hearing an inspirational speech from Adlai Stevenson during the presidential campaign of 1952, an inspired constituent said, "You will get the vote of every thinking American." Stevenson replied, "It's not enough. I need a majority." After reading this anecdote, it becomes even more evident that teachers need to work on critical-thinking skills. In past articles, I have talked about "fact vs. opinion" as an important critical-thinking skill for students to learn. In this article, I want to continue the critical-thinking theme as it relates to the Internet. In our busy and increasingly technical world, we are seeing more and more students look to the Internet for resources to complete reports and projects. How can we help them develop a "critical eye" as they surf through the vast resources on the World Wide Web? How can we help our students understand that they should NOT give equal credence to information from the Harvard Medical School Web site and from the "Momma's Kitchen of Home Remedies" site? Here are some things for you to look at when evaluating Web sites and the information they present:

- Is an author listed with credentials?
- Is the site affiliated with a reputable institution?
- Is the information/author/affiliation bias-free?
- Does the Web site meet the subject and requirements of the report/project you've assigned your students?
- Does the Web page contain little or no advertising?
- Is the site well organized, with links that work and make sense?
- Will the information on the Web page encourage the students to use higher-level thinking skills?
- Are the Web pages written at the appropriate reading level? Is the content suitable for the students?
- Has the information been updated recently?
- Is the Web page easy to navigate and visually attractive?

Here are some "red flags" to note about Web sites:

- No author listed
- The Web page is soapbox for a particular view
- Information is not appropriate for grade level of students
- Information is more than four years old
- Web page will not challenge students to think at a higher level on Bloom's Taxonomy
- Web page is biased and disregards other views

Teachers who want to help their students develop critical-thinking skills as they search the Web should take a close look at the sites students visit. Many teachers will even pre-select sites for students to explore. There are many excellent materials available that direct students to pre-selected, safe, and age-appropriate Web sites.