



Posting To The Web: Create An Approval Process

APPROVAL OF STUDENT WEB PAGES:

We encourage Project Next Generation participants to develop materials that can be placed on the Internet to promote community and civic projects in the local community. Student web pages should reflect the students' interests while reflecting "good taste." To maintain quality and the respectability of your library, it is our suggestion that the Lead Mentor and Project Next Generation Library Administrator review and approve student pages prior to making them "live" on the web. It is perfectly acceptable to send e-mail to the Project Next Generation staff at Illinois State Library for critique and approval.

Having the Project Next Generation students create web pages is an opportunity to teach evaluation of web sites, and help students to recognize quality web sites. This is also an opportunity to demonstrate the difference between opinions or propaganda and facts.

EVALUATING WEB SITES:

The following is taken from Yahoooligans:

<http://www.yahoooligans.com/tq/evaluatingwebsites.html>

Yahoooligans suggests a simple evaluation method using "four A's," accessible, accurate, appropriate, and appealing. Evaluating the Project Next Generation students web creations or any site using these four criteria will help the students to learn evaluation strategies and make educated decisions about the quality of what they read on a web site. Remind them to look for web sites that get "all A's"!

ACCESSIBILITY

- ❑ Just because a site is listed on a handout, never assume it will be there. The computer that hosts that site could be turned off or crashed, or the site could be gone altogether. The only way to find out if it is working is to check it out yourself.
- ❑ Speed is another issue in determining accessibility. You may find a fantastic site on the Gold Rush, but if it takes 10 minutes for each page to load on your computer, it is not easily accessible. Find another site that loads much faster. Have a backup site or two in case the fantastic site you looked at yesterday is mysteriously gone or running painfully slowly when your students go there.
- ❑ Be sure to browse the site thoroughly when you look at it. Just because the first page works, don't assume all the links to other pages do as well. The entire site should be accessible, as well as links to other pages.
- ❑ Consider whether your students will be able to navigate through the site to get the information they need. Some sites can be too confusing to use. Determine whether or not the time you and your students spend trying to move throughout a site is worth the information you will find there.

ACCURACY

- ❑ Anyone can make a web page. This includes experts in a particular field, people with no clue of what they are writing about, and everyone in between. That being said, the Internet is still a tremendous resource of information on just about any subject. If you know a lot about a particular subject, determining whether or not a site is factually correct is fairly easy. However, if students are covering a topic for the first time, they may not have enough personal knowledge on the subject to decide fact from opinion.
- ❑ Try to determine who the author of a web site is. If you are looking at a dinosaur site created by a professor from the Paleontology department at Berkeley, you can be pretty sure the content is going to be accurate and up to date. Web sites created by individuals are harder to evaluate, but often just as informative. If you are not sure whether someone's site is accurate, try to compare it to other sites in the same subject area. If five dinosaur sites state the same ideas, at the very least they are listing facts that are possibly worth discussion. As a rule, this is a good way to determine if the author's purpose is to educate, or to influence and express their opinion.
- ❑ Don't assume everything you see is totally accurate. Compare and contrast it against what you know, what other sites say, and what other types of sources say. Teaching your students this critical analysis of web sites may be the most crucial Internet skill you help them learn.

APPROPRIATE

- ❑ Try to determine the site's intended audience. If you find a site on Astrophysics designed by a college professor as a companion piece for a doctoral level seminar, there probably isn't much content for kids. However, a site like "Astronomy for Kids" is clearly intended for kids and will have information they can use.
- ❑ Read the language the site uses and ask yourself if your students will be able to follow. Are the terms too scientific? Are explanations clear and concise? Are pictures or diagrams clearly explained and connected to the content discussed at the site? Does the site talk down to the students?
- ❑ Finally, be sure the site provides information on the topic that it is supposed to be about! This sounds obvious, but many sites start out discussing one topic, then quickly digress to other, unrelated ones. The only way for you to determine if Billy Bob's Dino Site is indeed about dinosaurs is to visit the site and check it out yourself.

APPEALING

- ❑ Appealing means that a site is basically put together well and easy to follow. Just as a site with broken links is frustrating, so is a site that is hard to read. It is hard to stay focused if you and your students are spending huge amounts of time struggling to read a site with a dark background and black text, font styles that are too hard to follow, or miniscule text and pictures. And, as if you didn't already know, if the students are struggling and losing interest, your lesson is in big trouble. Most likely you'll end up trying to read and explain the information to the students yourself.

- On the other hand, if the site is colorful, easy to read, full of graphics, and fun to use, your students will probably enjoy seeing it. The information will be easier for them both to read and understand. The appeal of a text-only site is very low. This isn't to say that a volcano site with only text information will be of no value to students, but imagine how they would feel about a site that also had pictures, sounds, and videos of volcanoes.
- Some of the ideas discussed when evaluating the accessibility of sites apply here too. If a site is too slow or has many broken links, the frustration when trying to use it might outweigh any value you could get from the site. There will always be mediocre sites you use that have incredible factual content you could not find anywhere else and that's okay. However, if a site is poorly designed and hard to use, save yourself some trouble and find an alternate site.