

Administration Design Quality Web Site Evaluation Method

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Instructions

The Administration, Design, and Quality (ADQ) Web Site Evaluation Method Worksheet is designed as a guide for web site evaluation. Evaluation of web resources is an essential part of conducting a needs assessment for the development of a new health web site and for the expansion of existing sites. The ADQ Method was developed as a result of research on various web site evaluation methods and the personal experiences of the author.

The ADQ Method worksheet outlines for the web developer three broad areas of web site characteristics that must be evaluated. After using the worksheet for a period of time, the developer may no longer need it. The worksheet, by the way, is useful for self-evaluation, and it can be incorporated easily into the curriculum, teaching students how to evaluate web sites and online health information. Faculty using the ADQ Method in their courses should contact the author for a word processing version of this document for printing and photocopying.

Administration

When a user enters a web site, the Administration characteristics should be up front and obvious to the user. Unfortunately, many web sites do not disclose Administration information readily. In fact, it may be difficult to find all of the Administration categories below. For example, many web sites do not have any information about who are the authors, much less contact information.

Reputable Affiliations

It is important to assess what organization is sponsoring the web site and if the materials being published is consistent with the organization's mission. For example, health information being published by a School of Public Health is consistent with the School's purpose and mission. It is an academic institution where such practices are routine. However, health information being published by a commercial organization may have underlying biases, even though the web site Design and overall Quality of information are excellent.

Author/Administrative Names

Are the authors of the web site qualified to be publishing health information? Do they have professional credentials consistent with the materials they are publishing? Remember, web sites are electronic publishing entities, and should be scrutinized as any other publishing company. Would these individuals publish health information in print media? The authors and their credentials should be verified.

Author Contact Information

Believe it or not, many web sites do not contain author and contact information. Is there a postal mailing address (other than a post office box), phone, fax, and e-mail address? Web sites should contain e-mail links to the authors or a representative, and not to the webmaster only. Does the contact e-mail address contain the same domain name as that of the URL? Sometimes small not-for-profit organizations do not have the same e-mail domain name as their URL for financial reasons. The e-mail addresses may be the personal account of the author, chapter president, or some other contact person in the organization. Two common e-mail Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are America Online (aol.com) and CompuServe (compuserve.com).

URL

Is the URL of the web site consistent with other administrative information? For example, if the authors are claiming they are affiliated with New York University, does the URL contain "nyu.edu" somewhere in its path? The health information being published through the web site should be approached with caution when there are gross inconsistencies between the Affiliation and URL. There are many commercial enterprises portraying themselves to be charitable health-related organizations that published health information online whereas in reality, they are merely trying to sell a product.

Be aware that small not-for-profit organizations may not have their own domain names and may be subscribing to basic online services or their web sites may be based out of colleges or universities for financial reasons.

Web Site Purpose

Determine what is the overall purpose or mission of the web site. Is the purpose consistent with the institutional affiliation and author credentials? Keep in mind that the purpose of commercial organizations, regardless of their stated purpose, is to sell products to consumers to make a profit.

Target Population

Determine who is/are the target population(s). How does the target population fit into the web site purpose? Is the content of the web site appropriate for this population? Content written (and images, photos, etc.) specifically for an adult population is not necessarily appropriate for young children.

Web Site Goals

What are the goals of the web site? The goals, along with the purpose, usually can be found on the page labeled "About..." or "Mission Statement." Broad goals may include education, research, and so on.

Web Site Objectives

The objectives of the web site can be seen easily by the major resources categories being offered through the web site. For example, at HEPR, the major categories of information through which the web site goals will be accomplished include providing links and information about health education professional associations, professional preparation programs, resources, etc. (see HEPR).

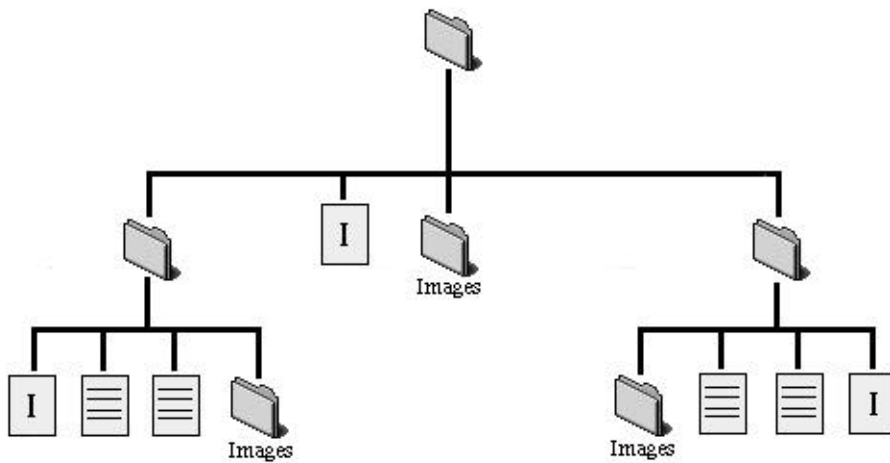
Design

Web Site

A properly structured web site should contain directories of each major resource category to separate the HTML files. Also, all images should be separated from HTML files in their own directories to reduce clutter when updating HTML files. The main page of each directory is named "index.html". This is usually the default setting. Whether users use the URL <http://www.somewhere.edu/> or <http://www.somewhere.edu/index.html>, the users will access the same index.html page (try it at HEPR).

Notice in Figure 1 below, the web site has two sub-directories, each with their own image file directories. As the web site becomes larger, major re-structuring of the web site is not likely to be needed.

Figure 1. Web Site Directory Structure.



LEGEND



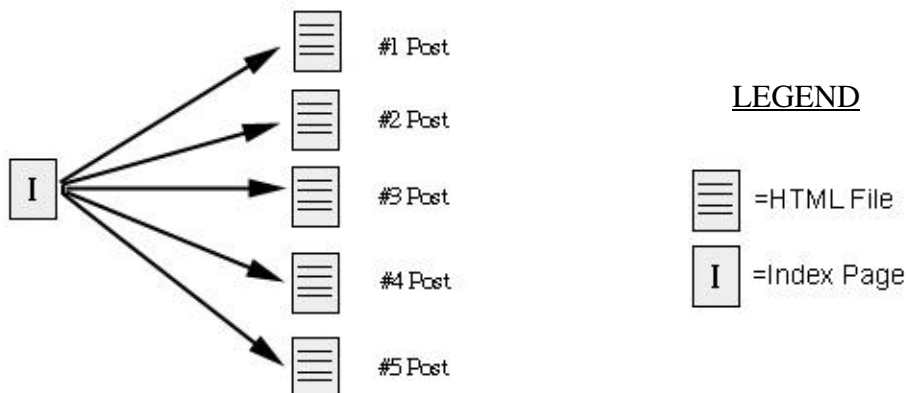
Web Page

Web pages throughout the web site should possess a header or logo to indicate the web page belongs to the web site and a footer for reference information (see HEPR and PRINS web sites). When images are used as hyperlinks, alternate hypertext should be at the bottom of the web page. To facilitate accessibility, hypertext leading to all major directories should be at the bottom or top of each web page.

Frames formatting should be avoided for web sites that target individuals who may not have state-of-the-art computers or those in the international community. Text only versions of web sites are not necessary if the web site is primarily text rather than images (e.g., image archives, animations).

When evaluating a web page for Design, concentrate on whether the information on the page is easily accessed. For example, pages that load slowly, or contain a multitude of animations and other distractions, are not only annoyances, but they prevent the user from accessing the information. Also, examine the pages for the arrangement of information, including hyperlinks to related pages. Are the pages too long, causing one to scroll, or are they shorter, arranged in a modular format (see Figure 1). For example, at HEPR, job announcements are posted weekly (see Jobs Available postings at HEPR). Rather than appending new job announcements to a single continuous document, each job announcement is a separate file with hypertext links from the Index page to each announcement. This allows users to choose only the job announcements they are interested in. The information, then, is accessed much more efficiently and easily.

Figure 2. Modular At-A-Glance Rather Than Scrolling Format for HEPR Jobs Postings.



Quality

Authority

Authority overlaps with Administration to evaluate the quality of information. Do the authors of the health information possess some authority (e.g., through their credentials, university affiliation, etc.) to publish such information online?

Accuracy

Is the information accurate? If so, are there references from reputable scientific publications? It may be impossible to evaluate all documents for Accuracy in a web site, especially if it is large. This is when the evaluation of Administration may indicate whether there may be problems with the Accuracy of information.

Currency

Is the health information current or is it outdated? It may be very difficult for public health professionals to determine whether the health information is current, especially when it is not in their specialty area. Are the references for the materials current or many years old? Again, the value of evaluating Administration is important because it may give some indication that the health information may not be current.

Objectivity

Are there any biases in the health information? Is the web site sponsored by or do the authors have a research grant from a commercial organization? Are there patterns to suggest that the authors have been overly selective in what health information, materials, and links to online resources they have included in the web site? For example, do most of the resource links lead to a particular university?

Coverage

How broad and deep in scope are the materials, and is this coverage appropriate for the target population? For example, a diabetes web site targeting young children has several pages of very technical information about insulin receptors and GLUT transporters. Are such materials appropriate to be covered in such morbid detail with young children? The answer, of course, is no. The Coverage and overall Quality of information may be excellent, yet, the information may not be written for the specific target population.

Presentation

Presentation refers to how the information (text ,graphics, color, video, hyperlinks, etc.) is arranged. Is it logical, orderly, eye appealing? For example, a web page with a florescent purple background and lavender text may be difficult to read!

Usefulness

A web site may have excellent Administration, Design, and Quality evaluations, but is the web site useful to the public health professional?

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ADQ Web Site Evaluation Method Worksheet

Review the pages from a selected web site and complete the worksheets below. You will evaluate the web site for three broad web site characteristic areas: **A**dministration, **D**esign, and **Q**uality.

ADMINISTRATION

Characteristic	Findings
Reputable Affiliation(s)	1. 2.
Author/Administrative Names (Who is running the place?)	1. 2.
Author Contact Information (Do the authors provide contact information-- postal address, phone, e-mail?)	
URL (Consistent with Affiliations?)	
Web Site Purpose (Mission)	
Target Population (Who is the intended user of the information?)	1. 2.
Web Site Goals (Are the Goals consistent with the Purpose and Target Population?)	1. 2. 3. 4.

Characteristic	Findings
<p>Web Site Objectives</p> <p>(What are the resource categories the user may choose from? Are the categories consistent with the Goals of the web site?)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.

DESIGN

Characteristic	Findings	
<p>Web Site</p> <p>(Is the web site user-friendly for the target population?)</p> <p><i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there a consistent design across ALL web pages? 2. Are pages arranged in a logical order? 3. Are pages arranged in a modular format? (Not having to scroll down long pages) 4. Is there a choice to view the web site in frames or no frames? 5. Is it easy to find the information you're looking for? 6. Any unsolicited junk advertisements? 7. 8. 	<p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p>
<p>Web Page</p> <p><i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do the pages load quickly? 2. Are postings in an At-A-Glance format? 3. Can you view the completed page on your monitor? (Are pages too wide?) 4. Moving and distracting objects on pages? 5. Unsolicited audio? 6. Unsolicited video? 7. Hyperlinks work? 8. Dates when pages published or updated? 9. 10. 	<p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Yes No</p>

QUALITY

Characteristic	Findings	
Authority <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. Is the web site affiliated with a reputable institution? 2. Address and contact information provided? 3. Author names and their credentials identified? 4. 5.	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No
Accuracy <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. Are there references for the resources? 2. Do hyperlinks to related materials lead to credible resources? 3. 4.	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No
Currency <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. Are the written materials current? 2. Are hyperlinked related materials current? 3. Are other materials such as archived software applications, video, and so on, current? 4. 5.	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No
Objectivity <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. Any biases in the content? 2. Do authors inform users of any inherent biases? 3. 4. 5.	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No
Coverage <i>(Are the materials covered in depth and appropriate for the intended user?)</i> <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. How detailed are the materials? 2. Are the materials complete on the subject? 3. Are the materials appropriate for the age of the user? 4. Complexity of information consistent with users' educational level? 5. 6.	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No
Presentation <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. Logical use of hypertext? 2. Modest use of video, audio, and graphics? 3. Color clashes? 4.	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No

Characteristic	Findings	
	5.	Yes No
	6.	Yes No
	7.	Yes No
Usefulness <i>(Add other criteria that may be relevant)</i>	1. Is the information useful for the intended target population? 2. 3.	Yes No Yes No Yes No

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The ADQ Instructions and Worksheet may be used for academic purposes ONLY, and may not be used for commercial purposes. For those using the Worksheet for academic purposes, please send the author information about how it is being used, and if modified, how was it modified. All comments and suggestions to improve the Instructions and Worksheet are greatly appreciated!

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