

BUYER BEWARE INTERNET TUTORIAL

When in Doubt, Doubt

Almost anyone can put up almost anything on the Web for almost any purpose. Look for ambiguity, manipulative reasoning, and bias. Accuracy is not always easy to confirm, so you must test one source against another. Don't accept an author's word without checking for supportive evidence. Examine assumptions, including and perhaps especially, your own.

Who coined the phrase "**Question Authority!**"? Look at five or six different web sites and you might get six or eight different answers, so question the authority of all web sources.

1. Several sites attribute the quote to Timothy Leary.
2. On a Web page that claims Timothy Leary was a CIA agent, the implication is made that Dr. Leary was quoting Socrates.
3. Many Web pages simply credit the bumper sticker. Some are more specific than that:
 - The Hippie land Glossary indicates it was a bumper sticker from the sixties;
 - Or did it originate in the 1970s or more recently?
 - Some pages insist or at least hint at a Unitarian-Universalist connection.
 - To complete the circle, another U-U minister calls the slogan a bumper sticker summation of Socrates' idea.

Buyer Beware

Look at this hoax web site Dihydrogen Monoxide - The Truth and answer the following questions:

1. Who is the author of this site? What group, agency, or company sponsors it? Where did you get this information? (If you are not able to find it, where did you look?)
2. Is any information about the author given other than his or her name? If so, what is it? If not, can you find information about the author somewhere else, either on the Internet or in the library? What does this tell you about the author's qualifications and expertise?
3. If there is a sponsoring agency, group, or company, is any information given about it other than its name? If so, what is it? If not, can you find

- information about the sponsor elsewhere, either on the Internet or in the library? What does this tell you about the sponsoring organization?
4. What is the purpose of this site? Does the site have a statement of purpose? If not, what do you think the purpose is? As you examine the site, do you think it does a good job of fulfilling its purpose?
 5. Is there information about when the site was last updated, or how often it is updated? How does the currency of the information at the site affect its reliability and usefulness?
 6. What is your overall opinion of this site? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Would you have known it was a hoax site right away? Why or why not?

Questions to think about when looking at web sites:

Do you have good reason to believe that the information on the site is accurate?
Do authors provide any supportive evidence for their conclusions?