Rubric for Evaluating Websites for Language Teaching
by John de Szendeffy, Boston University (2007)

Teachers using the Web to teach anything find themselves in the role of evaluating sources of information and activities regularly. The Web is still a largely wild, untamed frontier. A teacher must separate the wheat from the chaff for students or empower them to perform this critical function.

There are a vast number of sites ostensibly for language learning, but the reliability and value of these sites vary widely. Below is a framework I developed for evaluating sites, both pedantic and authentic (see key), for their language teaching potential. This is *decision-based* criteria; that is, the objective is to determine if a site should be included in the *course design.*

There are other evaluation methods. Some researchers dismiss rubrics such as this one as mere "checklists" and, instead, attempt to quantify values of each criterion or, worse, assign a composite score, an attempt, I suggest, that has little practical value for teachers trying to establish whether a site is worthwhile for class. This process has too many subjective elements to be meaningfully represented with statistics. In addition, a site shouldn't be discredited because some elements are weak if others more than make up for it.

So, use my rubric as a *guide* (i.e., not necessarily a form to fill in) for what to consider in evaluating a site and how to organize this and other criteria.

KEY: Criteria relevant only for pedantic sites is denoted by **P** and green shading. (A *pedantic* site, as opposed to an *authentic* site, was designed expressly for language learning.)

CONTENT			
	Target audience: Who is the site intended for?		
		Target language: Is the TL used throughout?	
		L1: Is an L1 assumed and therefore a specific audience?	
		Age: Is the site focused on a k-12 group or adult learners?	
P		Level: What proficiency level or range would this be appropriate for? Is the range too broad? Keep in mind that pedantic sites can serve lower levels than authentic sites, generally.	
P		Purpose: Do the activities target a specific skill or purpose (e.g., ESP)?	

	Author: Who developed the material?		
		ID: Is the person or group identified?	
		Contact info: Can you contact the person?	
		Affiliation: What is the developer's affiliation (school, college, publisher, company, independent)?	
		Authority: What qualifies the author to develop such material?	
		Acknowledged: Do others recognize this author's authority through links to the site?	
	Purpose: Why was the site developed?		
		Commercial or non-commercial: Is the site tied to a publisher or consultant? Is it teaser material?	
		Objectivity: Does it evince a bias? Is there some ulterior motive behind the site (commercial, political, religious, ideological)?	
P		Coursework: Did a teacher develop this for her class?	
	Accuracy/usefulness		
		Is the information correct?	
		Is the grammar, usage, and spelling exemplary?	
		Citations: Are other sources of information or references cited?	
P		Vocabulary: • Does it focus on high-frequency or low-frequency words? (Word frequency tool at wordcount.org) • Concrete or abstract? • In meaningful groups or clusters?	
	Currency		
		Is the page up to date and still relevant or obviously out of date?	
		Is the content static or dynamic (i.e., changing through RSS feeds or user contributions)?	

Instructional Design			
	Directions		
		Are the directions concise and clear?	
		Are the tasks or activities clear?	
P		Is level of direction consistent with level of study?	
	Pedagogy		
P		Do activities conform to established pedagogy?	
P		What is the organizing principle: lexical, grammatical, thematic, functional, other?	
P		Quizzes • Are questions and answers well designed to teach or reinforce correct forms? • Do the aid in learning, such as with feedback for incorrect answers/ • Do distracter answers reinforce incorrect forms? • Feedback, is it offered immediately after each question. is it detailed and explanatory?	
P		Interactivity: • What's the level of user input and involvement? • Linking: e.g., are terms linked to a glossary?	
		Are activities multi-dimensional or flat (i.e., is there an interesting variety)?	
FORM			
	Design		
		Appeal: Is the design aesthetically appealing?	
		Density: Is the amount of content on each page readily digestible or is there a profusion?	
		Text: • Is it easy to read? • Are some characters bitmapped as images? • Is the color contrast with the background high? • Is the character size appropriate?	

	Layout		
		Organization: Is the content on each page well organized and placed (is it clear from positioning that elements are separate)?	
		Focus: Is your eye immediately drawn to the most important informational or functional areas of the page or distracted by seemingly extraneous information?	
	Graphics		
		Balance: Is there an appropriate balance of graphics and text?	
		Informative: Are graphics iconic or do they seem arbitrary or frivolous?	
	Multimedia		
		Use: Does the site make use of audio or video appropriately or is it just ear/eye candy?	
		Implementation: Is the audio and video easy to access without a lot of technical difficulty?	
	Functionality		
		Loading: Do the pages load quickly?	
		Display: Does the page appear to load and display correctly or do elements not load or overlap?	
		Navigation: • Is it clear how to get around the site, through navigation menus? • Does the navigation menu change on different pages? • Is there context-specific menus on sub topics? • are external links clearly indicated?	
		Links: Do all internal and external links work?	
		Support: Is your browser and OS supported or is the site specific to a subset?	
		Requirements: Do the pages require special media player plug-ins (e.g., Flash, Shockwave, RealPlayer)?	
		Access: Are some areas of the site viewable only by subscription (fee)?	