

# Critical Reading

Master

With all the information that is available today, you must be on your guard as you read. Nothing is automatically true just because it is in print or on the Web. You need to develop the ability to *read critically*. That is, you need to ask questions like these about the text and about the writer.

- Where is this material from? Is this a valid source of information?
- Who is the writer? Is he or she qualified to write about this topic?
- Can I trust the information here?
- What is the writer's purpose in writing this?
- What is the writer's point of view about the topic?
- How does this information compare to what I already know?
- Based on what I already know and believe, do I agree?

## Evaluating Web Sites

It is important to remember that ANYONE can create a web site or put information on the Web. There are no editors to check the reliability of a writer (as in a serious newspaper or magazine). Therefore, when you are reading articles on the Web, you need to be especially critical. Ask yourself:

- Does the writer identify himself/herself? Is he/she qualified to write about this topic?
- Does the web site belong to an organization that you have heard of? If not, use a search engine (Google or others) to look for more information.
- What is the apparent purpose of the web site? Could there be a second, hidden purpose (e.g., it appears to simply offer information about an organization, but actually it aims to convince you to join)?
- Is the information based on reliable, outside sources or the writer's opinions?
- Is this an open-source web site like *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia? If it is, anyone can contribute to it, so you should check the information in other sources.

When you are looking for information about a topic on the Web, you may first have to choose among the many sites listed on Google or another search engine. You can tell a lot about a site just from its web address, also known as the URL. Look for the following clues:

1. The name or an abbreviation for an organization that you have heard of.
2. Any indication that it might belong to an organization.
3. A person's name, personal information, or the word "blog"—all of which might indicate that it is a web log or journal created by an individual who wants to express opinions and share experiences with others on the Web.
4. Where the site appears on the list of search results. The sites at the beginning of the list are those that have been linked most by other web sites.

### Example:

Look at the following Web addresses. Then read the questions and the answers.

- a. [www.daydreamer18.blogspot.com/archive/2005/05/17/the\\_piano\\_man.html](http://www.daydreamer18.blogspot.com/archive/2005/05/17/the_piano_man.html)
- b. [www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/05/17/world/main695867.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/05/17/world/main695867.shtml)

1. Which address do you think is for a web site belonging to an individual? How can you tell?

2. Which address do you think is a web site belonging to an organization? What kind of organization do you think it is?

3. Which web site do you think provides reliable information?

## EXERCISE 1

**A. The following web addresses are for sites containing information or opinions about the "Piano Man" (see Unit 2, Exercise 3). Study the URLs and answer the questions.**

- a. [www.mirror.co.uk/news/tm\\_objectid=15882241&method=full&siteid=94762&](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/tm_objectid=15882241&method=full&siteid=94762&)
- b. [www.kentandmedway.nhs.uk/whats\\_new/piano\\_man/statement\\_one.asp](http://www.kentandmedway.nhs.uk/whats_new/piano_man/statement_one.asp)
- c. [www.jonathan.james.blogspot.com/2005/05/piano man/html](http://www.jonathan.james.blogspot.com/2005/05/piano_man/html)
- d. [www.edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/08/22/uk.pianoman](http://www.edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/08/22/uk.pianoman)

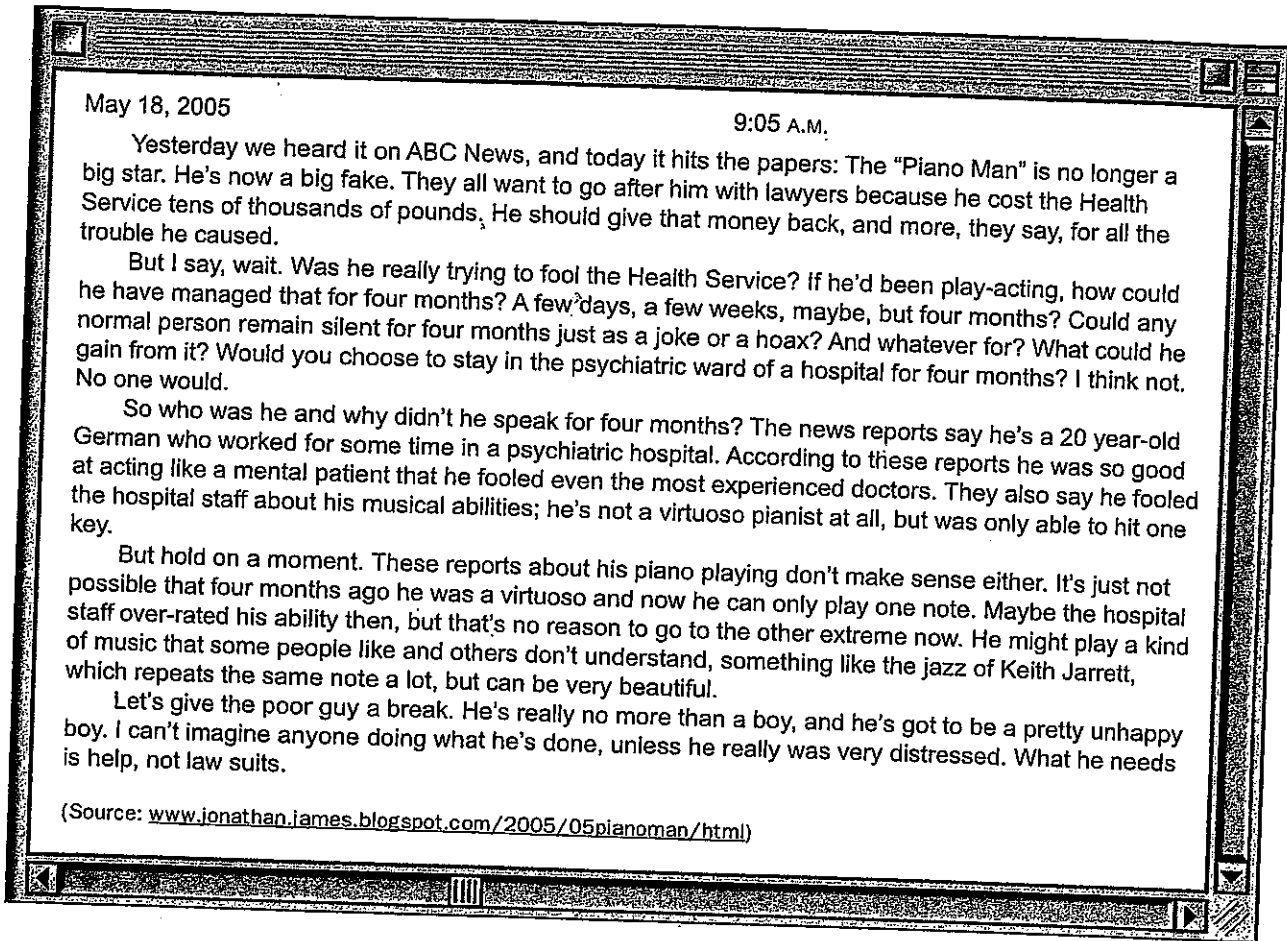
1. Which URL is for a web site belonging to an individual? How can you tell?
2. Which URL is for a web site belonging to an organization? What kind of organization do you think it is? Circle the name or abbreviation of the organization.
3. Which of the web sites is most likely to provide reliable information?
4. Which web sites would you look up if you wanted to find out what happened to the Piano Man? Why?

**B. Compare your answers with those of another student. If you disagree, explain how you decided on your answers.**

## EXERCISE 2

A. Read these two online articles about the Piano Man and answer the questions.

### Online article 1



May 18, 2005 9:05 A.M.

Yesterday we heard it on ABC News, and today it hits the papers: The "Piano Man" is no longer a big star. He's now a big fake. They all want to go after him with lawyers because he cost the Health Service tens of thousands of pounds. He should give that money back, and more, they say, for all the trouble he caused.

But I say, wait. Was he really trying to fool the Health Service? If he'd been play-acting, how could he have managed that for four months? A few days, a few weeks, maybe, but four months? Could any normal person remain silent for four months just as a joke or a hoax? And whatever for? What could he gain from it? Would you choose to stay in the psychiatric ward of a hospital for four months? I think not. No one would.

So who was he and why didn't he speak for four months? The news reports say he's a 20 year-old German who worked for some time in a psychiatric hospital. According to these reports he was so good at acting like a mental patient that he fooled even the most experienced doctors. They also say he fooled the hospital staff about his musical abilities; he's not a virtuoso pianist at all, but was only able to hit one key.

But hold on a moment. These reports about his piano playing don't make sense either. It's just not possible that four months ago he was a virtuoso and now he can only play one note. Maybe the hospital staff over-rated his ability then, but that's no reason to go to the other extreme now. He might play a kind of music that some people like and others don't understand, something like the jazz of Keith Jarrett, which repeats the same note a lot, but can be very beautiful.

Let's give the poor guy a break. He's really no more than a boy, and he's got to be a pretty unhappy boy. I can't imagine anyone doing what he's done, unless he really was very distressed. What he needs is help, not law suits.

(Source: [www.jonathan.james.blogspot.com/2005/05/pianoman/html](http://www.jonathan.james.blogspot.com/2005/05/pianoman/html))

1. Who wrote this article?
2. Does the web site belong to an organization? How can you tell?
3. Do you think this web site is a reliable source of information? Why or why not?
4. Write a question mark in the margin where you have doubts about the information in the text. Underline parts of the text that you think state valid information.
5. Do you think the information or ideas on this site would be useful for a research project about the Piano Man? Why or why not?

22 August 2005

## EXCLUSIVE: PIANO MAN SHAM

by Stephen Moyes and Jon Kaila

The mysterious Piano Man has finally broken his silence after more than four months—and has been exposed as a fake.

What is more, the man thought to be a musical genius can hardly play a note on the piano, according to latest reports.

The stranger refused to utter a single word after being found in a soaking wet suit on a beach near Sheerness, Kent.

Now it is claimed that he has confessed to medical staff that he was German. He said he had been working in Paris but had lost his job. He added that his father owned a farm in Germany and he had two sisters.

He made his way to Britain on a Eurostar train and claimed he was trying to commit suicide when the police picked him up on the beach in April.

He flew home to Germany on Saturday. Health chiefs, who have wasted tens of thousands of pounds on treatment, are considering suing him.

The man used to work with mentally ill patients and is thought to have copied some of their characteristics to fool psychiatric doctors about his own imagined illness.

An insider at the Little Brook Hospital in Dartford, Kent, claimed: "A nurse went into his room last Friday and said 'Are you going to speak to us today?' he simply answered, 'Yes, I think I will.' We were stunned. He has been with us for months and we have got nowhere with him. We thought he was going to be with us forever."

The patient was nicknamed Piano Man after reports that he entertained hospital staff with his remarkable talent for classical recitals. When medics gave him a pen and paper, he drew detailed pictures of a grand piano.

Now it is claimed that he could only tap one key continuously on the piano in the hospital chapel. And he said he drew a picture of a piano for therapists because that was the first thing that came into his head.

The hospital insider added. "He claims he was found by police as he was trying to commit suicide. He was obviously in a distressed state and didn't talk to the police. Then it just went on from there." [...]

(Source: <http://www.mirror.co.uk>)

1. Who wrote the article?
2. Does the web site belong to an organization? How can you tell?
3. This is the web site of *The Daily Mirror*, a newspaper in England. Do you think this web site is a reliable source of information? Why or why not?
4. Write a question mark in the margin where you have doubts about the information in the text. Underline parts of the text that you think state valid information.
5. Do you think the information or ideas on this site would be useful for a research project about the Piano Man? Why or why not?