

Accessing Resources using the Internet

Guide to Successful Searching

1. Consider a logical place to start. If the subject is broad (cancer, education, politics) start with a directory such as Yahoo! [<http://www.yahoo.com>]. A directory will lead you through logical subject categories instead of thousands of sites that happen to contain your search word or phrase. Some search engines provide both directory and “search” options. Popular search engines include:
 - Google: <http://www.google.com>
 - Excite: <http://www.excite.com>
 - HotBot: <http://www.hotbot.com>
 - Infoseek: (now Go/): <http://go.com>
 - Lycos: <http://www.lycos.com>
 - WebCrawler: <http://www.webcrawler.com>
 - Yahoo!: <http://www.yahoo.com>
 - MSN: <http://www.msn.com>
2. Select several words to help focus your search. If you type just one or two words, you’ll probably get thousands or millions of articles. Use nouns whenever possible, with the most important words placed first. Read the “hints” offered within the search engine. This tells you how to use that particular search engine most effectively.
3. Choosing unique words or phrases (put phrases in quotes) will help to focus your search.
4. If the search engine lets you refine your query, do it.
5. Take advantage of links. If you find a good website on your topic, check for links to similar sites.
6. You may be able to guess the address of a specific site (e.g. <http://newyorktimes.com> or <http://nytimes.com>). Knowing what kind of organization hosts a site can also be a helpful evaluation tool. The following organization types (the 3-letter code is found near the beginning of the URL) are most common.
 - .edu Educational: schools, colleges, universities
 - .gov Government, governmental agencies
 - .com Commercial, business
 - .org Organizations, not for profit organizations
 - .net Networks: commercial and public networks
 - .mil Military: United States armed forces
 - .int International: site located outside of the United States
7. Double-check spelling. Capitalization may count.
8. Realize that, even if you type a precise inquiry, many of the documents returned may not be on topic.
9. Remember that the Internet does not contain all knowledge. You may still need to use the library.
10. Be aware of “sponsored links” websites that may be returned first, not because they are the best results, but because fees were paid to the search engine company.

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Evaluating Websites

Unlike most print resources, which go through a filtering process such as editing or peer review, **information on the World Wide Web is largely unfiltered**. In this sense, using and citing information from the web like swimming without a lifeguard. You are responsible for evaluating the reliability of the information that you choose to use.

Each web document should have three main elements: header, body, and footer. Pay special attention to the following information when evaluating the site.

Author or contact person. This should be clearly stated - usually in the site footer. A statement of (or link to) the author's credentials is helpful. Pay attention to the domain type. Although it is easy to assume that information found on an educational site is reliable, not all institutions review and approve everything that they host. For example, some educational institutions provide space for student projects, publications, etc.

The header or footer of a site will often contain a link to the home page of the organization that hosts it. Checking out the organizational home page can be very informative. Information found on government sites is usually reliable. Organizational (org) sites may present biased information, so it is important to learn what you can about the hosting organization. Commercial (com) and network (net) sites tend to promote business ventures, so realize that those sites usually support the interests of the business.

Information found on the web is not always current. Look for a "created" or "last updated" date, often found in the footer.

Who is the intended audience for the site? What is the site's purpose? This is often to inform, entertain, persuade, or sell. You should be able to determine this from the main body of the site. The site's purpose and intended audience may lead to bias. Seek resources (in various formats) that corroborate and/or question the viewpoint presented.

Breaking down the URL

Information found on someone's personal web sites may be less reliable than information found on the website of a reputable organization. The following examples are personal website URLs:

domain.com/~name

aol.com/name

domain.net/~name

compuserv.com/name

You can also break an URL down to learn more about the sponsoring organization. Sometimes this technique can help you locate a site that has moved and can no longer be found using an old URL. Each segment added to the URL provides additional detail.

Example:

http://ntc.edu/ntclibrary/services_reference or

http://ntc.edu/ntclibrary/services_glossary

<http://ntc.edu/ntclibrary/services>

<http://ntc.edu/ntclibrary>

<http://ntc.edu>