

Conducting Online Research

Effective Online Research Strategies

Overview

For effective online research:

- Know available search tools
- Understand how tools work
- Know how to use tools
- Evaluate results found with tools

Online Research

Characteristics of the Internet:

- Large volumes of information
- Convenient
- Doesn't always contain accurate information
 - Anyone can modify information online, meaning that you should always double check online information
- Potentially frustrating

Web versus Print: Web

Web

- anyone with web access can publish
- author/affiliations and qualifications may be unclear
- may not clearly identify external information
- may be biased/misleading
- publication info may not be listed

Web versus Print: Print

Print

- extensive publication process
- clearly indicates author/affiliations
- clearly marks outside sources/quotations
- bias exists, but is reviewed
- only qualified manuscripts accepted for publication
- publication info clearly listed

Visible Web versus Invisible Web

Visible Web:

- content can be found using freely accessible search engines such as Google
 - Ex. Public websites, news sites, social media

Invisible Web:

- content not found by general search engines
 - Ex. Academic databases, paid subscriptions, library resources (Ex. JSTOR, EBSCOHOST, or Megasearch)

Invisible Web vs. Visible Web

	Visible Web	Invisible Web
Pros	Fast & Free, more convenient	More verified or specialized information
Cons	Lacks in-depth, specialized data	Requires subscriptions to access data

Table comparing invisible web and visible web

Web Search Tools

- Search Engines
 - list results based on entered keywords
- Web Directories
 - offer categories for users to choose from
- Metasearch Engines
 - combine results from multiple search engines

Conducting a Search

Consider:

- Keywords that apply
- What kinds of information you need

Terminology

- Do multiple searches
- Try keyword variations
 - Ex. Try “dining hall” and ”campus food service”
- Be specific as you learn more
 - Ex. Change “dining hall” to “Midwest university dining hall”

Evaluating Search Results

Some results won't be helpful

- unrelated topic
- not enough information
- incorrect or outdated information
- shallow or untrustworthy source
- wrong tone for your project
 - Ex. An opinionated article when you need a basic overview

Evaluating Search Results (cont.)

- Have a clear idea of the type of content needed
 - general overview
 - in-depth explorations of a topic with number and statistics

Some Academic Research Sources:

- Google Scholar: Easily locate full documents on relating works
- JSTOR: Find journal articles, book, and primary sources
- PubMed Central: Scholarly literature in life sciences and biomedical topics
- Digital Commons Network: Scholarly work for architecture, business, education, and law topics

Clues to Determine a Site's Purpose

- Tone and language used
- Assumptions/Generalizations
- Commercial/Non-commercial
- Advocating a particular opinion
- Copyright notice
- Links/Sources cited
- Domain name extensions and website design does NOT determine the reliability of the information

Wikipedia Articles

- Be Aware of Wikipedia
 - Inaccuracies: Articles can be edited by anyone without reviewing the information
 - Spam: There have been countless occasions where malicious or inaccurate content is added
 - Conflict of Interest: Editors can be paid to promote a certain option

Thank You

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