

SEARCHING THE WORLD WIDE WEB AS A RESEARCH TOOL



Research for a paper or project should NEVER be done solely on the World Wide Web. Good research combines various sources (books, journal articles, news stories, etc.) for a well-rounded outlook on your topic.

SEARCH ENGINES (such as Google) - remotely accessible programs that let you do keyword searches for information on the Internet. They are collections of websites (a database) that are created by machine. There are specific computer programs (called spiders or robots) that go out into the Internet, bring back websites, and store them. Google is an example of a search engine.

DIRECTORIES - information resources that contain references to other resources, categorized by subject, usually in a hierarchy. Subject indices are not to be confused with search engines. Directories are created by people who actually visit the website or at least determine the subject matter of the website and place it in the proper category. Yahoo is the most popular Internet subject index.

A search using a search engine or a directory simply matches the word/words you put in to word/words in the database and your results are the websites that have those words in them.

The choice of which type of database to use should be made depending on what type of research you are doing. Search engines give you a lot of information but they should be combined with a search in some directories as well. If you prefer to start with websites that are more organized into subject matter, use a directory. You should always search more than one place to get information and evaluate and compare your results.

META SEARCH tools search MANY of these databases all at the same time. Here are some examples:

<http://www.metacrawler.com/> - one of my favorite meta search tools.

Dogpile - <http://www.dogpile.com/> searches (at the same time) **Google, Yahoo! Search, MSN, Ask.com, About, MIVA, LookSmart** and more.

<http://www.mamma.com/> Mamma.com - The Mother of All Search Engines, simultaneously queries 10 of the major Search Engines at the same time.

For more scholarly searching on the "invisible web" go to: <http://www.search.com>

Evaluating Web Sites



- **Anyone** can put information on the World Wide Web and it is NOT reviewed by anyone, we need to take careful consideration of web material before we use it on a research project. Following are descriptions of good, bad and unfriendly web sites.

Good Points

1. Access to vast amounts of information quickly (well, sort of) and easily.
2. Information that is easily updated and kept current (such as news or legislative action).

Bad Points

1. Anyone can put pages on the Web - information is not reviewed or evaluated, it is put just put out to the public.
2. A scholarly or reliable page can link to an unreliable one or vice-versa.

User Un-Friendly Sites

1. Poorly designed pages that are confusing and not at all helpful.
2. Large graphics that take a long time to load onto your screen.
3. Pages that are not documented well and it becomes difficult to find out where the information came from.
4. Hackers can sometimes access and change information without the author knowing it.
5. Information is sometimes taken out of context.
6. Pages that are biased politically, sexually, racially, etc..

- Here are some helpful ways to go over a web site and evaluate it before you utilize it.

1. **Accuracy** - How reliable and error-free is this information? Has anyone reviewed it?
2. **Authority** - What are the author's qualifications? What is the reputation of the publisher? Basically, WHO put the information on this web page?
3. **Objectivity** - Is it biased? Is it trying to sway us or just present the facts?
4. **Currency** - How dated is the content? How recently was the page updated?
5. **Coverage** - Has the topic been covered thoroughly or just touched upon.