

Searching the Web & Evaluating Websites

The Web can be a good information source for:

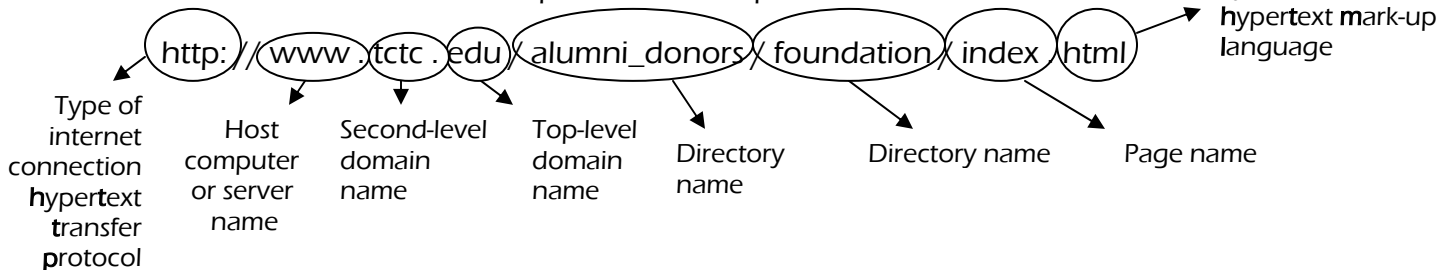
- learning more about companies and organizations
- information from the U.S. government
- finding quick facts
- catching up with current news
- gathering opinions of people
- **AND** connecting to library resources

URLs and Domain Basics:

Every web page has its own address, called a Uniform Resource Locator (URL). Much like the address on an envelope with a name, street address, city, state, and zip code, each part of a URL provides information about the web page. **The domain name tells you the type of organization sponsoring a page.** It is a three-letter code that is part of the URL and preceded by a "dot." The domain names can often point you to authoritative sites and are a way to narrow down your search to the best possible sources for information from the web on a particular topic. To find legal or medical information, try limiting your search to educational domains (.edu) because they will include law schools and medical schools.

example: http://www.tctc.edu/alumni_donors/foundation/index.html

Here's a description of the components of this URL:



Some common domain names are:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| .edu | educational institution
Even though a page comes from an education institution, it does not mean the institution necessarily endorses the views published by students or faculty members. |
| .gov | government
Federal and state government agencies use the web to publish legislation, census information, statistics, research data, weather data, tax forms and many other documents. |
| .org | non-profit organization
Non-profit organizations use the web to promote their causes. These pages are often good sources to use when comparing different sides of an issue. |
| .com | commercial entities (also includes .net and .biz)
Companies advertise, sell products, and publish annual reports and other company information on the web. Many online newspapers or journals also have .com names. |

QUALITY vs. QUANTITY

Libraries have large collections of information on a variety of carefully selected and organized topics. The key idea when using the library is that you are getting quality over quantity. Print or electronic library resources are usually the best sources to use when starting your research. You can efficiently find high quality information from a variety of credible resources in the library. **The Web is a good tool for finding information, but it is usually not the best place to begin academic research.**

Starting with the Library . . .	Starting with the Web . . .
<p>Library resources go through a review process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources have been checked by an editor or peer-reviewed, then selected by librarians, no matter the format of the resource. The library collects sources considered reliable, historically relevant and valuable. 	<p>Most information on the Web does not go through a review process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anyone can publish on the Web without passing the content through an editor. The information on a web page might be written by an expert on the topic, a journalist, a disgruntled consumer or even a child. The information may be slightly inaccurate, sub-standard for publication, or just plain false. Anyone can claim to be anyone (or anything!) he/she desires to be on the Web.
<p>Library resources are free or discounted for your use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Libraries purchase one copy which can be shared by many people. 	<p>Some information on the Web is not free.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many pages are free, but some commercial sites charge a fee to access their information.
<p>Library resources are organized.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items are organized so you can find all the sources on a topic. For example, when you search for a book in the library catalog you will get a call number. The books shelved nearby will cover a similar topic. 	<p>Information on the Web is not organized.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some directory services, like the <i>Best Websites A-Z Guide</i> or <i>Yahoo</i>, provide links to sites in subject lists. But there are too many Web pages for any single directory service to organize and index.
<p>Library resources are meant to be kept permanently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A primary function of a library is to store information published throughout time. As well as finding very current information, you can also find books that are no longer published and older issues of magazines. 	<p>Most information on the Web is not permanent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some well-maintained sites are updated with very current information, but others may be dated or disappear altogether without notice.
<p>Library resources come with personal assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Libraries have staff who are trained to help you find what you need. 	<p>Most information on the Web is not comprehensive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely will you be able to use a search engine on the Web to collect information about your topic from earlier decades and different types of sources.

Judging What You Find

Because there is no review process or regulation for the Web, you will need to judge for yourself the quality of the material you find. Keep in mind these questions:

- Accuracy** Does the information presented seem accurate? Are the facts verifiable? Are there any spelling and/or grammatical errors?
- Authority** Who is the author? What expertise does he or she have on this topic? Who sponsors the site? Check the domain name to see if it is a university, business, organization, or an individual.
- Objectivity** What is the stated purpose of the site? Check the "About . . ." or "Mission" link if there is one. What position or opinion is presented and does it seem biased? What kinds of sites does it link to?
- Currency** On what date was the page created or last updated? Do you need more current information? Do links on the site still connect to their destination?
- Use** Would you quote information from this site in a college research paper? If the information you use is from another individual's research paper that has been published on the web (ex. from an Internet paper mill), even if you correctly cite the source, is it quality information that you would want to use in your own paper? Is the website asking you to pay a fee in order to access the information? What is the purpose of the information?

YOU be the Judge: Are these credible sources of information?

These websites are real, but based on the criteria listed above, can you tell if they are legitimate sources of information? If you aren't sure if a website has legitimate information, it is your responsibility to do additional research on the topic! **Compare all web information with the information that you find in books, magazines, and journal articles.** *(Answers on the last page.)*

- U.S. Department of Agribusiness – <http://www.mypyramid.org>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – <http://www.mypyramid.gov>
- Lip Balm Anonymous – <http://kevdo.com/lipbalm>
- Psoriasis - <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/psoriasis.html>
- Emu Oil for Psoriasis – <http://www.emu-oil.com/psoriasis.htm>
- Save the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus – <http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus.html>
- Endangered Species - <http://www.fws.gov/Endangered/wildlife.html>

Searching the Web with Search Engines: Tips for Better Search Results

When you do a search in a search engine, it searches within its own database of web pages - not the whole Web - for the keywords you enter, wherever they appear on a Web page. There are various search engines with different databases that are available, but probably the most popular, or familiar, one is Google™. Use a search engine to find specific terms or phrases, to find well-known entities, such as IBM or government agencies, and to find news, travel and shopping services.

Tips

Be Specific

- Use nouns and unique words
- Put the most important words first
- Use multiple terms when possible

Use quotes around phrases

so the search engine will search for the words as a phrase not as separate words

Use a plus sign + in front of a word or a phrase to *require* its search

Use a minus sign – in front of a word to *exclude* its search

Use lower case letters to find words that are *either* lower or upper case

Use parentheses around terms that are alike. **Enter connectors** in capital letters.

Examples

If you were interested in “bias in newspapers” you could search for: **newspapers bias slant censorship journalism**

To look for a term, rather than search the individual words in a term, use quotes around it:
“world health organization”

A word or a phrase preceded by a + must be present in all pages returned: **+“absentee voting” + “assisted suicide”**

If you wanted pages on fusion but *not* cold fusion you can prevent “cold” from being searched: **- cold fusion**

japanese internment “world war ii”

(adolescents OR teenagers) television AND children
Google™ automatically inserts AND between terms.

Refining a Search on Google™

Use the
**ADVANCED
SEARCH**
feature!

1. **trail of tears** – Google searched **each** of the words you entered separately. You probably got more than 421,000 hits.
2. **“trail of tears”** – When you put quotes around trail of tears, it ensured that the words were searched together **as a phrase**. You should have gotten fewer hits this time.
3. **“trail of tears” “andrew jackson”** – Adding the name of Andrew Jackson makes the search more specific. He’s connected to the topic. You should have gotten even fewer hits now.
4. **Advanced Search with .org** – By limiting your search to **.org (organizations)** you should have found a PBS site and the official site of the Cherokee Nation. You could also try **.edu** sites, or add additional terms to refine your results.

ANSWERS from Page 3: a)No b)Yes c)No d)Yes e)No f)No g)Yes

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