INTERNET SEARCHING GUIDE

There are many excellent sources of information on the Internet, but finding them takes practice and patience. Any person with a computer and Internet access can publish a web page on any topic whether they have expert knowledge of the subject or not. It can sometimes be difficult and frustrating to sift through the "junk" on the Internet when searching for reliable sources of information. Another characteristic of the Web is how fast things change online, literally on a daily, even an hourly basis. A site can be there one day and gone the next; it may just be down temporarily or gone for good. Web sites routinely change their appearance, some for the better, others not. Fortunately, there are search tools available on the Internet that make it much easier to find the information you need as well as advise to help you evaluate websites.

ABC's of Evaluating Online Sources:

When evaluating Web sites, keep in mind the following criteria:

Authority – Who created the web site? Are they known experts on the subject? Is the author affiliated with a reputable organization? Is the organization reputable?

Bias – Is the web site objective or does the author only present one side of the topic? Does the author's organizational affiliations make him/her biased?

Content – Is the information accurate and current? When was the web site created? More importantly, *when* was it last updated? Are the links up to date or are they dead (i.e., result in a "file not found" error message)? Does the information seem logical and credible? What is the tone of the web site – does it evoke strong emotions, such as anger or fear? Is it an advertisement? Are sources given when facts or statistics are used? Are basic rules of grammar and spelling followed?

CAUTION: Even hoax or parody websites can be made to look credible. If something seems good, but you're just not sure, look for background information from known resources. Use encyclopedias and dictionaries (print or electronic) to get basic information on a topic. A well-known source for revealing Internet spoofs, hoaxes or parodies is Snopes < http://www.snopes.com/>, a site known for debunking urban legends. Even looking for a term on Google ™ can often find websites devoted to the hoax or parody as well as those that debunk or expose them.

Clues in the URLs: The URL (Uniform Resource Locator) is the website's electronic address. They typically contain portions or variations of the organization's name. The domain, usually the last 3 letters at the end of a website's home page, ".com," ".org," etc., can sometimes be helpful in determining the validity of the site, but not always.

- ".com" is for commercial sites
- ".org" means that the author, whether an individual or an organization, is simply a non-profit organization. Such organizations may have any agenda and show any bias that it deems fit for its purposes. Having a domain of "**.org**" does **NOT** automatically give a website credibility. Nor should it be taken to mean that resources offered by such sites are free of charge.
- ".gov," on the other hand is only used for websites for agencies of the U. S. federal government.

- ".edu" is a designation for institutions of higher learning and is granted only after certain criteria have been met by the institution.
- ".mil" is for military websites
- ".net" is for network organizations

Sometimes, the URL can also include parts that indicate a website's country of origin, e.g.:
- .au = Australia
- .ca = Canada
- .fr = France
- .uk = United Kingdom
- .us = United States

Web Browsers:

Web browsers are application programs that allow users to access the Internet. There are a few well-known Web browsers, including Microsoft's Internet Explorer ™, Firefox™, Chrome™, and Apple's Safari™. While having slightly different appearances, they generally offer the same types of functions. Many web pages are designed to be compatible with only one or two, most often Internet Explorer and Firefox. The choice of which to use is mostly personal. Windows operating systems (e.g., XP, Vista, Windows 7, etc.) include some version of Internet Explorer; it as well as the others can usually be downloaded for free.

Using Search Engines

A search engine is an application used to find Web pages and sites. There are several search engines available on the Internet now and new ones are created all the time. Often, existing search engines undergo changes, some quite frequently; some changes may be subtle and hardly noticeable, while others can be drastic, making users wonder if they may have the wrong one. Search engines come in several varieties, offering different search features and options. Probably the best known is Google ™; in fact, it is so well-known that its name has become synonymous with searching the Internet (e.g., "Googling" your name). Different types of search engines search different parts of the Internet and search for certain types of resources. There are some that search the entire Internet, others that just search specific parts of the Internet, and others that perform 'meta searches;' in other words, these search several search engines at once. Different search engines search differently and usually find different web pages for the exact same search. It can be time consuming to go from search engine to search engine in order to search them one at a time. It can be equally difficult to choose the best search engine to meet your needs. This is why a meta search engine, such as Dogpile, www.dogpile.com, may be a good choice. Dogpile searches 13 other search engines at once and saves you time.

About.com offers information, analyses and commentaries on search tools and directories in its section:
Search Engines and Directories A to Z
http://websearch.about.com/library/searchengine/blsearchenginesatoz.htm
Note that search engines come and go, like anything else on the web. There are search engines listed here that no longer exist, like KartOO, or have been renamed, like Clusty, which is now Yippy!.

Searching Tips
- When formulating Internet searches, use key words and phrases important to your topic. Be as specific as possible.
- Most search engines automatically omit words like "and," "the," etc. If they are important to your search (e.g., "The Donald," a well-known nickname for Donald Trump; "Brooks and Dunn," a country duo), enclose the phrase in quotation marks. Placing words or phrases in quotation marks tells most search engines to search for those words exactly as typed.
- Check your spelling; some search engines may offer suggestions. Sometimes this can be helpful, but not always.