

6 RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD WIDE WEB



ELECTRONIC MATERIAL

As we all know, computers are everywhere! The skills that you will develop through the need to work with computers during your Higher Education studies will prove to be invaluable in the work place. This section of the package contains some tips for those who are still relatively unfamiliar with some of the advantages and challenges that computers offer as aids to study.

Researching with computers – the internet

There are thousands of web sites on the internet. The amount of information available on these web sites is staggering, and the internet is a great resource tool for research. Unfortunately, sorting through these web sites to find the exact information you are looking for can be time consuming and difficult. Search Engines can be your best tool for doing research on the web, but you need to learn a few 'power tips' to make the most of your searches.

One key concept to understand is that there are two main types of search tools;

Directories

Use a directory when you have only a vague idea of what you want and when you would appreciate prompts to guide you along.



For example Yahoo (www.yahoo.co.uk/) is a vast **directory** that covers a wide range of subjects, which are cross-referenced. It is very easy to use to find a *general* topic. Others you might try are:
bubl.ac.uk/link/subjects/
- for looking up general subject areas
accdc.hensa.ac.uk/indexes.html
- UK academic directory

and

Search Engines

Use a search engine when your goal is to get to a particular piece of information quickly.



For a **search engine** to find a *specific* topic try Alta Vista (www.altavista.digital.com/). Other useful search engines to try are:
www.askjeeves.com/
www.google.com/
www.dogpile.com/

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section 1

You will eventually settle on your favourites and 'bookmark' these on your computer.

What can you research on the internet?

The internet is more than a series of wordy web pages, you will find there are:

- Web sites devoted to particular topics, including text, graphics, movies, music files.
- Databases such as journals, newspapers or professional documents.
- Government documents, forms, laws, policies, etc.
- Services and information by non-profit organizations and by for-profit businesses.
- Directories of names and personal information.
- Personal web pages or vanity pages.
- Communications through e-mail.
- Discussion groups or Listservs.

What limits my search? Some information is

- In the 'public domain' and can be freely accessed and used, such as USA government documents.
- Copyright protected, with restricted use determined by national and international laws.
- Not copyright protected since the copyright has expired.
- Conditionally protected with 'copyright disclaimers' located on the web page/site.
- Limited in access by first registering, subscribing, or requiring personal information for use or access.
- Restricted by passwords.

All information should be properly cited.

How do I search the internet?

- Narrow your topic and its description; pull out key words and categories.
- Begin with known, recommended, expert, or reviewed web sites.

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- Use a search engine: enter your key words. Find the best combination of key words to locate information you need; Enter these in the search engine.
- Review the number of options returned. If there are too many web sites, add more keywords. If there are too few options, narrow/delete some keywords, or substitute other key words.
- Review the first pages returned: if these are not helpful, review your key words for a better description.
- When you are feeling fairly confident you can move on to advanced search options in search engines:
Research using several search engines. Each search engine has a different database of web sites it searches. Some 'Meta-Search' engines (e.g., **www.dogpile.com**) actually search other search engines! If one search engine returns few web sites, another may return many!
- Evaluate the content of the web sites you've found. The internet is a relatively new and untested information and communication medium. The internet is persuasive and it is unregulated. As such, it is the visitor to a web site who must have both tools and responsibility to discern quality web sites.
- Identify the resource, especially its location, and the date you found it.
- Track your search, list resources you checked and the date you checked them.
- Bookmark the site: your computer has the facility for you to keep a bookmark of the sites that you wish to be able to return to again quickly and you should organise your bookmarks according to topics.
- University Home Pages: university home page web sites are an invaluable source of links to carefully selected sites and you will find your own university and departmental web pages a most useful place to begin. (British university sites end in **ac.uk** and USA in **edu**.)

You must accurately cite (reference) your internet source in the references and bibliography of all your assessed work, including the date when you accessed it. So, make sure you always keep a record. (See section 7: 'Compiling References and Bibliographies', for how to reference internet sites).



WORKSHEET 6

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Use the two worksheets below to be methodical about using the internet, aware of the time you are spending, and to critically evaluate the material you find there.

Task 1 Internet Search

NAME: _____

I am working on _____ (e.g., Geography, weather, etc)

I am going to look for _____ (e.g., tornado)

I will start with these sites: (e.g., Yahoo, BBC WebGuide, Eduweb etc)

http:// _____

http:// _____

http:// _____

I think these will be the most useful words to look for (e.g., tornado, whirlwind, etc)

When I started looking, the time was _____

When I searched I found these were the most useful words to look for _____

these were not helpful words to look for _____

I also got this information which I did not want (e.g., fighter planes, etc) _____

I found these sites had what I needed:

http:// _____ I liked it because _____

http:// _____ I liked it because _____

http:// _____ I liked it because _____

http:// _____ I liked it because _____

(e.g., <http://www.tornado.org> I liked it because there were good pictures. Also people wrote about what it was like to be near a Tornado)

When I stopped looking, the time was _____ Time spent searching was _____ minutes

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Task 2 Web Page Evaluation

Title of Web Site: _____

URL: _____

Directions: Use your judgment in allotting points for the various categories. Total the points for score.

Currency (0 to 15 Points)

The site has the date of last revision posted. _____

The site has been updated recently. _____

Frequency of planned updates and revisions is stated. _____

Content/Information (0 to 15 Points)

The information will be useful to our curriculum and/or student interest. _____

This information is not available in any other format elsewhere in my library. _____

The information on the topic is thorough. _____

The information is accurate. _____

The purpose of the page is obvious. _____

The information is in good taste. _____

The page uses correct spelling and grammar. _____

Authority (0 to 10 Points)

The authors are clearly identified _____

The authors and/or maintainers of the site are authorities in their field. _____

There is a way to contact the author(s) via e-mail or traditional mail. _____

You can easily tell from the domain name where the page originates. _____

Navigation (0 to 10 Points)

You can tell from the first page how the site is organized and what options are available. _____

The type styles and background make the page clear and readable. _____

The links are easy to identify _____

The links are logically grouped. _____

The layout is consistent from page to page _____

There is a link back to the home page on each supporting page. _____

The links are relevant to the subject _____

The icons clearly represent what is intended. _____

Experience (0 to 10 Points)

The page fulfils its intended purpose. _____

The page is worth the time. _____

The page's presentation is eye-catching. _____

The site engages the visitor to spend time there. _____

Multimedia (0 to 10 Points)

Sounds, graphics or video enhance the site's message. _____

Treatment (0 to 10 Points)

Any biases towards the subject matter can be easily identified. _____

The page is free from stereotyping. _____

The page is age appropriate for content and vocabulary for its intended audience. _____

Access (0 to 5 Points)

You can connect quickly to the page. _____

The page is available through search engines. _____

The page loads quickly. _____

You can choose whether to download smaller images, text-only, or non-frame versions. _____

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Miscellaneous (0 to 15 Points)

The page has received an award(s). _____

There are no per-use costs involved. _____

Interactions asking for private information are secured. _____

Information can be printed without the need to change your system configuration. _____

Information is presented in short enough segments so it can be printed out without backing up the system for other users. _____

The page has its own search engine for searching within the page. _____

TOTAL: _____

- Scoring:**
- 90 - 100 Excellent
 - 80 - 89 Good
 - 70 - 79 Average
 - 60 - 69 Borderline Acceptable
 - Below 60 Unacceptable

Comments:

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