

## Top Tips for searching the internet



### Searching the Web

Common commands for search engines include:

- **Quotation Marks ( " )**  
Using quotation marks will help to find specific phrases involving more than one word. For example: "Political Reform"
- **Addition Sign ( + )**  
Adding a + sign before a word means that it **MUST** be included in each site listed. For example: + political + reform
- **Subtraction Sign ( - )**  
Adding a - sign before a word means that it will **NOT** appear in the sites listed. For example: + Washington -DC

### Evaluating Internet sources

You should carefully evaluate the value and reliability of any sources you use on the internet. The following evaluation tool will help you analyse web resources in terms of accuracy, authority, objectivity, timeliness, and coverage.

#### Accuracy

- ❖ When facts are presented are their sources also listed?
- ❖ Can you verify the information through using another source?
- ❖ What is the author's bias or point of view – is it made clear?

## Authority

- ❖ What is the purpose of the document and why was it produced?
- ❖ Check the document URL. Who is sponsoring the article? Is it clear who is doing so? Know the difference between author and Web site administrator / webmaster.
- ❖ Is there a link to the sponsoring organisation?
- ❖ Is the author qualified to write on the topic? Why should they be trusted? Do you know the authors' credentials – are they quoted?
- ❖ What is the author's background? What are their credentials?
- ❖ Is the author affiliated to an institution or university?
- ❖ Is the publisher someone you can trust?
- ❖ Web addresses often indicate the country of origin (e.g. .ca = Canada), or the type of organization hosting the web site. (e.g. .edu=educational (US) gov=governmental (US), .org=organization) If the information at the site is not original, make sure the original source is given, and is cited properly.

## Objectivity

- ❖ You need be aware that commercial uses of the Internet are growing faster than any other, therefore care needs to be taken when the internet quotes information – it needs to be analysed since it could easily be propaganda. Therefore it is important to be aware of the purpose of the site, and of the document, you are viewing. Check all the "meta-data" available, i.e. all the clues you can find that put the information in context or provide details about it.
- ❖ There are many different kinds of information resources on the Internet (e.g. peer-reviewed journal articles, government documents, student essays, personal letters and blogs etc. Know what type you are reading – not always as easy to see at first glance on the internet as it would be in paper format.

## Currency / date

- ❖ Each document should have a date. Note that a lot of information is only relevant within the context of the time it is written.
- ❖ Is there an original creation date and a date for when it was last modified?
- ❖ Is the document on a topic that does not change frequently?
- ❖ How up to date are the links?
- ❖ Is it out-dated?

## Coverage

- ❖ Is the topic covered in depth?
- ❖ Is bias and alternative viewpoints recognised?

**Summary from Cornell University Library,**

<http://guides.library.cornell.edu/c.php?g=32334&p=203773>

- **Accuracy.** If your page lists the author and institution that published the page and provides a way of contacting him/her, and
- **Authority.** If your page lists the author credentials and its domain is preferred (.edu, .gov, .org, or .net), and
- **Objectivity.** If your page provides accurate information with limited advertising, and it is objective in presenting the information, and
- **Currency.** If your page is current and updated regularly (as stated on the page) and the links (if any) are also up-to-date, and
- **Coverage.** If you can view the information properly (not limited by fees, browser technology, or special software requirements), then you may have a Web page of research value.

