

## Internet/WWW Searching

Web browsers such as Netscape and Internet Explorer simply go to Web addresses, and search engines simply look for terms that you designate. They do not evaluate the accuracy or value of the Web sites, and there are sites that contain inaccurate, out-of-date, or false information. *You are responsible for determining the usefulness of the sites.*

**What is a Search Engine?** A search engine is a tool for finding Web pages that cover a certain topic or contain certain information.

### How do Search Engines Work?

Some search engines use automated programs that 'crawl' across the World Wide Web, gathering information about Web pages. Other search engines are produced by companies that hire people to examine Web pages and systematically categorize them. Essentially, all types of search engines store information about Web pages and provide a means for you to type in and search on one or more keywords or phrases. The search engine then provides links to the Web pages that contain those keywords or phrases.

### Are All Search Engines the Same?

No, search engines actually vary quite a bit in their structure and capabilities. Some search engines categorize information by subject, some allow you to combine keywords with the boolean operators **and**, **or** and **not**. Most search engines will allow you to search by keyword, and some even let you specify that Web pages found must contain graphical or audio components (i.e. find Web pages that contain pictures and/or digital sounds.) Some search engines cover all kinds of Web sites and Web pages, and others specialize on a certain topic, such as medicine or finding Web pages originating from a certain country. There are even search engines that search several other search engines at once; these are called metasearch engines. There are four main types of search engines:

### TYPES OF INFORMATION

Many different types of information are available but most Web pages can be categorized into one (or more) of five basic types:

#### Business/Marketing

Business or Marketing pages are usually published by companies or other commercial enterprises. Their primary purpose is to promote the company or to sell products. Business and Marketing pages often include a mixture of information, entertainment and propaganda. Examples include: Microsoft, and Amazon. For U.S. based sites, the URL or Web address usually ends in **.com**

#### News & Current Events

News and Current Events pages provide extremely up-to-date information, and include news centers, newspapers and other periodicals. Examples include: CNN, and The New York Times.

#### Informational

Informational pages provide factual information on a particular topic. These are often provided by government (**.gov**) or educational institutions (**.edu**) and may include reference materials, research reports, databases, calendars of events, statistics, etc. Examples include: the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Code, and Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

#### Advocacy

Advocacy pages are usually published by an organization with the purpose of influencing public opinion. Examples: National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, and National Right to Life Committee.

#### Personal

Personal pages are published by individuals who may or may not be part of a larger group or organizations. They may include almost any type of information including biographical data, information on work, hobbies, etc. Examples include individual or family home pages, individual faculty or students at a university, and member pages from an Internet Service Provider.

#### Entertainment

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# Health Professions Division Library

## CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING WEB SITES

Many of the same criteria for judging library databases and resources can also be used for Web sites. Relevancy has been important in judging other kinds of information sources, and the relevance of Web sites accessed is also important when searching the Internet.

- **AUTHORITY**  
Who is sponsoring the site? Check who is responsible for the page and what their qualifications and associations are. Check to see if you can verify this. Authors and creators of Web sites should be clearly stated within the sites and means should be included for contacting them and/or the Webmaster. Any commercial or organizational affiliations should also be included. What are the goals and/or values of the person/organization?
- **ACCURACY**  
Try to determine what the sources for the information at the site are. Are the facts verifiable? Are the sources of information cited, and are individual articles signed and attributed?
- **OBJECTIVITY**  
Look for the presence of bias. Considered the impact of any stated affiliations on the possible attitudes about the topic. What is the purpose of the site? Consider the seven types of Web pages listed above and consider where the page is trying to entertain, inform, persuade, or advertise?
- **CURRENCY**  
Consider how old the information is. Is the date of the last revision posted anywhere on the page? What is the date of the last revision?
- **COVERAGE**  
Consider the scope of the site is and what it focuses on. Consider what kind of information does it have and whether this meets your needs.

To see more about this topic, check out **Thinking Critically about World Web Resources** by Esther Grassian at UCLA College Library. Another excellent guide is **Evaluating Web Resources** by Jan Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate at Widener University.