

## Research on the Web

### First Step: Choose the Right Tools

Spending hours on the 'Net? Not finding information for your research project? Not sure you can trust the information you're retrieving?

Sometimes you can ease your frustration by using advanced searching techniques. (See Tips and Techniques below for more information.) Frequently, though, it's not a question of mastering search engines. Rather, it's a question of identifying the appropriate tool in the first place. The Internet is wonderful, and can provide material we have never had access to before, but it is not necessarily the first place to go for college-level research. Consider your needs:

Are you looking for statistics?

The World Wide Web is a terrific source for statistical information (see [Steely Library's Research Guide for statistics](#)), but sometimes a statistical handbook is even better.

Reference librarians know where to look and are happy to help.

Are you looking for the point of view of a particular group, such as the NRA on gun control, the American Smokers Alliance on smoker's rights, or PETA on animal experimentation?

The Internet is one of the best places to look. Try one of the links to lists of online organizations below.

Do you want the text of a newspaper, magazine or journal article?

The periodicals published on the Web make up a small minority of the periodicals available, and even fewer are available online for free. You can use the new [Google Scholar](#), to identify citations for many periodical articles, but most hits will require a fee to actually see the article. For most magazine and journal articles, you will have better luck with the [databases subscribed to by Steely Library](#), many of which offer full-text articles from both current and past issues.

Do you need brief factual information?

The 'Net is a possibility, although a reference book is often faster and usually more reliable. You can get this kind of information from the Information Desk -- call 572-5456 or [email](#) us.

Do you need a complete, in-depth study?

BOOKS! Use NKUIRE to find a book on your topic.

Are you looking for information that has been carefully checked for accuracy? Are you seeking reports, critical analysis, or scholarly investigation of a topic?

Your chances of finding complete, reliable information are much better if you use material that is reviewed -- by fact-checkers, editors, or peer reviewers -- before being published. This is true of books, newspaper articles, and magazine articles, and it is especially true of scholarly journal articles. It is most definitely not the case with many WWW sources, as there is very little quality control on the Internet! Your best option is to use a periodical index or library catalog. If you prefer to search the Web, try a Subject Directory rather than a search engine to conduct your search. This will improve your chances of finding reliable web sites. To learn how to judge web sites for yourself, go to [Evaluate Web Pages](#). For web sites recommended by NKU librarians, see our [Virtual Reference Room](#).

Not sure where to start?

[Ask your Reference Librarians](#).

# Research on the Web

## Subject Directories vs. Search Engines

Subject directories organize web sites into categories. They are compiled by people, not machines; in this way they differ from search engines. Most subject directories are searchable, but what is actually searched is limited to the contents of the directory.

The directories below review sites for quality before linking to them. If you choose to use a less selective directory like Yahoo (which will accept any web page that's submitted), be sure to evaluate your results.

- [About: the Human Internet](#)
- [Academic Info](#)
- [Encyclopedia Britannica Best Web Sites](#)
- [INFOMINE](#)
- [Internet Scout Project](#)
- [ProFusion](#)
- [Librarian's Index to the Internet](#)
- [Price's List of Lists](#)

## Search Engines

Search engines electronically seek specific words or phrases, then retrieve documents that match your keywords. They generally retrieve much larger lists of results than subject guides do, because they search a much greater portion of the WWW, and some search every word on a page.

For help choosing a search engine, try [Search Engine Watch](#). Search engines aim at quantity rather than quality. For this reason you should carefully evaluate any web sites you find.

- [Alltheweb](#)
- [AltaVista](#)
- [Excite](#)
- [Google](#)
- [GoTo](#)
- [HotBot](#)
- [Lycos](#)
- [Teoma](#)

## Multi-Threaded Search Engines

Also known as meta-search engines, they search multiple databases simultaneously, using a single interface. For a comparison and explanation, see [Meta-Search Engines](#) from the U.C. Berkeley Teaching Library. The disadvantage to using multi-threaded search engines is that they lack advanced searching features.

- [Ask Jeeves](#)

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- [DogPile](#)
- [Ixquick](#)
- [Metacrawler](#)

### Organizations and Listservs

Organizations can be fruitful sources for position statements, journals and newsletters, and links to high quality resources on the Internet. Listservs and discussion groups allow you to enter an online discussion on a specific topic.

#### [Scholarly Societies Project](#)

A directory of web sites maintained by or for scholarly societies across the world.

#### [Associations on the Net](#)

A directory of professional and trade associations, cultural and art organizations, political parties and advocacy groups, labor unions, academic societies, think tanks and research institutions.

#### [American Council of Learned Societies](#)

A federation of 61 national scholarly organizations in the humanities and related social sciences.

#### [Political Advocacy Groups](#)

A directory of US political pressure groups, special interest groups, and lobbyists. Organized by subject (gun control, term limits, children, alcohol & drugs, etc.).

#### [Topica](#)

Search for listservs from this site.

#### [Google Group](#)

Search for Usenet newsgroups from this site.

### Tips and Techniques for Using Search Engines

#### Key Word Searching:

Search engines, unlike library catalogs, periodical indexes, and Internet subject guides, do not search by consistent subject headings. They rely instead on key words. Search engines can only find words that are actually entered in your query. For example, a search for medieval would not return any documents that used "middle ages" instead. Search engines also do not distinguish between words that are spelled the same way, but mean something different (physical plants, manufacturing plants, garden plants). This often results in hits that are completely irrelevant to your query.

#### Boolean Searching and Proximity Searching:

In order to search effectively, you need to understand how to refine your search by combining search terms. The basic Boolean operators AND, OR and NOT are used to combine terms in most search engines.

Each search engine is different. Be sure to read the HELP screens for each search engine you employ. [Search Engine Watch](#) offers a chart comparing search features. See HotBot's [Advanced Search Features](#) for an example of a search engine's help screen.

See our guide to [Boolean Searching](#) for more instruction

# Research on the Web

## Understanding the URL

The URL, or address, of a web page is the most direct way to search for information on the WWW. The URL takes you directly to the page you want to see. Here is an example of a URL:

<http://library.nku.edu/howfindbook.html>

Here is how they are constructed: transfer protocol :// servername . domain / directory / subdirectory / filename . filetype

Domain types are as follows:

- .edu: an educational institution
- .org: a nonprofit organization
- .com: a commercial enterprise
- .net: an Internet Service Provider (ISP)
- .gov: a governmental body
- .mil: a military body

There are also domains for individual countries; for example, .ca is Canada and .uk is the United Kingdom.

## More Tips

### [Search Engine Watch](#)

Click on "Web Searching Tips" for excellent searching help, reviews and news about search engines, and a comparison chart.

### [The Spider's Apprentice: A Helpful Guide To Web Search Engines](#)

Offers searching tips, information about how search engines work, and comparisons of popular search engines.

### [Recommended Search Strategy: Search With Peripheral Vision](#)

### [Sink or Swim: Internet Search Tools & Techniques](#)

### [Search Engines: What they Are, How They Work, and Practical Suggestions for Getting the Most Out of Them](#)

### [Windweaver's Search Guide](#)