USING THE WEB FOR RESEARCH

**Essential:** You must critically evaluate web sites used in college research!

**Ask these questions:**

**Author:** Is the author identified? Is the author an expert? Are credentials (position, publications, experience) listed? Who is the publisher or sponsoring organization?

**Currency:** When was the site last updated? Are the links current?

**Purpose:** Is it to inform, persuade, entertain, sell?

**Audience:** What is the reading level? Is it intended for a general audience or for experts in the field? If a scholarly audience, are the sources documented?

**Point of View:** Is the site one-sided? Is it biased? Is the information provided fact or opinion?

**Address:** .com - commercial, .edu - educational institution, .gov - government, .org - nonprofit organization.
. edu and .gov sites are considered most reliable.

Keep in mind that some of your initial search results may be paid placement (sponsored results).

For more information see the handout “Evaluating Sources.”

**Where Should I Search?**

A **search engine** looks for specific words and phrases. Many allow for specialized searches for images, video, news, and maps.


A **meta-search engine** allows you to search several search engines at one time.


A **directory** organizes sites by subject to allow easy browsing.

http://www.about.com  http://www.dmoz.org
http://www.google.com

A **scholarly search engine** retrieves academic articles, reports, and books.

**Google Scholar** – Searches for journal articles and books. Fees or subscriptions may be required for some articles.  http://scholar.google.com

Ask a reference librarian for good sites on a particular subject.
Handy Search Tips

The web is best for searching current events, popular culture, quick facts, trivia, statistics, company and product information, and organizations.

Combine your keywords with:

- **and:** specifies both words must be present  *(college and Missouri)*
- **or:** specifies either word must be present  *(global warming or climate change)*
- **not:** excludes a word  *(viruses not computer)*

Use quotation marks around phrases; for example, “social media”

Use the “Find” (in “Edit”) to locate information within a page.

Search for reliable sites by limiting to .edu and .gov sites: combine your topic with **and site:.edu** or **and site:.gov**  Example: **smoking and site:.gov**

Add **-.com** to eliminate most commercial sites.

Try alternate spellings for more results. Examples: barbecue/barbeque, seatbelts/seat belts, theater/theatre, Peking/Beijing.

Remember – not all information is on the web! Use the library online catalog and databases, too.

How is the Web Different from an Online Database?

**Information on the Web**
- Freely available to anyone with Internet access
- Anyone can put information on the Internet
- You **must evaluate** what you find, especially when using it for college-level research

**Online databases**
- Web-based sources of articles and reference information to which the library subscribes
- Information in databases has gone through an editorial process
- Most databases provide a citation for the source (although they may contain errors)
- The information is credible and authoritative – perfect for college-level research!

Citing Web Sites:

It is so easy to copy and paste from web sites. But you must cite these sources.

Ask for “**MLA Style Guide,**” “**APA Style Guide,**” and “**Chicago Style: Humanities**” handouts
- Available in paper on the reference side of the library
- Available online on the Maple Woods Library website; click on “Research Tools” on the library’s home page.

**Style Manuals**
- **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers** (Ref 808.02 G35m)
- **Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association** (Ref 808.02 P96)
- **The Chicago Manual of Style** (Ref 808.027 C43).

Ask your instructor for specific requirements.