Where Should I Search?

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

http://www.altavista.com  http://www.google.com

A meta-search engine allows you to search several search engines at one time, but superficially.


A directory organizes sites by subject to allow easy browsing.

http://www.about.com
http://dir.yahoo.com
http://www.galaxy.com

A virtual library provides links compiled and organized by experts. Fewer, but more focused, resources are provided. Good for searching broad topics.

Digital Librarian  http://www.digital-librarian.com
Open Directory Project  http://www.dmoz.org
WWW Virtual Library  http://vlib.org

How Should I Search?

Determine what you are researching. Express it in the form of a question or thesis statement.

Identify key concepts in your question or statement. Use these keywords in your search query.

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, “right to privacy”

If you are getting too many hits:

Narrow your search with more specific terms
Use “and”
Use “not”

If you are not getting enough hits:

Check your spelling!
Try related words (synonyms) Combine these with “or”
Use broader terms

Check to see if the sites you retrieve are relevant. Read the name of the site before you click on it, then skim the site. Does it provide information you can use?
How Do I Evaluate What I Find?

**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.”

How is the Web Different from an Online Database?

Information on the Web is freely available to anyone with Internet access. You must evaluate what you find more carefully because anyone can put information on the Internet.

Online databases are web-based sources of periodical articles and reference information to which the library subscribes. Many contain full-text articles, in which you get every word that appeared in the magazine, journal, or newspaper. Others contain encyclopedia-type articles, biographies, reports, excerpts from books and periodicals, government documents, quick facts, and indexes to articles. Because most information in subscription online databases has gone through an editorial process where one or more people evaluate manuscripts, the information is usually more credible.

How Do I Cite What I Find?

See “MLA Style Guide”, “APA Style Guide”, and “Chicago Style: Humanities” handouts on the reference side of the library. These handouts are also available online on the Maple Woods Library website. Click on “Research Tools” on the library’s home page.

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

Ask your instructor for specific requirements.

Where Do I Learn More?

Visit a “how-to” site on the web:

- Finding Information on the Internet: A Tutorial
  http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/FindInfo.html
- Internet Detective
  http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective

Ask a reference librarian for good sites on a particular subject.