Searching the Internet and Evaluating Web Sites

In addition to commercial collections licensed by the Library, you should also consider WWW search strategies, including Web document search tools provided via Library Web pages.

The Library Web pages provides several options to search for materials published via the World Wide Web, however you should also examine any WWW content carefully to ensure the source or author is authoritative and reliable.

Tips on Evaluating Web Sites

In addition to using the Online Library, the Internet, used wisely, can sometimes also be a useful source of information for your studies. Be careful though with the information you find, particularly if you intend to use the information in your dissertation. Always think about the quality of information you find on the Internet - do not accept it as correct and reputable simply because it appears convincing.

Critical evaluation of web sites is essential to ensure that the resources you use are accurate and reliable. This is particularly important if you are referring to information found on the Internet in your dissertation.

Sometimes you can assess the authority of a Web page by identifying it as the homepage of a well known academic or a University department Web site, at other times you may be viewing the Web pages of a leading professional organization or professional body. Other Web pages may provide less obvious clues when assessing the quality and authority of the material presented.

You may find it helpful to apply these tips on Evaluating Web Sites:

Try using the following criteria to evaluate web sites:

1. Scope – extent of coverage
   - Who is the audience?
   - What topics are covered?
   - What is the level of detail provided about the subject – is it suitable for your level?
   - Is the information in the resource limited to certain time periods?

2. Accuracy
• Is the information in the resource accurate?
• Do Web links lead to high-quality and reliable sites?
• Are there political, ideological, or other biases?
• If it is a commercial site or a non-profit organization, is their purpose or bias easily determined?
• Are the sources for any factual information clearly listed so that they can be verified?

3. Authority

• What authority does the author possess?
• Can the author be contacted for clarification or be informed of new information?
• Is the site sponsored? If so, by whom?
• Check the URL (e.g. http://www.fbi.gov) or domain
  o .edu (higher education in US)
  o .com (commercial)
  o .ac.uk (higher education in UK)
  o .org (organisations such as professional bodies or charities)
  o .net (network resources)
  o .gov (federal government).

4. Currency

• Is the resource dated? If it's not obvious from the web page, you can check the page source to see if there is a date included there (select View - Source on your browser)
• If it is updated, how frequently? When was the last update?
• Are dates of update stated?
• Are the Web links on the page working?

5. Usability

• Is the resource convenient, and easy to use?
• Are any necessary special commands clear?
• Is help information available?

6. Searching

• How effectively can information be retrieved from the resource?
• Is a useful search engine provided?
• What operators and ranking features are available?
• Is use of the search engine interface intuitive?
Note on use of encyclopaediae (Wikipedia etc.)

Use, and referencing, of an encyclopaediae (Wikipedia or any other) is usually accepted as an initial reference (e.g. serving to get acquainted with the subject). But this reference must be followed up with further research from "content specific" sources and cannot be accepted as the sole reference. Encyclopaediae represents "digested content" which has been summed up by someone else than the student and thus, unless in very specific cases, cannot be accepted as research fitting the requirements of a University of Liverpool taught programme.

Search Engines

If you simply search for scholarly resources via the regular, public URL of Web Search engines such as google.com you will find you are unable to access secure E-Resources held in collections, you should also consider strategies and tools to focus your search to obtain more reliable scholarly papers, professional reports or other authoritative documents.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar includes freely accessible scholarly papers from across the WWW and many subscribed collections / platforms. Google Scholar can provide a useful option to search the WWW for more relevant scholarly content (vs. searching the general WWW via the Google search engine).

If you visit or search Google Scholar from a link or search box provided in Library Web pages then you will be prompted to access Scholar via your UoL login in, this means you can open resources in commercial collections/ platforms. You should avoid accessing Google Scholar from its normal public URL, since you won’t be able to open secure content subscribed by the Library. Scholar also provides an alternative way to search for E-Journal articles by title or author.

You can access Google Scholar from some Library Web pages, alternatively see a Scholar search box in the Library for Online Programmes:
When using Scholar you can often access items from the normal links shown in results, however, sometimes you may need to use the alternative ‘Is it @ Liverpool’ or other suggested sources shown in the right menu:

Google Document Search

Whilst you can use the basic Google Search Engine to obtain scholarly content, this kind of search may result in irrelevant results due to the volume of Web pages contained in Google.

If you would like a more focused WWW search, limited to more formal documents and reports, you can limit your search to NGO (non-government sources), worldwide University documents, reports and articles, corporate reports, or a general search of all popular document formats (PDF, DOC etc.).

You can use the ‘Advanced’ search options in Google to manually limit your search:

You can then use the advanced search options to define exact an search phrase, limit your search to a geographical location, language or other details:
You can also access advanced Google document search options from the Library for Online Programmes (see the Quick Search / Key Databases search box):
Research Gateways

Research gateways or hubs provide research papers from Universities and research archives around the world. Major research gateways such as OAIste allow you to search across many hundreds of individual University research archives from a single search. You can access Research Gateways via the Library Web pages.

You can also access research gateways and search these directly from the page in the WWW/ Open Access area of the Library for Online Programmes.

Web Directories and Search Engines

You can access a range of specialist WWW directories containing online resources, these platforms are often maintained by Librarians or industry professionals, you can access suggested Web directories from your subject LibGuide page. Online/ remote students are recommended to view selected resources in the Library for Online Programmes (see subject pages shown in the upper menu/ tabs.

Recommended WWW sources include:

- **DMOZ** - an 'open directory' of Web sites categorised into subject areas.
- **Librarian’s Internet Index** - a directory of 20,000 Web sites maintained by librarians.
- **Social Science Research Network (SSRN)** - provides a large collection of scholarly articles freely via the Web.
- **The WWW Virtual Library** - a portal to subject-based Web sites.
- **Yahoo Directory** - a directory of Web sites categorised into subject areas.
- **Bized** - business and economics resources for students, teachers and lecturers.
- **SCIRUS** - a Web search engine for scientific and technical resources.

Further Help

If you have any questions please contact your Librarian (see list of Liaison Librarians and Librarian for Online Programmes).