

Finding Information Online

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Some sources of online information

- Websites
- Search engines
- Web directories
- Proprietary databases
- Listservs and bulletin boards

How do you find a website?

- The easy ways:
 - Known URL from friend or other trusted source
 - Enter the address in the browser address window.
 - Follow a Link from another website
 - A good-quality website will often direct you to other quality sites on related topics, often giving annotations about what you can expect to find.
- The principle here: a person has done some evaluation of a site.

If you don't know where to start:

- Search engines
 - Vast databases of websites, created mechanically. Relevance to search determined by location or frequency of a search term's appearance, number of other pages linking to page, etc.
- Web directories
 - Much smaller databases of websites, created by people. Relevance to search determined by evaluation of contents.

Some Links

Search Engines

- google.com
- altavista.com
- lycos.com
- metacrawler.com

Web Directories

- lii.org
- mel.org
- yahoo.com
- brightonlibrary.info/links/pages

Searching in Search engines

- Enter search terms in the text box.
- Use specific terms to narrow your search.
- Use quotation marks to search for a specific phrase or name on its own or as part of a larger search.
 - “does your chewing gum lose its flavor”
 - “john smith” senator

Search engine results

The image shows a screenshot of a Google search results page for the query "epilepsy". The search bar at the top shows "epilepsy" and the results are "Results 1 - 10 of about 19,700,000 for epilepsy (added to index 0.04 seconds)". Annotations with arrows point to various elements:

- Number of hits**: Points to the text "Results 1 - 10 of about 19,700,000 for epilepsy".
- These are ads**: Points to the "Sponsored Link" section on the right side of the results.
- Web page title and link to site**: Points to the first search result: "Understanding Epilepsy" with the URL "www.understandepilepsy.com".
- Context of search terms**: Points to the "Refine results for epilepsy:" section, which includes filters for "Treatment", "Tests/diagnosis", and "Symptoms".
- Website address (URL)**: Points to the URL "www.understandepilepsy.com" in the first result.
- Link to Google's saved copy of the webpage (useful when a page can't be accessed live.)**: Points to the "Cached" link in the first result.

19,700,000 hits?!

- Search engines are a good means of finding a website for a particular company, service, or organization when you don't know the URL.
- For researching a topic, search engines and web directories are useful to find a few good sites, which you can use to direct you further. Look for links pages!
- In any case, if you can't find anything useful in the first few pages of results, try modifying your search.

How to Evaluate a Web Site

- **Currency** - Is this site dated? When was it last updated?
- **Accuracy** - Where does the information come from? Is it from sources you can trust?
- **Authority** - Who is responsible for this site? Does the site tell the credentials of the person/organization? Is there a link to contact someone to get more information?
- **Bias** - Does this site have a particular perspective on an issue? Is their perspective clear and direct or indirect?
- **URL** – Is it a trackable URL? Check betterwhois.com

Library Catalogs

- Library catalogs provide a good introduction to database structure and searching.
- Databases are made up of *records*. Each item in a catalog has a record.
- Records are made up of *fields*. Title, Author, and Subjects are a few of the fields in a library catalog record.

Combining Search Terms

- Search terms are combined using *Boolean Operators*.
- The most common Operators are AND, OR, and NOT.
- Operators can be combined to expand or narrow searches.

Using Boolean Operators

- In the library catalog, search:
 - france
 - france not fiction
 - france and history not fiction
 - france or germany and painting
- Use parentheses to show which operations to perform first.
 - (france or germany) and painting

MelCat

- MelCat is a catalog reflecting holdings of public, academic, and school libraries throughout Michigan. Items that are not available through Brighton District Library's shared catalog can be requested for delivery to Brighton through MelCat.
- A link to MelCat can be found on the main page of BDL's catalog, or from mel.org.
- Items not available through either catalog may also be obtained through OCLC, whose catalog WorldCat, can be accessed from the Brighton District Library database page.

Proprietary Databases

- Access to published material and specialized directories not freely available on the internet, or findable through search engines.
- Require subscriptions and authentication.
- The State of Michigan and local libraries pay for database subscriptions for their residents.
- Brighton District Library's database page:
Go to **brightonlibrary.info** and click on the "articles/databases" button near the top of the page.
When accessing these databases from home you will be prompted for a library card number before you can get into the database.

(Some of the) Subjects covered in our Databases

General periodicals articles

General Reference Center Gold
Wilson Select Plus

Newspapers

Infotrac Custom Newspapers 150
Michigan Newspapers - Newsbank

Genealogy

Ancestry Plus
Heritage Quest

Health/Medicine

Health and Wellness Resource Center
Health Reference Center Academic

Investments

Value Line Investment Survey

Business directories & Information

ReferenceUSA
Business and Company ASAP

Author biography/Literary criticism

Literature Resource Center

Current affairs essays

Opposing Viewpoints

Test preparation

Learn-a-test

Academic Journals

Expanded Academic ASAP

Another searching tip

- Truncation or Wild Card keys can be used to substitute for one or more letters in a search term.
- It is particularly useful when searching for singular and plural forms, or different words from the same root without stringing together a bunch of different forms with OR.
- Different databases use different characters for truncation. The asterisk (*) is a frequent choice. The library catalog uses the dollar sign (\$). Check the database help pages to be sure.

Truncation examples

- These use the Health and Wellness Resource Center database, searching for information on childhood epilepsy.
- Use the term child* to search for child, children, childhood, etc.
- Use the term epilep* to search for epilepsy, epileptic, etc.

Database Search Results

These tabs show the different categories of results that may be found. This search found only Magazine and Journal articles.

Subject headings that are related to these search results.

Click on the article title to go to the full text.

“Controlled Vocabulary” versus “Free Text”

- Databases often include a controlled vocabulary, like library subject headings.
- These classify all articles on a particular subject together.
- The catch: you have to know or find out what exact term is used.
- Search for terms as keywords or free text, and see what headings are attached to useful results. As in the previous example, some databases will suggest possibilities.

Listservs:

ask somebody who knows

- There are email discussion lists, or “listservs” on almost any subject imaginable.
- List members can ask questions and share information and news, often past discussions are archived.
- Look at relevant links pages or do a search engine search for the topic and “listserv”