



Effective Searching

Planning a search strategy

- Before starting an online search ask yourself the following:
- What is the question? What do you want information on?
- Can you think of any related concepts?
- For what purpose is the information required – overview or in-depth?
- How will the information be used? Who is the audience?
- How much information is required and when?
- How will the information be presented?
- How might you limit your search, e. g. by year, language?
- If English language, are there any American synonyms?
- What resources are the most appropriate to access?
- Do the answers to these questions indicate that online is best?

To develop the search strategy:

- In one or two sentences, you need to state the topic you want to research.
- Next, you need to underline the main concepts in the statement.
- Now break the search concepts into:
- Remember to add in any synonyms, alternate spellings, and variant word forms.
- It is possible to use Boolean operators but using Advanced Search option will give you the same result

Basic Boolean operations:

OPERATOR	PROCESS RESULTS
OR	Requires EITHER or BOTH terms to be present in document, e.g. French OR newspaper Widens a search – increases the number of documents
AND	Requires BOTH terms to be present, e.g. French AND newspaper Narrows a search – reduces the number of documents
NOT	Requires terms to be ABSENT, e.g. Newspaper NOT French Reduces the number of documents but risks eliminating a relevant document
NEAR	Requires terms to be located within a certain number of words Narrows a search
ADJ(ACENT)	Requires terms to be located beside each other Narrows a search

Evaluating Web Sites

The quantity of information on the internet is vast. Anyone can publish material on the web. The information found needs to be evaluated to ensure:

Relevance Questions to ask:

- Is the information relevant to my research?
- Is the language suitable?
- Does it cover the topic adequately?
- Is the balance of text and illustration appropriate?
- Who is the intended audience of the website?
- If adverts or cartoons are used, are these appropriate?
- Is the information more easily available elsewhere?

Authority Questions to ask:

- Who is the author?
- Does the author belong to a recognised organisation?
- What evidence is there of the author's education/relevant experience/ job title/ function?
- Is there contact information (email, telephone number, postal address)?
- Is there sponsorship from a recognised organisation?
- Can this be checked?
- Has the information been reviewed by a third party?
- Can this be checked?

Accuracy Questions to ask:

- When was the page created?
- Is the information up-to-date?
- When was the last update?
- Are the links current?
- Is the information correct?
- What sources have been used?
- Can you verify any of the information?
- Is the information biased?
- Is there an attempt to persuade/sell?
- Has it been well written?
- Is the spelling correct?
- Is there proper use of grammar?
- Is it written in a reasoned tone?
- Does it present a balance argument?

Evaluation criteria checklist:

Name of website: _____

URL: _____

Evaluation Question Comment

- Is the language use appropriate?
- How up to date and reliable is the information?
- Who is the author, and what are their credentials?
- Does the information come from a trustworthy, reputable source?
- How unbiased, objective and reasonable is the information?
- Is there a good balance of text and illustration, and with little advertising?
- What are the copyright restrictions?
- Is the information available elsewhere, in print or electronic format?
- Could I have found the same or better in a general encyclopedia?