

Veritas Academy

Accessing and Utilizing the Internet for Research

Each school year, generally during the first quarter, students shall review the following outline on accessing the internet and utilizing information from the internet for academic writing and research.

This review shall take place in all Logic and Rhetoric level humanities and Rhetoric courses.

One to two hours of instructional time shall be dedicated to this review.

Students being instructed shall have access to a computer device (tablet, desktop, or notebook) during the class.

Internet Basics

Define key terms: device, browser, search engines, websites, software, hardware (monitor, processor, printer, mouse, etc.).

Demonstrate how to access internet and conduct an online search using several search engines (Google, Ask, Yahoo, etc.)

Demonstrate use of local word processing/office software (e.g. MS Office) and cloud based programs (e.g. Google docs)

Discuss online safety: Filter software, caution when searching/surfing, identifying dangerous sites, viruses/anti-virus software, proper passwords, etc.

Online Research Basics

1. Decide if the Topic Is 'Hard Research', 'Soft Research', or Both.

'Hard' and 'soft' research have different expectations of data and proof. You should know the hard or soft nature of your topic to point your search strategy where it will yield the most reliable research results.

A) 'Hard research' describes scientific and objective research, where proven facts, figures, statistics, and measurable evidence are absolutely critical.

B) 'Soft research' describes topics that are more subjective, cultural, and opinion-based.

C) Combined soft and hard research requires the most work, because this hybrid topic broadens your search requirements. Not only do you need to find hard facts and figures, but you will need to debate against very strong opinions to make your case. Politics and international economy topics are the biggest examples of hybrid research.

2. Choose Which Online Authorities Are Suitable for Your Research Topic.

A) Hard research topics require hard facts and academically-respected evidence. An opinion blog will not cut it; you will need to find publications by scholars, experts, and professionals with credentials. The Invisible Web will often be important for hard research. Accordingly, here are possible content areas for your hard research topic:

Academic journals (there are "academic search engines").

Government publications (e.g. Google's 'Uncle Sam' search).

Government authorities (e.g. the NHTSA)

Scientific and medical content, sanctioned by known authorities and peer reviewed (e.g. Scirus.com).

Non-government websites that are NOT influenced by advertising and obvious sponsorship (e.g. Consumer Watch)

Archived news (e.g. Internet Archive)

B) Soft research topics are often about collating the opinions of respected online writers. Many soft research authorities are not academics, but rather writers who have practical experience in their field. Soft research usually means the following sources:

Blogs, including personal opinion blogs and amateur writer blogs (e.g. ConsumerReports, UK politics).

Forums and discussion sites

Consumer product review sites

Commercial sites that are advertising-driven (e.g. About.com)

Tech and computer sites (e.g. Overclock.net).

Wikipedia

3. Use Different Search Engines and Keywords

Firstly, start with broad initial researching at sites like DuckDuckGo, Clusty, Yippy, and Wikipedia. This will give you a broad sense of what categories and related topics are out there, and focus your research.

Secondly, narrow and deepen your searching with sites like Google and Ask.com. Experiment with combinations of 3 to 5 different keywords to fine tune your searches.

Thirdly, go beyond Google, for Invisible Web (Deep Web) searching. Because Invisible Web pages are not spidered by Google, you'll need to be patient and use slower and more specific search engines like Scirus, OAlster, SurfWax, FindArticles.com, Library Spot, InfoPlease.com, and FirstGov.gov.

4. Bookmark and Stockpile Possible Good Content.

While this step is simple, this is the second-slowest part of the whole process: this is where we gather all the possible ingredients into organized piles, which we sift through later. Here is the suggested routine for bookmarking pages:

CTRL-Click the interesting search engine result links. This will spawn a new tab page each time you CTRL-Click. When you have 3 or 4 new tabs, quickly browse them and do an initial assessment on their credibility. Bookmark any tabs you consider credible on first glance. Close these tabs and repeat with the next batch of links. This method, after about 45 minutes, will have yielded you dozens of bookmarks to sift through.

5. Filter and Validate the Content.

Vet and filter which content is legitimate, and which is drivel. If you are doing hard research, this is also the most important step of all, because your resources MUST withstand close examination later.

Carefully consider the author/source, and the date of publication. Is the author an authority with professional credentials, or someone who is peddling their wares and trying to sell you a book? Is the page undated, or unusually old? Does the page have its own domain name (e.g. honda.com, e.g. gov.co.uk), or is it some deep and obscure page.

Be suspicious of personal web pages, and any commercial pages that have a shoddy, amateurish presentation (e.g. spelling errors, grammar errors, poor formatting, cheesy advertising on the side, absurd fonts, blinking emoticons).

Be suspicious of scientific or medical pages that display scientific or medical advertising. Advertising can possibly indicate a conflict of interest or hidden agenda behind the writer's content.

Be suspicious of any ranting, overstating, overly-positive, or overly-negative commentary.

Commercial/consumer websites can be good resources, but be skeptical of every comment you read. Just because 7 people rave that Pet Food X is good for their dogs does not necessarily mean it is good for your dog. Similarly, if 5 people out of 600 complain about a particular vendor, that doesn't mean the vendor is necessarily bad.

Use Google 'link:' feature to see the 'backlinks' for a page. This technique will list incoming hyperlinks from the major websites that recommend the web page of interest. These backlinks will give you an indicator how much respect the author has earned around the Internet. Simply go to google and enter 'link:www.aaaaaa.com (the web page's address)' to see the backlinks listed.

6. Quote and Cite the Content.

Online references must follow the Chicago Manual of Style or Turabian style of bibliography.

(see <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html>).

Students must also be instructed in the Computer Use Policy (School Policy Manual #23.5) and the policy concerning "Use of Personal Electronic Devices, Cell Phones, and Computers (Parent/Student Handbook, page 34)