IES Search Guide

This site is designed to help you find accurate and useful Earth science-related data and support materials on the World Wide Web.

1. Write down key words or phrases that describe what you are seeking on the web. The questions below will help you develop your key words.

- What is your topic?
- What are the key concepts?
- Are there other ways to express your key concepts?
- List synonyms for your key concepts.

2. Choose your search engine. University Libraries of SUNY has created a great guide on "How to Choose a Search Engine". Select a search engine that appears likely to meet your needs.

3. Type your key words into the search engine. Below are some tips on how to fine tune your search.

- Use more key words to get fewer and more relevant records
- Use fewer key words to get more records
- Search for a specific string of words, such as a title or a phrase, by enclosing the words in quotation marks.
- Use + for key words that should be included in your search
- Use - for words that should not be included in your search
- Words such as "and," "and not" and "or" help to tailor your search

4. Once you have a list of web sites you should evaluate the information on those web sites.

- **Who is putting the information out there?** Look for sites maintained by educational institutions, non-profit organizations, or government agencies. How do you know whether the site is from an educational institution or a private company? One way you can tell is by checking the Internet address, or URL. Look at the ending three letters of the Web address. As a general rule:
  - Educational institutions have URLs ending in .edu
  - Government agencies have URLs ending in .gov
  - Non-profit organizations have URLs ending in .org
  - Commercial and private organizations have URLs ending in .com
- **How old is the information?** Age does matter when you are dealing with research. As a general rule, anything more than five years old is probably out of date, unless you are looking for historical information. On the Website look for a "date created" or an "updated" date.
- **Who wrote the information?** Anyone can publish information on the web, so establishing the credibility of the author is important. Look for a link or email address of an author or Webmaster on the Website. Most credible Websites provide this. Cross-check your information with books and articles. Also, "Google" the author to see what other forms of information he or she has provided.
- **What is the motivation or bias of the author?** Look at what is being said. If a product is available for purchase on the Website, is the author trying to sell the product? Is the information coming from a special interest group? Who funded the development of the site? Is there a disclaimer on the Website?

Benbow, Ann E. The SPRY Foundation (2002), Evaluating Health Information on the World Wide Web, pg. 3-13.

Cohen, Laura. "Conducting Research on the Internet," University Libraries, University at Albany, SUNY. 10 May 2005.

http://library.albany.edu/internet/research.html

Monash University, "Research on the Internet," 16 December 2004.

http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/vl/www/wwwprin.htm

State of Victoria Department of Education and Training, "Research on the Net," 4 March 2002.

http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/internet/research.htm