Researching

This chapter does not really cover any testable material; it is more of a case study on researching using electronic sources in the proper manner. Because of this, you are not responsible for knowing this material on a test, but it may come in handy for your paper research. I will just highlight some important items about online research.

1. **Not everything you find online is true.**

   Placing untrue information on the internet is common, because really it’s your fault for believing what you read. The same used to be said about television, and before that radio.

   Is there any way you can verify that the person writing something online is a doctor, like they claim to be? Only if their name appears elsewhere, or if they are a member of a prestigious organization should you believe them. The key here is that you should verify, and verify again if necessary.

   Try to back up the info you find with a couple of different sources, especially if you are unsure about it.

2. **Be aware of the 'freshness' of the information you find.**

   Much like on products you buy in a supermarket, information should have an expiration date. Some items last longer than others. Information on the Roman Empire for the most part has remained the same for many years. Things dealing with science and technology may expire at an almost yearly rate.

   Most web pages have a ‘last modified’ date on them somewhere. It may be near the bottom of the page. If you can’t find the information don’t panic. You can still use it as long as you are sure it is relevant and correct. Try to see if you can determine the date by reading it. Make an educated guess as to when it was last modified, and use this in your citations along with your ‘access date’.

3. **Use reputable sources.**
Word of mouth is a powerful thing. If you mentioned ‘EBay’ to someone 3 years ago they wouldn’t know what you were talking about. Today it is a very popular web site for selling junk.

If the site is an educational site (.edu domain), you are probably safe to use it.

Government and military sites (.mil, .gov domains), for the sake of argument, should be accurate (at least that’s what they want you to think).

Most non-profit (.org domain) and profit organizations should provide accurate information as well. Use your better judgment though.

When taking information from commercial and private sites (.net, .com domains) be cautious. Try to use sites you recognize, or are known to be reputable.

4. **Expand and narrow as needed.**

If you go out searching for information on Bill Gates, there are several ways you can do it. All have pros and cons.

First Try: Open up AOL search, type in ‘Bill Gates’. You would get lots of hits, too many to ever sort through.

Second Try: Change your AOL search to ‘Bill Gates Biography’; it narrows by a nice margin.

Third Try: Use fancy words to trick the search engine – Bill + Gates + Biography, or Bill AND Gates AND Biography. You may see a change, you may not.

Fourth Try: Search for ‘Biography Web Site’. You go to a web site that specializes in Biographies. Then search for ‘Bill Gates’.

Moral – Slow and steady wins the race. Try a bunch of things to get quality info. If you choose the first one all the time, you may be disappointed.

5. **Keep track of addresses (bookmarks) when you can.**

Your browser, no matter if it is Internet Explorer, Netscape, AOL, etc. more than likely allows you to make ‘bookmarks’ (Favorites). Use it to save things. It is worth the two or three clicks.

If you don’t want to do this, copy the addresses into a Word file or something of the like.

6. **Find pictures, audio, movies when necessary.**
Sometimes a movie clip or picture can tell a thousand words, you may want to incorporate these into a paper or presentation. There are search engines that specialize in these searches (Google Media Search, etc.), use them when you need them.

Pictures and movies were made by someone as well as words and thoughts. Be sure to give credit when credit is due. If you can find who the original author is, make sure you quote where YOU found it. This takes the pressure off of you if someone asks.

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