



“Information You Can Trust”

Alverno College Library

When To Use Different Electronic Resources

“Web sources complement library sources; a good researcher uses both!”

INTERNET SEARCH TOOLS

The Main Three:

Search Engines, Subject Guides & Directories, and Metasearch Engines

1. **Search Engines** perform keyword searches and locate websites on various topics. They use electronic ‘spiders’, which constantly ‘crawl’ through millions of websites on the Internet and create large lists of web pages. Search engines typically work best if you choose appropriate keywords and take advantage of their advanced search features. Examples: **Google, Yahoo!, Bing**
2. **Subject Directories and Guides** provide large catalogs of websites covering a multitude of subjects, which have been gathered, reviewed and organized by human indexers. The websites are organized by *subject* or *category*, making them very easy to browse. Examples: **Yahoo!, About, MSN Search**

Academic Subject Directories are generally created by education-related entities and have been compiled by subject experts. Examples: **Librarians’ Internet Index, Infomine, Academic Info**

3. **Metasearch Engines** allow you to construct a single search statement and then perform the search in multiple search engines simultaneously. It's a good idea to read the help screens before you begin in order to understand how the metasearch engine operates. Examples: **Clutsy, SurfWax, Dogpile**

When Should I Use A Search Engine?

- When you have a narrow topic to research
- When you are looking for a specific website (e.g., the State of Wisconsin web page)
- When you want to retrieve a large number of websites on a topic
- When you want to search for particular types of documents, files, in certain languages, etc.
- When you want to take advantage of unique search engine features like relevance ranking, clustering, etc.

When Should I Use A Subject Directory?

- When you have a broad subject area and want to browse through smaller subdivisions
- When you want to retrieve a list of sites relevant to your topic
- When you want to see and evaluate a number of sites on one topic (often recommended by experts)
- When you want to avoid the “false-hits” that turn up on search engines
- When you want to perform a search using the subject directory’s keywords or search for a specific title in order to retrieve relevant sites

When Should I Use a Metasearch Engine?

- When you have finished using one or more search engines that retrieved a low number of "hits" (relevant websites)
- When your topic is fairly obscure (i.e., weaving apprenticeships)
- When you need to do a comprehensive search

LIBRARY ELECTRONIC TOOLS

The **BIG Three**:

Online Catalog, Electronic Databases, Selected Web Links

1. **TOPCAT** (*the online public catalog*) is the tool you use to determine what materials the Alverno Library owns and what the other libraries in the SWITCH Library Consortium own. When you search TOPCAT, you obtain records that contain information on materials in our library. Each record has a call number so you can locate books, videos, etc. on the library's shelves.
2. **Electronic Databases** (*Access to Journal & Newspaper articles online*)
Electronic databases are used to locate **journal or newspaper articles**. They are typically updated daily-to-monthly. *All databases* provide citations to articles; some provide **full-text** articles as well. A citation provides you with the information, e.g., journal title, issue, page number etc. you need to find the article(s) obtained in your search. Because some databases *only* provide citations to articles, you still need to use traditional research methods to locate a journal or newspaper in our library collection. FULL-TEXT means you are able to print or email the complete text of an article.
Examples of electronic databases: **Academic Search Premier, PsychINFO, JSTOR**
3. **Selected Web Links** page – found via the Alverno Library website –
<http://depts.alverno.edu/library/weblinks.html>
This page offers a list of librarian-recommended websites organized by subject. The listing of sites is NOT comprehensive. Instead, it serves as a starting point from which to begin your research on the web.

When Should I Use An Electronic Database?

- Whenever you need to locate *journal or newspaper articles* for a class paper or assignment
- When you want either popular press (magazine and newspaper) articles or scholarly journal articles

The Library's Electronic Databases are located at:

<http://depts.alverno.edu/library/dbsubject.html>

General Tips for Searching the Internet & Electronic Databases

- Jot down good search terms or "keywords" **before** you search
- Use **library databases**, not search engines, to locate journal and newspaper articles
- Use **search engines** to locate "up to the minute" information or "breaking news"
- Search with multiple terms (though not more than three or four) rather than a single word
- Remind yourself from time to time: **Where am I? How did I get here? What am I looking for?**
- Use the **Find** command or **Ctrl + F** to locate a term within a website