

**When searching on the Web, examine the information you find keeping these questions in mind:**

- Who is the author/creator?
- Who publishes or maintains the Web site or blog?
- Is the site well maintained?
- Do I need very current information?
- What are the possibilities that this information is in some way biased?
- Should I use more than one search engine ?
- Did I get the best information, or did I miss some good Web sites?
- Why does my instructor say that I can't use the Web?

**Author**

It is very important to evaluate the credentials of the author of the content of the Web page. Credentials include these concerns: the level of authority, expertise and responsibility the author has for the information, and the knowledge base, skills, or standards employed by the author in gathering and communicating the information. Do other authoritative sites link to the page? Is the site an open blog where anyone can post messages and opinions?

- Signed articles and sites are the best sources. If you can't identify the author, organization or corporation that wrote or hosts the Web page or blog, the information is suspect.
- Use reference books or news databases to help verify the identity of a mysterious author or publisher. There are many excellent online and print company directories available in the [Business Library](#) and at the library. Look for news articles in LexisNexis that critique and tell more about the blog, group or author. Ask a librarian to assist you.

**Validity of Publisher**

The pages of authoritative and well known agencies such as the [Mayo Clinic](#), the [U. S. Census Bureau](#), a Fortune 500 company or [Harvard University](#) often provide more reliable information than the Web pages of a hobbyist or a special interest group such as [Heaven's Gate](#).

- Subscription Web databases that are purchased by UF or other academic institutions are highly reliable. Examples of licensed databases are [JSTOR](#), [ScienceDirect](#) and full-text reference works and journals linked within the [UF Libraries' Catalog](#).
- Give preference to information written by or hosted on sites affiliated with government agencies, trade and professional associations, major universities, well known organizations or groups and finally research centers.

**Is the Web site well maintained?**

- Are there lots of "dead links"? Webmasters maintaining reputable, active sites redirect users to new locations of pages.
- What is the date of revision? Reliable sources list the dates that revisions are made on Web pages and revise often.

**Currency? Is the information current and is it important that the information be current?**

While it is very easy to find current news and information on the free Web and through subscription Web services, most authoritative historical information may not be freely available via the Internet. When researching something of a historical nature, be sure to consult library subscription databases, books, bibliographies and print indexes to journal literature.

- Libraries have extensive back files or issues of journals and magazines that free Web sites typically do not offer.
- The Web is a good place to find the latest discussion and public opinion on an issue, through online papers and blogs.
- [Lexis-Nexis](#) and [Factiva](#) are library subscription services that provide very current articles from newspapers, magazines and wire services, as well as transcripts of television and radio programs.

## Bias/Objectivity

Does the author or publisher have a particular viewpoint that they seek to endorse?

- What are the biases and motivations of the compiler in gathering and publishing the data? Look for the stated purpose of the Web site to determine if there is possibility of bias. If there is no stated purpose, investigate the author or organization hosting the site.
- Information from bloggers, businesses, political or pressure groups, lists devoted to non-academic or research missions, newsgroups and advocacy groups often are biased towards that group's views. For example, conservative political bloggers at [RedState](#) or [The Corner](#) offer different interpretations of events than do liberal bloggers at the [Daily Kos](#) or [Firedoglake](#).

## Search Engines

Search engines vary widely in the amount of Web pages that they cover and searching interface.

- While most search engines try to update their indexes to the Web monthly, search engines lag behind at times. Use more than one search engine to compensate for gaps in coverage.
- Use several search engines for comprehensive searches of the Web (such as [Google](#), [Vivisimo](#), [HotBot](#), [Teoma](#) or [AltaVista](#).)
- Use [Google](#), [AlltheWeb](#), [AltaVista](#) or [MSN Search](#) to search for PDF files and other formats.
- Use metasearch services to search several search engines at once (such as [Vivisimo](#), or [Kartoo](#).)
- Use subject based search engines when possible, such as [MusicSearch.com](#) or [MedHunt](#). [Search Engine Colossus](#) lists search engines that cover specific subject areas.
- Use Web megasites such as [Yahoo](#) or the [WWW Virtual Library](#) that register and/or "catalog" new Web sites by their subject area and content.

## Did I get the best information, or did I miss some good Web sites?

- Try one of the [UF Libraries' Internet Subject Guides](#). Librarians only list the best Web sites on these guides.
- Try one of the subject based megasites such as the [Internet Public Library](#) or the [Librarian's Index to the Internet](#)
- They select the best Web pages and/or sites according to their criteria, and group them by subject.
- Look at reviews of the Web sites. Many periodicals (such as Choice, Internet World, History Today) publish reviews of Web sites as do newspapers. Try searching [Academic Search Premier](#) or [Lexis-Nexis](#) for reviews. [Best Free Reference Web Sites](#) is a site produced by librarians.
- You can't find it all in one Web site or database. If you searched a selective information source such as one of the licensed UF Libraries databases, you miss things in other databases or on the Internet. Try another source.
- Maybe it's not on the Web. Many times the best sources are not available on the Web. There may be a more "traditional" source in the library that provides superior information, such as a book or a CD-ROM.

## Why does my instructor say that I can't use the World Wide Web?

Many instructors and professors tell their students not to use pages from the Web in their projects or papers because of the many issues with finding authoritative and accurate information. Usually they are referring to use of the freely available Web sources such as [Wikipedia](#), [BoingBoing](#) or [Popurls.com](#). They are not eliminating use of the numerous databases of journals, newspapers, books or data purchased by libraries and delivered to readers using the Web. If your instructor says that you can't use the Web, ask a librarian for clarification and advice.

## Questions? Ask at the local library Information/Reference Desk for help in evaluating your Web search!