

# CHOOSE YOUR RESOURCES

3

*A good researcher can effectively choose a variety of appropriate resources to fulfill the purpose of the project.*

- ◆ **How do you select and limit your topic?**
- ◆ **Locating secondary sources**
- ◆ **Evaluating Internet sources**



## How do you choose your resources?

Evaluate information to determine its appropriateness for your topic and your audience.

Take time to evaluate the quality and accuracy of your sources. Be aware that the Internet often includes student web sites and non-scholarly summaries, some of which are humorous in nature. These types of information may not be suitable for academic assignments. Remember that research is a process which cannot be rushed.

**Choose a wide variety of sources.** Remember to check with your teacher if he or she has not already given you guidelines about types of sources (e.g., magazines, on-line books, databases). Your teacher is also an excellent judge of the suitability of Internet sources.

**Definitions of types of sources:** Your teacher may ask you to have a certain number of primary and secondary sources.

Primary source: usually your text or the literary (novel, play, poem) or historical (diary, letter, autobiography) work on which your research is based. Examples: *Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Emily Dickinson poem, scientific data gathered from observation or experiment.

Secondary source: materials written about the subject of your primary source. Examples: *A Survey of American History*, *Essays on Edgar Allan Poe*, a biography of Grace Hopper, published scientific research.

Internet sources may be either primary or secondary sources. Use the above definitions for help.

**Consult your librarian for types of sources available through your school library.**



## Locating Resources

### Library Catalog

To find nonfiction books on a particular topics use Athena, our electronic card catalog on the SMS Network.

#### Tips:

- Look up headings broader than your topic.
- Look for other books by authors of sources already discovered.
- Use keyword searches
- Make a list from your preliminary reading of important terms or people; you may even come across different spellings of names.
- Look on the shelf around useful books to browse for things you didn't find in the catalog

### Electronic Databases

SMS subscribes to several electronic databases that provide access to essays and articles from magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, and academic journals.

#### Tips:

- In order to find more information, look up headings broader than your narrowed topic.
- Follow through on “see also” and other cross-references.
- Use keyword searches.
- Use advanced searching options to limit searches to full-text articles (narrows the search to publications where the entire article in is that database).
- Many databases have a browse option that will let you look at an index of topics or a subject directory – these can help you find other keywords to search and related topics to explore.
- Take advantage of ways databases can help you. Use citation helpers, options to save searches or articles to an account, email articles to yourself...they add features all the time.

### Internet

Using Internet search engines is often a good place to start learning about a topic. Use the Internet with caution, carefully evaluating sources and following instructions from your teacher about using the web for your paper or project.

#### Tips:

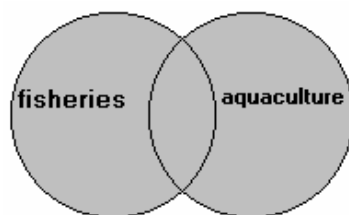
- Try several keyword searches - modify your search terms to find better results.
- Use only the first 2-3 pages of search results.
- Choose one or two search engines you like and stick with them. Don't waste time repeating searches with a lot of different engines.
- If your teacher recommends websites, start there and see if you can follow links to other good sites.
- Bookmark, tag, save websites to favorites or find a system to make sure you can get back to a website you need without recreating your search.

The Boolean Search:

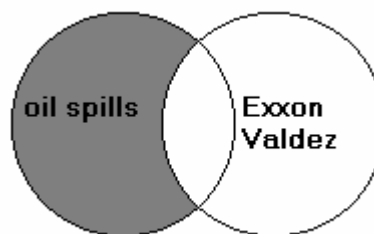
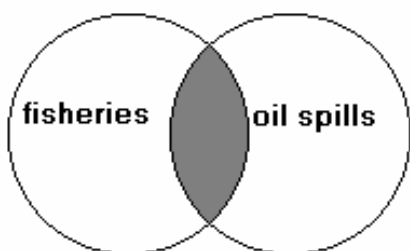
While searching catalogs (e.g., Athena), databases (e.g., EBSCO), or the Internet, you may need to broaden or narrow your search. The Boolean search is the most common way to narrow your search. Named after George Boole (1815-1864) who combined logic and algebra, the "Boolean Phrase" makes it possible to narrow or expand a search and use limiting parameters. Most common operators are AND, NOT, and OR.

Advanced searching = Boolean searching		
And	=	all of these words
"Quotes"	=	exact word or phrase
Or	=	one or more of these words
Not	=	don't show pages that have these words

*Broadening a search:* To broaden a search, use "or." For example, for works on modern fish farming and on traditional fisheries, you might type "fisheries **or** aquaculture" and get 25 entries with either keyword in them. Other examples: "university **or** college," "design **or** graphic arts."



*Narrowing a search:* To narrow a search use "and" or "not" to limit your options. Sometimes too many possibilities make your research difficult. For example, typing "fisheries **and** oil spills" would give only entries that contain both keywords—and far fewer entries if you had typed "or." Similarly, if you typed "oil spills **not** Exxon Valdez," you would get entries on oil spills, but not entries including the *Exxon Valdez* spill. Other examples: "endangered **and** species," "bed and breakfasts **and** California; insecticides **not** ddt, "cowboys **not** dallas."



## Evaluating and Verifying Resources on the Internet

### Guidelines:

Who is the author or institution?

- If the author is a person, does the resource give biographical information?
- If the author is an institution, is there information provided about it?
- Have you seen the author's or institution's name cited in other sources or bibliographies?

How current is the information?

- Is there a date on the Web page that indicates when the page was placed on the Web?
- Is it clear when the page was last updated?
- Is some information obviously out-of-date?
- Does the page creator mention how frequently the material is updated?

Who is the audience?

- Is the Web page intended for the general public, scholars, practitioners, children, etc.? Is this clearly stated?
- Does the Web page meet the demands of its stated audience?

Is the content accurate and objective?

- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional biases?
- Is the content intended to be a brief overview of the information or an in-depth analysis?
- If the information is opinion, is this clearly stated?
- If there is information copied from other sources, is this acknowledged? Are there footnotes, if necessary?

What is the purpose of the information?

- Is the purpose of the information to inform, explain, persuade, market a product, or advocate a cause?
- Is the purpose clearly stated?
- Does the resource fulfill a stated purpose?

Tips:

- Look for the name of the author or institution at the top or bottom of a Web page.
- Go to the home page of that site that hosts the information to find out more about the organization. You may do this by extracting the first part of the URL in the location box of your browser—the part starting with "http://" up to the first slash.  
(For example, you have reached [http://www.sms.org/books/sr\\_list.htm](http://www.sms.org/books/sr_list.htm) and you want to find the name of the publishing body. You could delete the parts of the URL back to the domain section—everything after org/ and press enter. This would give you <http://www.sms.org>, which is the home page for St. Margaret's School. From this page you would be able to find out more information about the school.
- The URL can give clues to the authority of a source. A tilde (~) in the URL sometimes indicates that it is a personal page rather than part of an institutional Web site.
 

.edu	educational (anything from serious research to faculty and student home pages)
.gov	government (usually dependable)
.com	commercial (may be trying to sell a product)
.net	network (may provide services to commercial or individual customers)
.org	organization (non-profit institutions; may be biased)

Remember, if you cannot validate the information, do not use it for research.

**NOTES:**