

WHY USE THE WEB?

Clarification

Technically speaking, subscription databases such as *LexisNexis Academic* and *Wilson Humanities Abstracts*, as well as electronic journals, are “on the Web.” However, Wallace Library’s subscription databases are only available to you on-campus (the service looks at the network address of your computer to see whether you are a valid user). Results from these sources do not turn up in search engine hits, whether you are on- or off-campus.

When I talk about the Web here, then, I mean *the freely accessible World Wide Web*, open to anyone with a browser and a network connection. These are the sites that turn up in search engines like Google and Web directories like Yahoo.

Web Strengths

The Web “does” some kinds of information better than others. Here are some strengths of the Web:

Current/breaking news information

Example: <http://news.google.com>

Question: Which news sources do you trust?

Advocacy information

Example: organization homepages like <http://www.greenpartyus.org/>

May contain reports, statistics to support point of view. Exercise some caution here. Can this information be corroborated elsewhere? What sources are named for these materials?

Information on \$tuff for \$ale

Examples: eBay.com, Amazon.com

Directory-type information (names, addresses, contact info)

Example: <http://www.idealists.org> [Directory of non-profit organizations]

Statistics from a trusted source

Example: American Factfinder from the US Census Bureau, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Historical/Primary Source information from a trusted source

Examples:

- Avalon Project at Yale Law School, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm>
[full text of historical documents such as treaties]
- Library of Congress, American Memory, <http://memory.loc.gov>
Wonderful multimedia collections of primary source materials related to American history.

Government information

Governments, particularly the US Government & European Union, put lots of info online. The range of topics is wide and is worth considering not only for politics, but for social issues, educational material, etc.

Official Gateway to US Government Information: <http://www.firstgov.gov>

Popular Culture information

Example: <http://www.christinaaguilera.com/>

Web Weaknesses

You will find much less of these kinds of information:

- *Scholarly articles*
- *Scholarly books*
- *Non-US-oriented information*
- *In-depth information, rich historical overviews*

Warning: *Even the best Web sites can occasionally link to so-so sites. Use your judgment, always.*

Good Academically-Oriented Web Gateways

The gateways below are great places to look for richer, more reliable information on the Web.

Librarians' Index to the Internet, Lii.org

<http://www.lii.org>

Selected and evaluated by Californian librarians as reliable and useful guides for public libraries. Search or browse, Yahoo-style.

INFOMINE

<http://infomine.ucr.edu/>

Giant directory of scholarly Internet sources in all subjects. Spearheaded by the libraries at the U. of California. Use *Advanced Search* and select "Free Resources" from the *Access* pulldown menu to avoid UC-only subscription databases.

Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG)

<http://www.sosig.ac.uk/>

From the Institute for Learning and Research Technology at the University of Bristol, UK. Searchable. SOSIG (say "sausage") is well worth knowing about for all kinds of social science topics.

Still not sure whether the Web is a suitable source for your project?

Ask your professor, or a Reference Librarian!