

Internet Search

Searching Online

The Internet may have answers to many of your basic questions about the issue, problem, or policy you are working on. The trick is finding reliable answers.

As you search for answers to your general questions, note the people, departments, etc., to contact as your questions become more specific.

Use keywords on search engines. If you are searching about the problem of graffiti, use “graffiti” as a keyword. If you get too many results, try adding more keywords one at a time (e.g., “problem,” “causes of,” “effects,” “solutions”). You can even add your location, e.g., “Chicago,” as a keyword.



Use a web directory. You can search the directory using keywords. Searching for “graffiti” turns up “graffiti” as a main category and offers several subcategories such as “anti-graffiti.”

Search a news search engine for recent news articles. Once again, use keywords and narrow your search with additional keywords and locations.

Find government sites. The U.S. Congress, your state legislature, or a local government agency may have held hearings on the problem. Find your city’s and county’s web sites. Search for departments that may be working on the problem.

Evaluating Websites

The Internet is filled with great information, but also with junk. You have to sort the good from the bad. As you conduct your search, watch out for:

Who sponsors the web site? In general, the most reliable sites are from the government, the mainstream media, colleges, and universities. Who created the web page? What are their qualifications?

Does the site contain any obvious errors—names, dates, historical facts?

Does the site advocate a particular position? Try to detect bias. If a controversial issue is presented, does the site provide other points of view or counter-arguments?

Does the site have links to other sites? What are their nature and quality? Do the links advocate the same view presented on the site?

Is the information accurate? Use at least two additional sources (books, periodicals, or other web sites).