

Finding Information Online

Searching the internet for information will seem an easy and familiar option, but if the information you require can be provided by our resources, you are better off using them; they are likely to be more credible with less irrelevant results to sift through. Check our Resource Guide if you are unsure of the best place to find the information you need.

Often it is not an either/or choice and you will need to make strategic use of freely available online resources and those provided by the library. For example, using Wikipedia is often, with justification, frowned upon by tutors, but it can still be a valuable resource to find relevant terminology and references that you can then search for in the resources provided by the library.

Examples of information you may need to find online rather than through the library's resources could include:

- **Information from government departments:** For example The Ministry of Education or The Ministry of Health.
- **Legislation:** For example, legislation.govt.nz or the [Māori Land Legislation database](#). The library also has resources that may be relevant. For example the CCH database for legal resources, the Brookers' law book series, as well as secondary literature dealing with various aspects of legislation.
- **Company Information:** Be aware that companies are going to portray themselves in a positive light, so be clear in your objective in using their websites. You may also find relevant information in the Tablebase database. Wellington City Libraries also has some valuable information on finding company information.
- **Social media/blogs/forums:** While not a good source for scholarly information, you may have research where you need to gauge public opinion, study methods of modern communication, or use it as a means to find and follow links through to credible websites. Be clear in your purpose and that your use of social media fits appropriately.
- **Images:** The internet is a great source for images if you need them in your assignments. Refer to our [guide](#) to ensure that you reference them correctly.
 - If the website you have taken an image from is difficult to reference, you can see if the image is available elsewhere by doing a reverse image search. Hold down S and then right click on your mouse (this will not work in all browsers).
 - Using Microsoft Clipart exempts you from the need to reference.
- You can also find numerous reference resources online. The library has provided a list of some key ones [here](#).
- Check your [Subject Guide](#) under the *websites* tab for relevant online resources or speak to a librarian.

Searching the internet

- **Be strategic** with your searches:
 - **Use appropriate keywords and phrases** related to your topic in order to keep your search focused and avoid wasting time sifting through irrelevant results.
 - **Use the most appropriate web resource** to find the information you require. For example, if you require crime statistics, you may need to search The Ministry of Justice or Corrections websites rather than (or as well as) a more general search.
- Ways to **improve your search**
 - Enclose phrases in speech marks, e.g. “cultural property”
 - Think of synonyms and use OR to add them to your search, e.g. teenagers OR adolescents.
 - Make use of the advanced search option if the search engine you are using has one.
 - Google also has a number of [operators](#) you can use. Other search engines are likely to use them, as well.
- You may want to try search engines other than Google and compare the different results.
 - If you normally use Google then your results could be affected by what Pariser (2011) refers to as the [filter bubble](#). This can cause the search results to be tailored based on your past usage of Google and may result in you missing out on vital resources.
 - Try duckduckgo.com if you want a search engine that does not collect your user data.
 - You can find a list of search engines categorised by topic and information type on Wikipedia.

Evaluating your results

As anyone can publish online, there is a greater need to be critical and selective when searching the internet as opposed to using library resources.

- In addition to the below, you can also read our [guide to evaluating websites](#).
- Applying the [CRAAP test](#) is an effective way to evaluate web resources; namely the resource’s **Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose**. These are noted below.
- Check when the information was published, i.e. its **currency**. Ensure that it is appropriate for your need. Do you require the most recent information or will something older suffice?
- Search results normally include brief excerpts from the pages. These should give you an idea of the results’ **relevance**. If they are not on topic you will need to look at the search terms you are using.
- If the results are too broad in scope or there are too many, you can:
 - Use or add more specific keywords
 - Exclude irrelevant results using the minus sign (this may not work in every search engine). For example, hurricanes –rugby will exclude any results about the Hurricanes rugby team.
- Who is making the information available? Are they qualified, knowledgeable, and have some measure of **authority** on the subject?

- Look for an about us link or google the author's name.
- Poor quality information is rife online. Try and ascertain the **accuracy** of the resources you find.
 - Does the information ring true with your knowledge of the subject? Do they provide references to back up their claims?
 - If you find interesting information/ideas online that you would like to draw on but are uncertain how accurate the resource is, try corroborating it with resources available through the library that you can use to follow up on the ideas.
- Be aware of the domain types being used. For example, .govt for government websites, .edu or .ac for academic websites, and .com or .co.nz for commercial websites (lists of the different types are readily available online).
 - However, domain types are no guarantee of a website's **purpose** and you should always try to ascertain what they hope to achieve. Are they trying to inform people, push a political agenda, or sell a product?
 - You can restrict your searches to specific domains (or websites) in some search engines by using **site:.** For example, "Treaty of Waitangi" site:.govt.nz will only return results from New Zealand government websites.
 - The site operator is also useful for excluding certain sites when used with a minus sign. For example, nursing -site:.ac.nz would exclude New Zealand educational institutions that are offering nursing programmes.

Referencing

You can find out how to reference a website by referring to our [online guide](#). Our [APA Referencing Examples](#) guide will show you how to reference other online sources such as YouTube videos or blog entries.

At times, you may find it difficult to ascertain information needed to create a reference, such as the author or publication date. We have examples in the above mentioned guide on how to create a reference regardless. However, if a resource is missing such information, you should seriously question its credibility and whether another resource might be more appropriate.

References

Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the internet is hiding from you*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.