

How to Do Research

Evaluating a Web Site

The Web is a wonderful resource but it is important to remember that anyone can put anything on the Internet. Just because it is on the Internet does not mean the information is reliable or true. Before you use an online source in your project, you should evaluate its content. Do this by asking the following questions.

What is the URL?

Look at the URLs (uniform resource locators or web addresses) for the web sites you found. These letters indicated the domain and tell you something about the entity that produced the website as follows:

- .com = commercial site
- .net = Internet service provider
- .edu = educational institution
- .gov = United States government
- .org = professional or non-profit organization or association

-Is the information current?

Try not to use undated information. It could be outdated and irrelevant. Be sure to determine when the site was last updated, usually found at the bottom of the web page.

-Who wrote the page?

Look for the name of the author or at least the name of the organization, institution, or agency. This information is sometimes found under links that say "About us."

-Is the information thoroughly researched and accurate?

Look for a link called "links," "additional sites," or "related links." These kinds of references usually indicate that the author has used other sources in compiling the web page or that there are related documents that support the work. It is usually a bad sign if the links do not work. Sometimes web sites pad their "bibliographies" with fake or irrelevant web sites.

-Is the author credible?

Does the author provide contact information? Look for something more than just an e-mail address. Try putting the author's name in Google to see if he/she is an authority on your subject. Try to determine if the author has strong, relevant credentials.

-Is the site objective?

If the site belongs to an advocacy group the purpose of the site may be to persuade the reader. Some sites do not provide objective information.

Documenting Your Sources

Your paper must avoid plagiarism, i.e. you cannot take anyone else's words or ideas and present them as your own. You can avoid doing this by using quotation marks, paraphrasing or summarizing what a person has to say and citing your source. It is not necessary to provide citations for "common knowledge," which is information that can be found in a high school textbook or three general sources, but any other data or ideas that are not your own need to be given a citation. Therefore, as you do research you will need to keep a detailed record of all your

sources. This includes the author's full name, the full title, and publication information, which varies for each type of source. For a print article, publication information includes the name of the publication, the date it was published, and the volume and page numbers. For an Internet source it usually includes the date it was published, the date you accessed the site and the complete Internet address (URL).

For this class we will use the American Psychological Association Style (APA) for **in text citations** and **references**, the list of sources at the end of the paper. This handout provides a brief overview. Consult references or talk to me if you need help.

Under the APA system **citations in the text of your paper use the author and date in parentheses**. The author's last name and the year of publication for the source should appear in the text, and a complete reference is given in the reference list at the end of the paper. The text citation is meant to lead the reader to the **complete citation in the References section** at the end of your paper. If you use a direct quote with quotations marks you must include the page numbers as well.

The reference list appears at the end of your paper and is arranged alphabetically by the author's last name or, if the source is anonymous, by the first significant word in the title. Initials are used for author's first and middle names and only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized in titles. The second line of each entry is indented.

Examples of Citations in Text

General Notes:

- Use the author's last name and date in parentheses instead of footnotes in the text
- Use in text citations for all direct quotes and references to the ideas of others
- Include page number(s) when referencing a direct quote or referring to a specific portion of text.
- Always capitalize proper nouns, including author names
- If a work has two authors, cite both names every time the reference appears in your text. Join the authors' names with the word and.
- If a work has three, four, or five authors, cite all of the authors the first time you refer to the work in your text. The next time you refer to the work, shorten the citation to the last name of the first author plus the words et al.
- If a work has six authors (or more), cite only the last name of the first author plus the words et al.
- When citing a web article, try to give the name of the web article in your text. Alternatively, if there is no name, refer back to the website and give the hosting group's name. Then, people can look in your bibliography for more information.

Articles

In a recent study of student performance (Jones, 1998), it was reported....

Due to the high levels of nitrogen released from the surrounding watershed, eutrophication has increased in the river (Stewart & Petty, 2002).

Direct Quote from an Article: Include the Page Number

"Students performed at a higher level after inquiry-based teaching methods were used" (Jones, 1998, p 123).

Paraphrasing the Source

According to Jones (1998), students learn better when teachers use specific techniques, such as inquiry-based strategies.

Government Documents

About 10 percent of the homes in the United States have a potential radon problem (Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Air and Radiation Programs, 2005)

If the source is electronic and does not have page numbers, use paragraph numbers, if available:

As Myers (2000, para. 5) aptly phrases it, "positive emotions are both an end - better to live fulfilled, with joy [and other positive emotions] - and a means to a more caring and healthy society."

If you are citing an entire website and not a specific part of the site, reference the website in the text:

Douglass (<http://douglass.speech.nwu.edu/>) is a well organized site for locating American speeches.

Or, refer to the name of the website:

Douglas is a well organized site for locating American speeches (Douglas Speech Writing, 2000).

How To Create Your Reference List

General Notes:

- Arrange the items on your reference list **alphabetically** by **author's last name**.
- If no author is given, start with the title and then the date.
- The general form for periodicals is: Author, A.A., Author, B.B. & Author C.C. (Year). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*, xx, xxx-xxx.
- The general format for **web pages** is Author, A.A. (Year). *Title of work*. Retrieved month day, year, from URL of web page.
- Indent the second and following lines one half inch.
- Use only the initials of the authors' first (and middle) names.
- If you cannot produce *italics*, then use underlining instead.
- **Magazine articles**: include the month (and day) as shown under newspapers.
- **Websites**: if the date the page was created is not given, use (**n.d.**).
- For documents and situations not listed here, see the printed version of the manual.

Journal or Magazine Article

Dubeck, L. (1990). Science fiction aids science teaching. *Physics Teacher*, 28, 316-318.

Newspaper Article

Di Rado, A. (1995, March 15). Trekking through college: Classes explore modern society using the world of Star Trek. *Los Angeles Times*, p. A3.

Book Article or Chapter

James, N. E. (1988). Two sides of paradise: The Eden myth according to Kirk and Spock. In D. Palumbo (Ed.), *Spectrum of the fantastic* (pp. 219-223). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Article from an Internet Database

Mershon, D. H. (1998, November-December). Star Trek on the brain: Alien minds, human minds. *American Scientist*, 86, 585. Retrieved July 29, 1999, from Expanded Academic ASAP database.

Website

Lynch, T. (1996). *DS9 trials and tribulations review*. Retrieved October 8, 1997, from Psi Phi: Bradley's Science Fiction Club Web site: <http://www.bradley.edu/campusorg/psiphi/DS9/ep/503r.html>

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- Delaney, R. (2003). *APA citation style*. Retrieved February 21, 2006, from Long Island University Website: <http://www.liu.edu/csis/cwp/library/workshop/citapa.htm>
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- Starting your research*. (n.d.) Retrieved January 29, 2004, from Hudson Valley Community College, Online Learning Assistance Center: http://academ.hvcc.edu/~lac/php/academic/writing/workshops/research_paper/starting_research.php