

Subject guide: Beyond Google: Using Many Sources for Research

Information cycles: this 7-minute video shows how information cycles through time, and how different sources become relevant at different times in the cycle.

http://extranet.libraries.psu.edu/content/dam/psul/up/lls/audiovideo/infocycle_2008.swf

When is it best to use the Internet? A scholarly book? A subject directory? This video helps you decide what type of sources to use for a specific topic.

Know when to use each type of resource:

- when your topic is **very** current: newspapers, print or online, online sources
- when your topic is **recent**: add weekly magazines and journals to above.
- When your topic is at least a **year** old: add books and academic journals.
- When you need a **quick fact**: search engine, reference book (print or online).
- When you need a good quality **article**: Cuesta database or some online.
- When you need **authoritative web sites** you can trust: academic subject directory (see links to these on Cuesta library channel).
- When you need an **overview** or complete picture of a topic: book, online book, encyclopedia (either print or online). Some subjects have encyclopedias just on their subject.

Let's take the topic of **gun control** as an example of the differences between using the first things that pop up when you use Google, and how to refine your search and get better results.

Start with Google: put the term **gun control** in the search box and hit search. Most of the sites on the results page don't tell you who is responsible for them, or what is in them. Many of them are by interest groups, not unbiased researchers.

Next, just add .edu to your gun control entry (**gun control .edu**). Now you get a few educational sites as well as the web pages of interest groups.

Take a look at <http://library.sau.edu/bestinfo/Default.htm> . This is a library page with links to selected and evaluated web pages. You know who authored it. It is a good resource for finding information on your topic. It covers primary resources as well.

When using a web page, ask yourself:

1. Does the page show clear author information and how to contact them?

2. Does the date on the page show that it is current?
3. Are the links from respected sources in government and education?

Cuesta's library has resources that have already been evaluated, and you can use them without worrying about the quality of the information.

From any remote location, go to your myCuesta or library home page, choose the *Resources* tab, and start looking for **gun control**.

- *eLibrary* - type in **gun control** in the search box. The list you get includes several books with pro/con arguments on your topic.
- Choose EBSCO *eBooks* (under the search box) and do the same search. Lots of books there!
- *SIRS* – under *Databases* choose *SIRS* and scroll down the topic list to **gun control**. There are full-text articles, a pro/con area, and a research guide.
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So you can check out books from the Cuesta library when on campus, and do research using myCuesta's library channel or the library home page when you are off-campus.

Other online research aids:

Academic subject directories different from commercial directories

Academic subject directories are collections of databases and informational sites, arranged by subject, and put together by librarians or other specialists. They find and list recommended academically-oriented pages on the Web. Similar to Google and Yahoo's directories, but the links are evaluated and annotated for easy researching.

This really is a time-saver.

<http://www.academicinfo.net/>

<http://www.digital-librarian.com/> has a Best of the Web approach

<http://www.ipl.org>

Notice that some of the web sites are the same ones you found on Google. The difference is that here they are annotated, which means that a specialist is describing the content of the site so that you know what is in it before you enter.

Examples of subject-specific databases – When using a search engine, you can often find a good site by typing in your subject (i.e. sailing) and adding the term 'directory' or 'database'

Below are some subject-specific databases:

- ☐ [Educator's Reference Desk](#) (educational information)
- ☐ [Internet Movie Database](#) (movies)
- ☐ [Jumbo Software](#) (computer software)
- ☐ [Kelley Blue Book](#) (car values)
- ☐ [Monster Board](#) (jobs)
- ☐ [Motley Fool](#) (personal investment)
- ☐ [MySimon](#) (comparison shopping)
- ☐ [Roller Coaster Database](#) (roller coasters)

- [Voice of the Shuttle](#) (humanities research)
- [WebMD](#) (health information)

Differences between search engines, databases and subject directories

Databases (like *EBSCOhost* and *SIRS*)

- Purchased by the library for use by students and faculty. Not available to the public.
- Content is reviewed and recommended by librarians.
- Information is organized by subject and keyword access.
- Information is stable.
- Databases are updated regularly. Out-of-date information is deleted.
- Smaller number of results than from search engines.

Search Engines (huge databases)

- Free to anyone from any computer.
- Run by software programs that search the Web automatically.
- Good for checking quick facts or finding products.
- There are no standards with regard to evaluating the content.
- Information is not well-organized.
- Information is not stable; locations and content continually change.
- No one removes dead links or out-of-date information.
- Very large number of results, many of them off-topic.

Subject Directories

- Built by people, not software programs
- evaluated (usually by academics in a field)
- exclusive, not everything on a subject is listed
- fewer results, but more focused
- academic subject directories are often annotated

Some tutorials on internet searching and how to do research:

<http://www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/pages/bones/bones.shtml> the original Bare Bones tutorial.

<http://libraries.stjohns.edu/ilt> tutorial on research start to finish

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/FindInfo.html> UC Berkeley

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-GQtGDEp38&feature=channel> a 12-part video series on how to do research, from a community college librarian.

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