Effective Use of the Internet as a Research Tool

Students at all levels increasingly rely on the Internet as a research tool. The Internet provides ready information any time of the day or night and allows students access to a wide range of sources. However, researching on the Internet can present a variety of challenges, ranging from finding information to assessing the validity of that information. Muriel Harris, editor of *The Purdue University Online Writing Lab*, describes some of the limitations of the World Wide Web as a research tool:

The World Wide Web is a superb resource, but it doesn’t contain all the information that you can find in libraries. Don’t expect to limit your search to what’s on the Internet, and don’t expect search engines to find some very recent information or to find everything that is on the Web. After you try several engines, you will see that you get different results from different sites. Also, remember that some information appears and disappears from Web sites.

While finding sources presents one set of challenges, assessing the validity of the information can present another set of challenges. In the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Joseph Gibaldi states, “Whereas the print publications that researchers depend on are generally issued by reputable publishers [...] relatively few electronic publications have comparable authority” (26). Leigh Ryan agrees and describes the Web as a sort of “vanity press” on which nearly anyone can publish; information goes largely unfiltered and it is important that students know “criteria for evaluating” what is found online (58).


Harris, Muriel, ed. The Purdue University Online Writing Lab. Purdue University Writing Lab, School of Liberal Arts, Purdue University. 1999. Web. 28 Feb. 2009. A Web Site


