

TWO WAYS TO FIND INFORMATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

1. Subject Directories
2. Search Engines

Subject Directories

Subject directories are good for students who need a quality website and are at the beginning of their research.¹ A subject directory offers you categories of websites to choose from. Progressively clicking through category lists will narrow your search. Keyword searching is also available. The advantage of using subject directories is that you get fewer but better quality sites, and the categories provide a context for understanding an unfamiliar website.

Here are two general subject directories to try and one for environmental studies:

<http://dmoz.org>

The Open Directory Project, nicknamed Dmoz, is staffed by volunteer editors. Each editor works to maintain an annotated list of recommended sites.

<http://lii.org>

Librarians' Internet Index is the name of this subject directory. Each recommended site has a small magnifying glass next to it. Click on it for information about the site (last update, topics covered, the person recommending the site). Another link allows you to give feedback to LII.

<http://www.envirolink.org>

The EnviroLink network is an example of a specialized subject directory.

Search Engines

Search engines are good to use when you have a more focused idea of what you hope to find. Perhaps you have already begun your research. Search engines offer sophisticated keyword searching techniques, but you may also do basic searches². Generally, you are searching in many, many more places than if you use a subject directory, but you will have to determine quality for yourself. Some search engines offer their own subject directory feature at their site. Get to know one search engine well, and you will have a powerful search tool for all future research. Here are a few search engines to try:

<http://av.com>

One of the largest databases, Altavista, is a very versatile search engine. It features structured searching, use of wildcards for truncation and substitution, and is case sensitive when you enclose your search term in quotations. An advanced search screen allows Boolean searches, date searches, and the choice of searching one site or host exclusively.

<http://www.google.com>

Google offers you a clutter-free screen and an easy search experience while delivering quality results. Google assumes you want every search term you enter in the search box.

<http://www.ixquick.com>

A “meta” search engine searches a group of search engines all at once.

1. A quality Web site means it will be credible, current, comprehensive, and objective. See the library handout, Evaluating and Documenting Information Found on the Internet, for a better understanding of quality.
2. The library offers a user guide for the Altavista search engine.

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