

16.3.5: Researching on the Internet

The great advantage of the Internet is it is a fast and convenient way to get information on almost anything. It has revolutionized how all academics conduct research and practice writing. However, while the Internet is a tremendous research resource, **you are still more likely to find detailed, accurate, and more credible information in the library than on the Web.** Books and journals are increasingly becoming available online, but most are still only available in libraries. This is particularly true of academic publications. You also have a much better chance of finding credible and accurate information in the library than on the Internet.

Hyperlink: See the sections “The Internet: The Researcher’s Wild Card” and “Evaluating the quality and credibility of your research” in Chapter One, “Thinking Critically About Research.”

It is easy to imagine a time when most academic journals and even academic books will be available only electronically. But for the time-being, you should view the library and the Internet as tools that work together and that play off of each other in the process of research. Library research will give you ideas for searches to conduct on the Internet, and Internet research will often lead you back to the more traditional print materials housed in your library.

Email

Electronic mail (“email”) is the basic tool that allows you to send messages to other people who have access to the Internet, regardless of where they physically might be. Email is extremely popular because it’s easy, quick, and cheap—free, as long as you aren’t paying for Internet access. Most email programs allow you to attach other documents like word processed documents, photos, or clips of music to your messages as well.

For the purposes of research writing, email can be a useful tool in several different ways.

You can use email to communicate with your teacher and classmates about your research projects—asking questions, exchanging drafts of essays, and so forth. Many teachers use email to provide comments and feedback on student work, to facilitate peer review and collaboration, or to make announcements.

Hyperlink: See Chapter Four, “How to Collaborate and Write With Others.”

Depending on the subject of your research project, you can use email to conduct interviews or surveys. Of course, the credibility of an email interview (like more traditional phone or “face to face” interviews) is based entirely on the credibility of whom you interview and the extent to which you can trust that the person you think you are communicating with via email really is that person. But since email is a format that has international reach and is convenient to use, you may find experts who would be unlikely to commit to a phone or “face to face” interview who might be willing to answer a few questions via email.

You can join an electronic mailing list, or listserv, to learn more about your topic and to post questions and observations. With the use of various email software, an emailing list works by sending email messages to a group of people known as “subscribers.” Email lists are usually organized around a certain topic or issue of interest: movies, writing, biology, politics, or current events. Before posting a question or quoting messages from the mailing list, be sure to review that lists’ guidelines for posting.

Many different sorts of groups and organizations maintain mailing lists that you will be able to find most easily by finding Web-based information about that group through a Web search.

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