

WEB LITERACY

High school is full of research projects. Your teen may use the computer for games and chatting with friends, but does she know how to do research on the Internet? Share these tools and tips to help her learn where to search, what to look for, and how to recognize information that is accurate and relevant.

SEARCH ENGINES

Different kinds of search engines will give your child different results. Encourage him to try a variety.

GENERAL SEARCH ENGINES

Does your teen have a favorite search engine? If he always goes straight to Google (www.google.com) or Yahoo (www.yahoo.com), suggest that he try a few other engines to see if he finds one he likes better. Quintura (www.quintura.com), for instance, is a “visual” engine: in addition to a straightforward list, it gives a “cloud” of related words that shift and change as your child moves his mouse over them. He may also want to try Ask (www.ask.com), Cuil (cuil.com), MSN Live Search (www.live.com), and AltaVista (www.altavista.com).

SPECIALTY ENGINES

Some search engines focus on a particular topic. To find one of these, your teen can type his subject and “search engine” into a regular engine. For instance, “history search engine” will give him www.historybuff.com. He can also visit www.searchenginefinder.com, a directory of subject-specific engines.

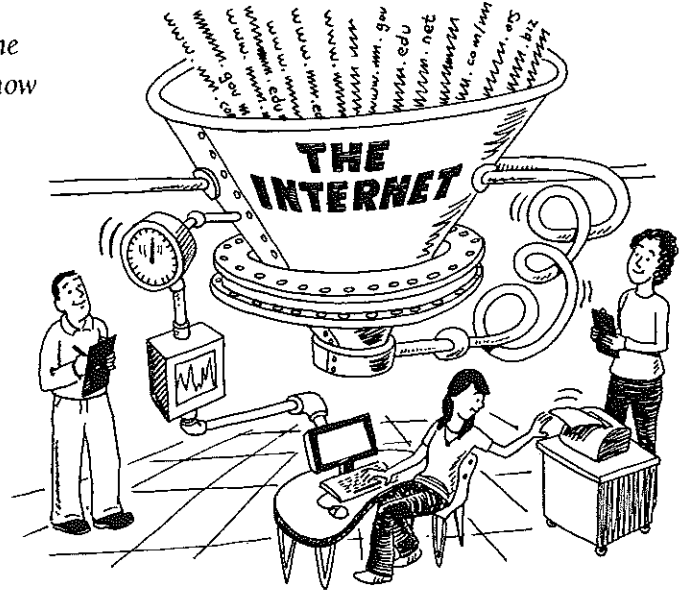
CUSTOM ENGINES

By creating his very own search engine at www.google.com/coop/cse, your child can search for facts within a list of Web pages he has chosen. He'll need to

register, pick a title for his engine, and list URLs that he wants to include. This is a good way to keep track of his sources and organize his research.

METASEARCH ENGINES

Your high schooler may be surprised to learn that an engine doesn't search the entire Internet. Luckily, he can search several engines at once with a single click in a metasearch engine. You might suggest PolyMeta (www.polymeta.com), Zuula (www.zuula.com), Info (www.info.com), or MetaCrawler (www.metacrawler.com).



SEARCH STRATEGIES

If your teen uses only the first few links that appear in a search, she may miss out on other great sites. Encourage her to dig deeper with these tips:

- List questions. What exactly does your teen want to know about her topic? Suggest that she come up with specific questions. *Examples:* “Where are coral reefs located?” “Why do we need coral reefs?” “How many coral reefs are there in the United States?” Then, she can type those questions into a search engine.
- Let a search engine automatically narrow a topic. For instance, typing “coral reefs” into Yahoo will give your child a drop-down box with subtopics like “importance of coral reefs,” “types of coral reefs,” and “destruction of coral reefs.” Other engines, like Ask and Cuil, offer a sidebar with related categories, subtopics, or search terms. Your teenager can keep narrowing down her search until she finds exactly what she's looking for.

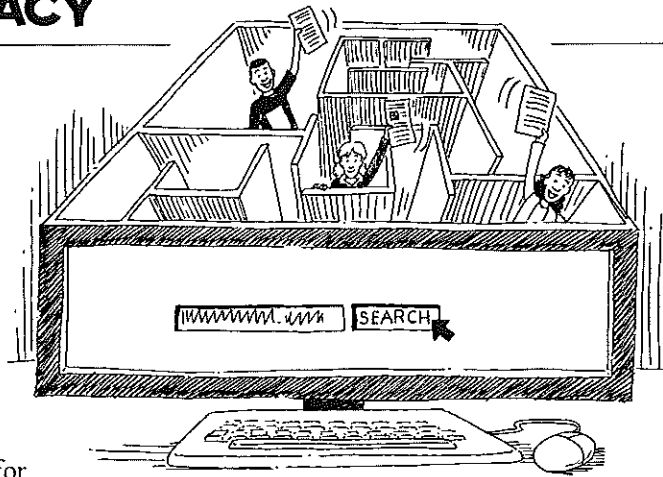
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Safety Note: Be sure your child practices safe Internet surfing. Remind him never to give out personal information that could identify him, such as his last name, address, phone number, or school. You can use the parental controls that come with your browser to help ensure safe surfing, and review each site to determine its appropriateness for your child.

■ Explore other search features. For example, most engines have an “advanced search” or “options” link that will let your teen request sites from a particular country or source (news story, journal article, blog). She can also specify sites that do not include particular words. If she’s searching for “Madagascar coral reefs” and wants sites only about the country and not about a movie, she would type “Madagascar coral reefs –movie” (attach a minus sign to the word you want left out).

■ Many teens begin their research on Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com). It’s a collaborative Web site, or “wiki,” that is written and edited by users. Since anyone in the world can add to Wikipedia, remind your youngster to always check the facts she finds there. She can also use the references and links at the bottom of each Wikipedia entry to do more research.

■ If your teen isn’t sure what her topic will be, a Web directory might be a smart place to start. This is a collection of sites organized into categories. For example, the Internet Public Library (www.ipl.org) has headings such as “Arts & Humanities” and “Law & Government.” Other directories include <http://lii.org>, www.awesomelibrary.org, and www.dmoz.org.



CITING INTERNET SOURCES

Online information should be treated just like material in books. Remind your teen that it is plagiarism to copy word-for-word. Also, she must list sources for information that’s not common knowledge (example: Neil Armstrong was the first person to walk on the moon). She should ask her teacher how he wants Web pages to be cited.

EVALUATING INFORMATION

The Internet contains so much information that it can be difficult to know which sites are reliable. These tips can help:

■ Look at the URL. Educational organizations (.edu) and government agencies (.gov) are usually reliable Web sources. Commercial Web sites (.com), nonprofit organizations (.org), and small business sites (.biz) can also have legitimate information, but your teen will need to evaluate them more carefully. He can search just for URLs ending in .gov or .edu by using an engine’s “advanced search” feature. Or he can add “site:.edu” (no space between the colon and the period) before the search terms. For instance, typing “site:.edu health” will pull up health sites published by schools.

■ Learn about the person or organization behind a Web site. A link at the bottom of the page may give credentials (books a person has published, organizations a group is affiliated with). Urge your teenager to avoid “sponsored links” on search engines. These paid advertisements usually appear in a shaded box at the top of the page or in their own column.



■ Check the date. Scan the page to find out when it was last updated. There may be a dateline at the top of an article or a copyright date at the bottom of the site.

Tip: Remind your teen to double-check all information. He should always verify facts by looking them up on more than one site.

ORGANIZING ONLINE INFORMATION

BOOKMARKING. Your child can use his browser’s bookmark or “favorites” feature to save the address of each Web site he uses for an assignment. He’ll want to keep all his bookmarked sites in one computer folder with the name of his project. He can even create a shortcut so that this folder is accessible from his computer’s desktop. Another option is to save his URLs online at a social bookmarking site such as www.diigo.com or <http://delicious.com>.



These allow him to access his links from any computer by signing into his free account. He can also share great sites with friends.

NOTE TAKING. If your teen is already on the computer doing research, suggest that she save time by taking notes in a word processing document. She should be careful not to cut and paste information from a Web site into her project, unless she’s quoting something directly. Instead, she should read each section and then summarize important points in her own words.

High School Years