

Using Internet Resources

Today's students need to learn how to find up-to-date information on a wide range of topics. The Internet has greatly expanded the reference and research materials available to students, with such online resources as maps and government publications; electronic magazines; Web sites of museums, libraries, schools, and other nonprofit organizations; and many more types of information in various media. Students can also use the World Wide Web to locate photographs, movies, graphics, sounds, and other media to add to their reports, multimedia presentations, or Web sites.

Internet resources pose special challenges for students and teachers. Student need to learn how to verify the accuracy and responsibility of the resources themselves. As a teacher, you will want to introduce students to the citation skills (supplying footnotes, bibliographies, and so on) that you would like them to practice. Teachers may also want to identify responsible research practices (quoting the work of others, citing the sources of quotations, analyzing or adding to quotations, and so on) and practices that are not acceptable in research, such as unattributed copying. Teachers can also review with students relevant copyright laws, especially if student work will be published in print or on the Internet.

This document includes

- Suggested guidelines for helping students evaluate the reliability of information they find on the Internet
- A suggested citation style for citing Internet sources and Web sites where you can find more detailed articles on citing electronic sources
- A brief summary of copyright law and resources for finding out more

Note: Remember to familiarize yourself with any Internet use policies in place at your school or school district before students begin using e-mail or other Internet resources.

Assessing the reliability of Internet sources

Consider guiding your students in a few simple practices that will help them gauge the reliability of the information that they locate on the Internet. These can include the following:

Checking the author

If an article or opinion is attributed to a specific author, students can use a search engine to learn more about that author. What else has he or she written? What have other people written in response? On occasion (perhaps after receiving clearance from you), students may want to use e-mail to ask the author questions about his or her work.

Checking the source

If no author is connected to the information, students can perform a search for information about the organization that has posted the Web site.

Checking the Web site

Students can also assess the reliability of the Web site. How is it characterized in its URL: as a commercial site (.com), as a nonprofit organization (.org), as a government organization (.gov), or as an educational institution (.edu)? What differences might there be in the information these sites provide? To what other sites is the resource site linked?

Checking the information

Regardless of the dependability of the source, students should compare the information to other information that they discover, keeping an eye out for contradictions. They can also assess information in terms of its use of supporting resources (via footnotes or other attribution), and the degree to which its information can be verified. Does the resource contain opinions or assertions that are presented as facts? Does the resource contain statements of fact that are impossible to prove or disprove? Does the resource maintain a tone of balanced and reasoned argument, or does it play on emotions (fear, sentimentality, and so on) to convince others to act or believe in certain ways?

Copyright basics

As students research using the Internet, they may find portions of articles they want to quote or a photograph or other image they want to include in their reports. Students who are creating multimedia reports or Web pages may be on a constant search for useful media to include within their presentations and Web sites. The Internet is one location where they can search for and find that perfect movie or graphic they want to use.

As a teacher, you are probably already familiar with the importance of respecting copyright law and how the fair use doctrine exception to copyright law applies to education. The following is a brief summary of the law and information on how to find out more.

Copyrighted materials include many different types of public works of expression such as books, articles, multimedia CD-ROMs, photographs, illustrations, video, sounds, and Web pages. Because copyright law covers items on the Internet, you can't simply copy a photographic image you like from someone else's Web site and include it on your own Web site, for example. You would need permission from the "copyright owner," who may be the photographer or a business.

The fair use doctrine is an exception to the copyright law that's especially important for education. Fair use may allow you to use copyrighted material without permission for "criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research." Several factors determine whether fair use applies. Here are a few questions to ask yourself when determining whether or not your use of copyrighted material falls under the fair use guidelines:

- How much do you want to copy and what proportion is that amount of the whole work?
- Will your use of the material take away from the potential market or value of the copyrighted work?
- Do you plan to profit from the use of the copyrighted material?

If the answer to this question is yes, you need to obtain permission from the person holding the copyright.

For more information, you can call the U.S. Copyright Office at 202-707-3000 or visit the Web sites listed in “Additional Resources” later in this document.

Citing Web sites

If students will use text or media resources from the Internet, remind them of the importance of properly citing their resources. How they include these citations depends on what they are producing. If your students are creating a report, they can present their citations of Web sites in their footnotes. If they are creating a presentation, they should plan to include a screen listing all their resources; if they are producing a Web page, they can leave space at the bottom of the page or create a link to a page listing their references. Giving credit is important business, so a project shouldn't be considered complete until all resources have been cited in some way.

Students can use the following style to cite resources from the Web:

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Document." Title of Complete Work [if applicable]. Version or File Number [if applicable]. Document date or date of last revision [if different from access date]. Protocol and address, access path or directories (date of access).

Example:

- Walker, Janice and Taylor, Todd. "Columbia Guide to Online Style." Part 1, 1998.
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html

For more detailed information on citation style, see the next section, “Additional Resources.”

Additional resources

For additional information on copyright laws and citation styles, see the following Web sites:

- **Copyright & Fair Use Web Site**
<http://fairuse.stanford.edu>,.
- **Electronic Sources: APA Style of Notation**
<http://www.uvm.edu/~xli/reference/apa.html>
- **Columbia Guide to Online Style**
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html
- **A Visit to Copyright Bay**
<http://www.nmjc.cc.nm.us/copyrightbay>
- **U.S. Government Copyright Office**
<http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/>