

Figure 3.1: Student Guidelines for Successful Internet Searching

1. **When searching for information, look for specifics, don't just browse:** You know you are browsing when you jump quickly from one site to another. If you need to, make a list of the information you are searching for, and make sure what you are looking at is relevant to that list.
2. **When searching for information, use multiple websites:** This means using library (school, local, and otherwise) resources, specialized search engines such as Google Scholar, research databases such as the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and sites that content experts operate. For example, NASA's site might be relevant to you if you are looking for information about the moon.
3. **Create a wide range of possible keywords to use when gathering information:** This might mean including synonyms (such as including *arachnids* when looking for information on spiders), words for causes or effects (such as including *spay* or *neuter* when looking for information on controlling the local animal population), or words for parts of a whole (such as including *ultraviolet* or *infrared* when looking for information on the light spectrum). You might also use specific terms or examples of a general phenomenon; for example, you might search for *Chernobyl nuclear accident* when looking for the general effects of nuclear radiation.
4. **Make sure that the information you find is relevant to the topic being researched:** You can do this by referring often to your search question. If you cannot explain the connection between your search question and what you are looking at in two sentences or less, then you might not be looking at relevant information.
5. **Make sure the information you find comes from a valid, reliable source:** You can do this by making sure you know who is providing the information. If the source has no credentials, then you should not use that information. Look for bias and for agenda: does this source benefit from the information being reported? For example, if you find information that appears to prove that a particular prescription drug is beneficial, but the information comes from a source that profits from the sale of that or other prescription drugs, the information may not be reliable. In general, blogs and wikis are not reliable sources of information. Use common sense, and think about the information being reported: is it more similar to something you would find in a newspaper or in a tabloid? It never hurts to double-check the information you find. If you cannot find another valid source that confirms the truth of the information you initially found, it might not be reliable.
6. **Make sure you read and think about the information you gather:** Remember that getting the information is not enough. Make sure that there are no contradictions, and that the information you found really supports your thesis or answers your question. You can do this by regularly comparing your thesis or question to the information you have found.
7. **When gathering information, sometimes there will be a lot of material to read:** Break it down into chunks you can manage. Remember that if you give yourself enough time, you can read everything, but you do not have to read everything at once.

8. **When searching for information, keep in mind the complexity of your topic:** Are there different points of view to consider? Are there different ways of looking at the topic? Remember that one clear and easy answer is not always available.
9. **When searching for information, remember that depth is not found strictly in facts:** In order to really understand a complex topic you may need to go beyond facts and look at points of view, future speculations, and so on. For example, think of the facts of your life. Your height, age, gender, address, and grade point average are facts about you; however, knowing those things might not help someone know you as a person.