

## General Information Seeking Skills in Academics

### The Free Web

For most students entering college, the principle resource they have used to find information is the free web. Having excellent search skills on the free web is important and should continue to be developed by:

- Reading the help screens for your favorite search tool (Google, Bing...) so you know its capabilities and limitations,
- Learning how to compare web search tools (i.e. using a rating service such as [www.searchengineshowdown.com](http://www.searchengineshowdown.com)) so that you choose the best one for your information need, and
- Learning how to evaluate and compare web sites using standard criteria such as authority, timeliness, bias, etc. (example at [http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/11605\\_12337.cfm](http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/11605_12337.cfm))

### Organized Information Search Tools

However, knowing how to use the free web, *at whatever level*, **IS NOT ADEQUATE** in academia. The free web suffers from lack of editors, difficulty in evaluating the quality of the information presented and the authors' credentials, and a host of other issues. For reasons having to do with quality, authority, depth, copyright, time factors, etc., you will be required to learn and hone additional skills in seeking information, in particular:

- Knowing how to locate and get your hands on books, both from our own and other libraries (use of **Catalogs** and **Interlibrary Loan**),
- Knowing how to locate and get your hands on articles from newspapers, magazines, and scholarly periodicals (use of **Indexes**),
- Being able to do basic background research on a topic (**Specialized Encyclopedias**, handbooks...)
- Knowing how to get information about pre-computer time periods (**paper research tools**)
- Learning the in-depth search tools specific to your major (ERIC for Education, IIPA for Theatre...)

### Transferable Micro Skills

The library assignment in this class is designed to get you started on this skill set. Some of the skills will be immediately applicable to the papers required for this class, others will be used later in your college career. As is the case in any situation, some students already have a significant background in using these skills. If you are one of the lucky few who do, please use the class exercise to check your assumptions about how things are done here. For example, we do not shelve our books using the Dewey Decimal call number system. If you are not familiar with the Library of Congress call number system, even if you have extensive research experience, there will be some adjustments to your skill set. A basic level of understanding in the following areas is needed to acquire the skill sets listed above:

- Library of Congress call number system
- Physical layout of the library
- Knowing how to formulate a research question from a general topic
- Knowing how to derive search vocabulary from a research question
- Understanding differences in periodicals (mainly newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals)
- Definition of Database, Record and Field
- Definition of Citation, Abstract, and Full-text
- Use of Boolean operators, also called connectors (AND, OR, NOT)
- Understanding the distinction between Subject and Keyword searching
- Phrase searching vs. individual words
- Truncation, wildcards, stemming and how to discover which keyboard character is used
- Basic citation elements for a book, article, website, and other formats