Library
Special Collections
and Museums

Tools for searching the Web

There are three important tools available to search the Web:

1. Search Engines

Use the *Advanced Search* option to avoid retrieving a vast amount of irrelevant material
They do not evaluate websites
See:
Google at http://www.google.co.uk
Google Scholar at http://scholar.google.co.uk/
Scirus at http://scirus.com/ (for scientific information only)

See also Meta Search Engines:
Metacrawler at http://www.metacrawler.com/
Dogpile at http://www.dogpile.co.uk/
Ixquick at https://www.ixquick.com/
Search.com at http://www.search.com/

2. Subject Gateways

Smaller collections of high quality material focussing on specific subject areas
Content selected by subject specialists and run by subject specialists
Browse-able and searchable
Evaluated – but always check against your own evaluation criteria
See:
VoS: Voice of the Shuttle (Arts & Humanities) at http://vos.ucsb.edu/
biz/ed (Business & Economics) at http://www.bized.co.uk/
SciCentral (Sciences) at http://www.scicentral.com/
Pinakes (all subjects) at http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/irn/pinakes/pinakes.html

3. Web Directories

Catalogues of Internet resources, usually listed under broad subject areas
Cover all subject areas and content selected by subject specialists
Browse-able and searchable
Minimal evaluation
See:
BUBL at http://bubl.ac.uk/
Yahoo at http://www.yahoo.com/

Sharing information using social networks, weblogs, wikis and Twitter

In addition to search engines, subject gateways and web directories **Social Networks**, **Blogs** and **Wikis** are tools that are becoming increasingly popular methods of gathering and exchanging information.

1. **Blog** (we**b log**)

A blog is a hybrid of web page, journal and links digest – written as a diary or log. The entries, usually short and informal and may contain links to other sites, are displayed in reverse chronological order. Comments can be submitted in response to any message from the *Blogger* (owner of the blog) enabling networks of shared interest to build up very quickly.

Further information:
Set up your own blog at **Google Blogger** (https://accounts.google.com/)
Use **Google Blog Search** at http://www.google.com/blogsearch to search for blogs of interest to you.

2. Wiki (WikiWikiWeb)

A Wiki is a collaborative writing tool. Wiki web pages are open to editing so they are a useful platform for communities to develop ideas and collaborative authoring of documentation but **BEWARE**: anyone - expert or amateur - can edit a web page on a wiki! *Wikipedia* is probably the most famous wiki available on the web – **HOWEVER** academic scholars do not like to see references to Wikipedia as a source of information in your bibliography!

Set up your own wiki from:
PBWORKS at http://pbworks.com/

3. Social networking using Twitter

Twitter (http://twitter.com/) is a free Web 2.0 service used by the University Library to communicate short messages (Tweets) about library services and resources; for example, about new databases and e-journals we have purchased, or places available on information skills workshops, or a forthcoming issue of our e-magazine HeadLines.

You can view the library Tweets by going to **http://twitter.com/aberdeenunilib**.

4. Social Networks

Although not heavily used by academics, social research networks provide channels through which you can converse. If you are interested why don't you investigate these networks?

Mendeley at http://www.mendeley.com/
Nature Network at http://network.nature.com/

Evaluating material

Search engines collect information indiscriminately – there is no human intervention in the selection of content. Subject Gateways do, so results should be good quality and have a much higher degree of relevance. The down side is that they search across fewer pages – simply because someone has to physically process each entry.

It is essential that information derived from unregulated sites is evaluated using a set of criteria. The following checklist lists the main ways to evaluate information derived from the Internet:

Accuracy	Is the page free from spelling errors/factual errors? Is there an editorial policy stated on content?
Authority	Are there contact details available for author or publisher? Look in the *About us* or *Contact us* links on the home page. Look at the URL – does it belong to an authoritative source, e.g. British academic institution (ac.uk); government site (gov.uk); non-profit organisation (.org)
Coverage	Assess the topics – is there a wide coverage, does the site try to be comprehensive or specific? Is reliable evidence used to support the information, e.g. research or references.
Currency	Is the Web page up to date? Check for a date at the bottom of the page – does it state when the page was created, or placed on the Web or or when it was last revised? Undated pages do not carry any authority.
Objectivity	Is there any bias in the way the Web page is written? Is it written by an interest group? Does the page present both sides of an argument? Is it sponsored - if it is – by whom?
Other things to check:	
Awards	Has the site won a quality award, e.g. Scirus?
How you found the page	Did you find it by using a subject gateway? These tools contain evaluated material added by subject specialists and are therefore more reliable.
Contact information	This tends to indicate that a site is confident in its information.
Links	Does the site have links to and from reputable Web sites? Do all the links work?