

Finding Information on the Web

Information Resources on the Web

The Internet gives you access to many types of information. Information can be found in the form of online books, including reference works, electronic journals or bibliographic databases. Full text material is also available, making it easier to get hold of information directly. There are many other sources of information on the web, for example discussion groups and mailing lists, image, audio, video and other multimedia resources.

One of the key resources for finding specific academic or professional information is the online bibliographic database. This is a resource, which organises and indexes references to many resources. These are usually journals and reports but can include other types of resources. Often abstracts, or even full text of articles are available from the database. These are searchable using online database search techniques, which will be described briefly in this booklet.

Searching the Web

There are three main tools for searching on the web: *Classified Directories*, *Subject Gateways* and *Search Engines*. In this section, the focus will be on the first two resources, which have close similarities.

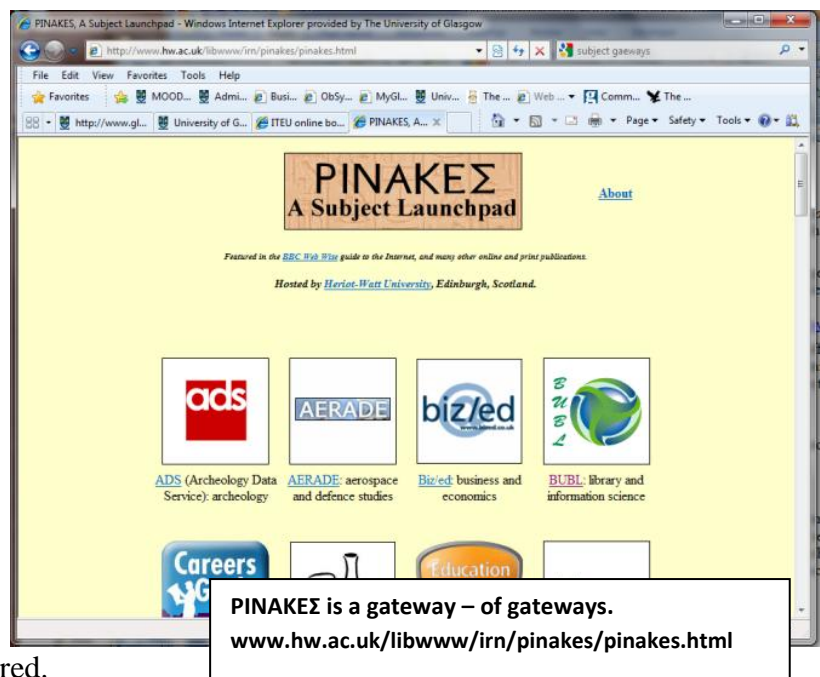
Classified Directories - These usually consist of lists of different subject areas arranged alphabetically or by some form of subject listing; sometimes both options are available. Also subject lists can often be searched, by entering key words into a text box. Here's one example directory: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/library/howtofindinformation/whatsyoursubject>

Subject Gateways - These are a more specialised type of classified directory. They offer a 'value-added' approach to information seeking. Subject gateways concentrate on organising high quality resources, which are of specific interest to users with specialist interests. Directories and gateways have the following advantages:

They are ordered by subject, making it easy to find relevant information quickly.

They are often catalogued manually by information professionals rather than done automatically, thus ensuring better quality in what is offered.

You can find related subjects very easily due to the structure of the indexes.



Subject Gateways are search tools constructed by subject specialists. They are an attempt to organise and categorise information, and in particular to incorporate the principles of review, editorial consistency and quality. These indexes often also have search facilities, which allow you to search within a subject area or across the whole index - thus allowing you to look for sites on a cross-subject basis.

Using Search Engines

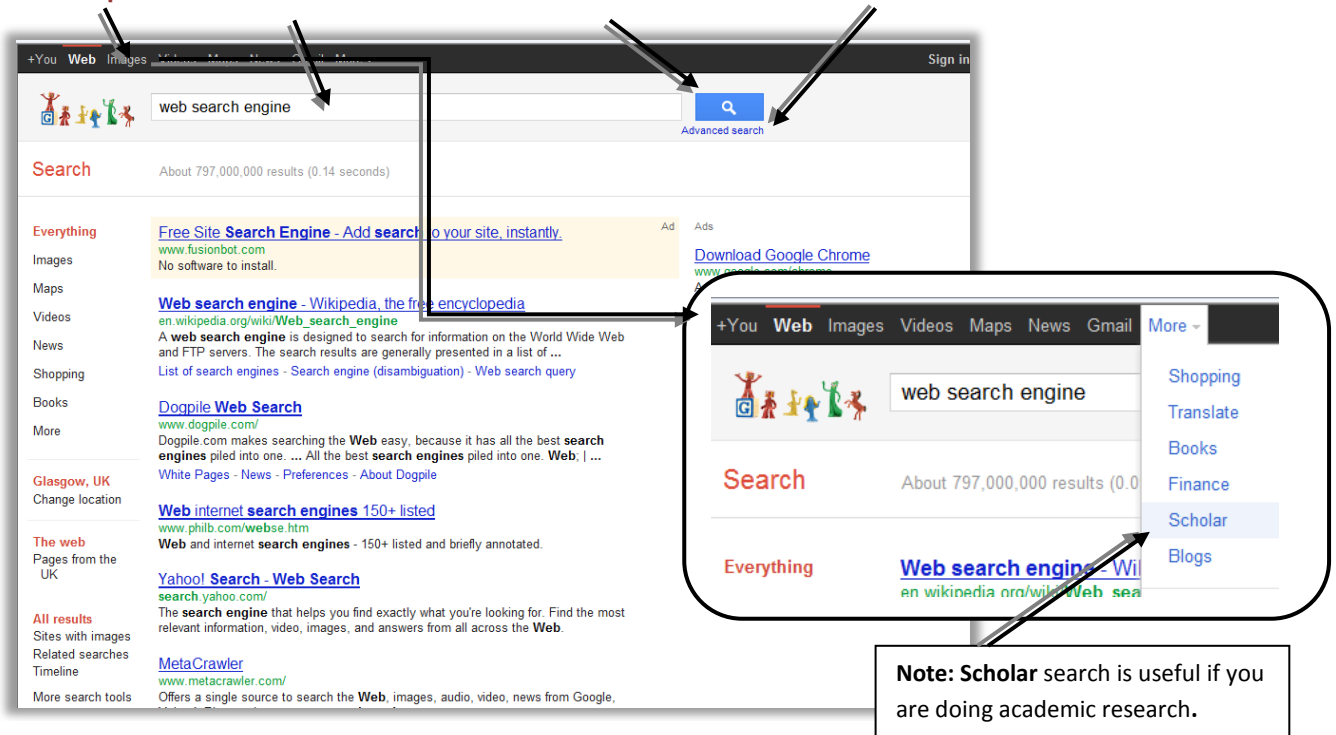
There are many web sites available, which contain database programs that allow you to search the web. These are called **search engines**. Some are better than others for finding particular topics and you will get into the habit of using the one you prefer.

Click on the **Search** button just above the current page to access a search engine (in *Firefox* type directly into the search box, next to the address box) – remember that many organisations have their own collections of links to search engines and you can find and bookmark your preferred ones.



Here is an example of a search engine page:

Search Options **Enter Search Terms Here** **Click to Start Search** **Advanced Search**



The screenshot shows a search engine interface with a search bar containing 'web search engine'. The search results show 'About 797,000,000 results (0.14 seconds)'. The results are categorized into 'Everything', 'Images', 'Maps', 'Videos', 'News', 'Shopping', 'Books', and 'More'. The 'More' menu is expanded, showing options like 'Shopping', 'Translate', 'Books', 'Finance', 'Scholar', and 'Blogs'. The 'Scholar' option is highlighted. A callout box with a black border contains the text: **Note: Scholar search is useful if you are doing academic research.**

Here are a few search engines you may find useful:

<http://www.google.co.uk>; <http://www.lycos.co.uk>; <http://www.askjeeves.co.uk>

Most search engines operate by asking you to type one or more key words describing the topic you seek. There is no uniformity, so the best thing to do is to stick to one or two search engines, and get used to their rules. Some help on the most common options is given below.

Usefulness of Search Engines

Search engines will return a great deal of information in response to a query, but this may not always be highly relevant or of good quality. Search engines return the best results if you enter specific, carefully worded queries. Generalised queries tend to return poor results.

Search techniques

Most Search Engines allow at least some basic database searching techniques to be applied; some allow some quite advanced search techniques. The most common options are:

Use of the "+" sign before a search term to insist the term must be included (used in front of every term this is similar to, but not exactly like, the use of 'AND'). AND is often applied automatically in many search engines but use of "+" allows you to insist on certain common terms which they would otherwise ignore.

Use of the "-" sign before a search term to insist the term must **not** be included (this is similar to the use of 'NOT').

Use of "*" (occasionally "?") at the end of a **truncated** search term to included variations on a root word. If searching for information on elections you might type in election*, which would return hits on election, elections and electioneering. It would not be a good idea, however, to type in elect* as this would also return words like electron, electronic, electricity, etc.

Use of double quotes (" ") round search terms to ensure they are searched for as a **single phrase**, e.g. "early English Manuscripts".

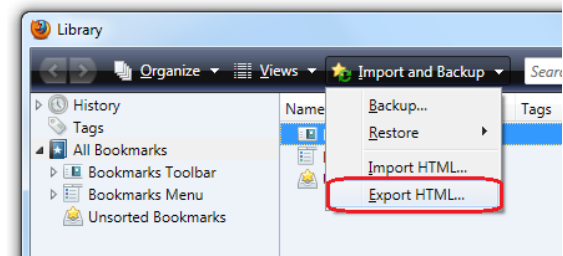
Adding Favorites or Bookmarks

There will be some sites you want to visit regularly. You can avoid the bother of typing in the URL or navigating your way to the page by adding the site to your **Favorites** or **Bookmarks** list. You simply have to click on an item in this list to access the web site. In *Microsoft Internet Explorer*, you use the **Favorites** menu to add bookmarks.

To edit your bookmarks, select **Organise Favorites** from the **Favorites** menu and use the **Organise Favorites** window to move, rename or delete items. At the university, on campus PCs, your **Favorites** are automatically saved to your **M:** drive (on your home PC these will be saved on your **C:**drive). If you wish to save a copy elsewhere, then select **Import and Export** from the **File** menu. This opens a wizard that will guide you through the steps of saving your **Favorites** in the drive/folder that you select.

In *Firefox*, clicking on the **Bookmarks** menu then **Bookmark This Page**, lets you add the current page to your bookmark list.

To save bookmarks, click **Show All Bookmarks** on the **Bookmarks** menu. From the **Library** window displaying the bookmarks choose **Export** from the **Import and Backup** menu (and **Import** to open a bookmark file). You can use the **Edit** menu in this window, to edit your bookmarks.



Evaluating web sites

It should be realised that, if you are using the web to access information you intend to use for academic purposes, you must apply the same academic standards of evaluation you would for traditional resources.

- 1. Accuracy:** Web sites don't often have editors and fact checkers. You can check any information given that you already know the accuracy of, but apart from this if there are no editors or fact checkers you must use other criteria to judge.
- 2. Authority:** If the author's name and qualifications are given, this is useful, but often does not happen on the web. Check the internet source - is it an academic institution; a government web site; a professional association?
- 3. Objectivity:** Academic web sites are likely to be more objective than the web site, say, of a political party. Still, even on an academic site, you may come across differing viewpoints - particularly about controversial subjects. Comparing several web sites discussing the same topic may help you decide how objective any one is.
- 4. Currency:** Date of update is always given on a well organised site. *However, sometimes dates given are updated whenever any one part of a whole site is updated* : so some information on it could be out of date, despite there being a current date. If a date is given for specific pages or topics on a site, this is more helpful.
- 5. Coverage:** The range and depth of the discussion of a topic is important as mentioned above. On the internet, also important is the quality of any links from the web pages – how relevant they are to the topic discussed, and whether they meet the other criteria above. It is also important that all the information you require on the site can be accessed and this is not limited by fees, browser technology, or software that you may not have access to.

Note that Directories and Subject Gateways often have evaluation of web sites listed, so these are useful resources for checking the value of web sites. One example of where guidance can be found is at: <http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>

Directly addressing Web Pages

Each web page has a unique identifier, known as a **URL** (Uniform Resource Locator). The URL is made up of the name of the file, an identifier for the type of file, and the Internet address of the computer where it is located. Here is the URL for the home page of the Law Department at Glasgow University.

http://

The protocol used
(Hypertext transfer)

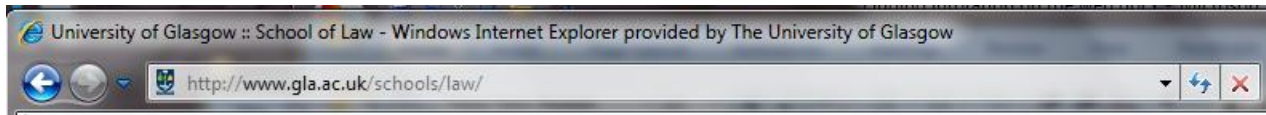
www.gla.ac.uk/

The server where the
page is located.

schools/law

Name of the Folder/Subfolder
containing the page contents

If you know the URL of a page you can access it directly by typing it into the address box above the page window. Then press the **Enter** key to access the page. <http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/law/>



Copying Information from the Web

Copying Text: to copy text from a web page, just select it (in the same way you would select text in a word-processed document), then copy and paste into a *Word* document. If the page is a long one, save it as a text file and insert it into your *Word* document.

Saving a Web Page as a File: For single pages, this is straightforward. Choose **Save As...** from the **File** menu in the browser. You are offered a choice of file types:

a. A text file, with a **.txt** extension: the file will lose graphics and formatting, retaining only the text, but it can be easily inserted into most applications. If there were originally some graphics on the page, you will need to tidy up the layout of the text for presentation, as there will be spaces left where they originally appeared.

b. An HTML file, with a **.html** extension. In this case the HTML code is retained in the text, preserving all the formatting, links to graphics, but not the graphics themselves, and hypertext links to other web sites. Graphics will only be displayed if you copy them also and keep them with the web page file.

c. A web page, complete, with a **.html** extension (in *Internet Explorer* this option is named **Web Archive**). It saves the page you are on, including any images and links on it, so that when you open it from your local file store, it is displayed just as it appeared originally.

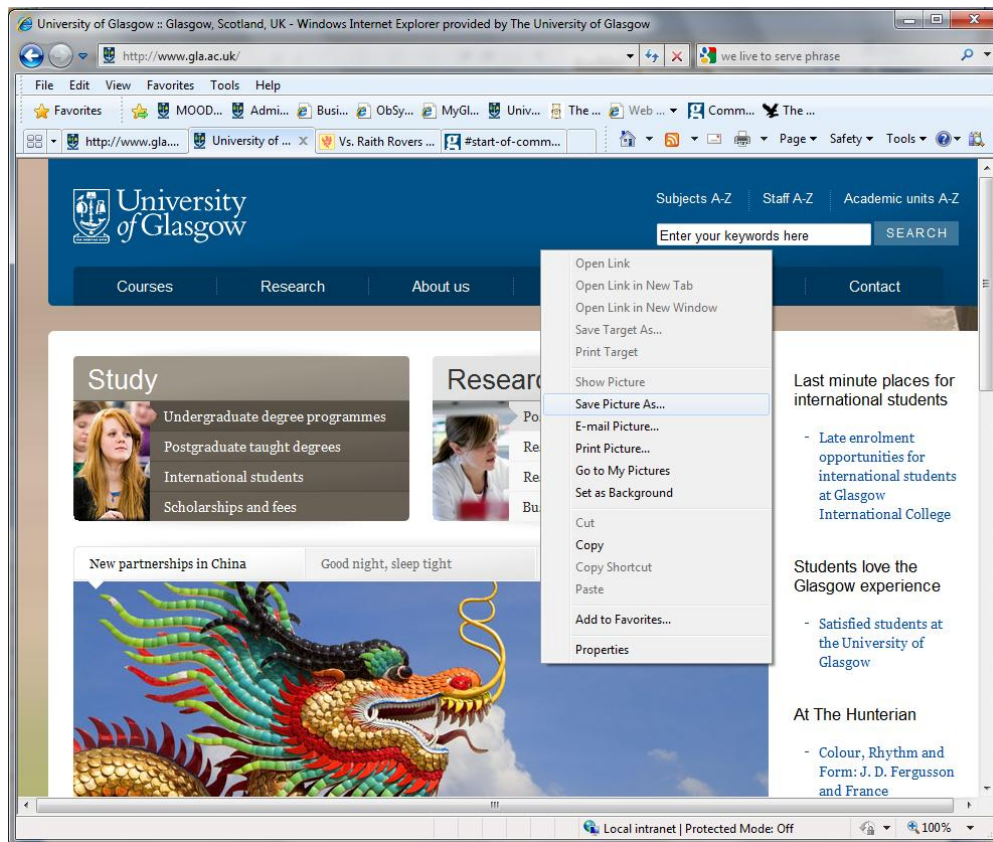
Saving pages divided into frames: Some web pages are divided into frames. This allows, for instance a menu to be displayed all the time even if the content section is scrolled down. In *Firefox*, first select the appropriate frame by clicking the mouse inside it. You must then choose **Save Frame As ...** from the **File** menu as above. In *Internet Explorer*, this is not possible but saving as a **Web Page, complete** will save the complete page, frames and all (just as it will in *Firefox*).

Be warned, that if you save the results of a search engine search as a text file, it may require a lot of editing. You will find it simpler to save it as a web page and view it in a browser. However if you feel you require the information as text – that can easily be copied into another document – then it is best to save it as plain text.

Downloading files: web pages often offer the option of downloading (via a link) text or other files in a variety of formats: e.g. as a *Word* or *Excel* document or a **PDF** file which can be viewed using a program called *Adobe Acrobat*. When this option is available you can have more control of where the file is downloaded to by right-clicking on the link and choosing (from the menu that appears) **Save Target As** (in *IE*) or **Save Link As** (*Firefox*).

Copying a Picture: Put the mouse pointer on the image and then press the **right** mouse button. In the menu that appears you will see an option to **Copy** the picture. Select this then move to the application you wish to copy to and **Paste** the picture into the document.

You could instead choose **Save Picture as ...** (if using *Internet Explorer*) or **Save Image as ...** (if using *Firefox*). The usual **Save** dialog box will appear. Note that images on the web are usually **.gif** or **.jpg** files. Then it can be inserted into a *Word* document using the **Picture (From File)** command in the **Insert** menu. Most browsers now allow you to **Copy** the image after which you can **Paste** it into another application. *Word* allows you to **Insert** a wide range of graphic file types into a document but not all types. For some you will need to use a graphics program, which will read lots of file formats and do conversions, such as *Paint* or *IrfanView*.



Printing out a Page: Most browsers now allow you to print out the current page. Use **Print** from the **File** menu. When printing from a frame on a web page in most browser types, it is advisable to use **Print Preview** option from the **File** menu. This will usually show all the frames combined into one page layout; *Internet Explorer* will give the option of choosing to print all the frames combined or as single frames.

Some Words of Warning

Copyright: Don't assume that anything you copy from the web becomes yours to do with as you wish. The right to copy any text whether on the web or on paper remains with the author or any person or agency to whom the author has assigned the copyright. If you use the text purely for your own study purposes, and copy excerpts or images for quotation in essays or other works produced solely in connection with your own study, you should have little to worry about. But, if you claim authorship of text that is not yours, or if you publish or broadcast copied text or images without permission (e.g. by incorporating it in your own web page or handing out hard

copies), or if you copy material from the web and sell it, you may be doing something illegal. Note that ignorance of the law is not regarded by the courts as a reasonable excuse.

Offensive material: Another area of legal concern is the transmission of offensive material across the Internet. It may not be an offence in some other country to put offensive material on a web page, but it could well be illegal in Scotland for you to copy that material to your computer terminal (which is what you do when you access the page). Whether you look at it on the screen or print it out makes little difference. “Offensive” is a definition which changes according to what is currently unacceptable, but it would include hard pornographic and violently explicit material, especially including children, and material which is likely to incite racial hatred.

Viruses: Networks enable you to get interesting and useful material from a huge range of sources. Unfortunately you can also get things you don’t want too. **Junk mail** and **chain letters** are not just irritating, but clog up lines and slow down the Internet; you should immediately delete and ignore them. A nastier import is a computer **virus**, which could have attached itself to a page that you access and be arriving at your computer as you read the page. The only way of dealing with this problem is to run a virus checking program which is regularly updated. All computers on university networks are protected in this way. If you have a computer at home you should make sure it is similarly protected. Even if it isn’t connected to a network, you could bring to it a virus from another machine on a disc or USB pen.