Getting to the Good Stuff: Accessing better web content

You can find lots of research-related material on the web. Information is added to and subtracted from the web every day, so it’s important to know the best types of web content for college-level research.

Let’s look at some categories of web resources that can often provide reliable information for your assignments.

Blog posts may be written by individuals or companies. They need to be reviewed carefully for bias. Blogs have typically been non-academic content but some scholars are now using them as a platform for publishing. Just make sure that you review the content carefully and ensure that it’s appropriate for your research.

Departments and agencies at the municipal, provincial, federal, and international levels of government use the web to communicate research and policies, which can be excellent resources. Often this is also the best place to find population-specific or geographically specific data.

Data sets can be found on many websites. Examine them for bias and determine where the data originally came from. Data sets may be broad or local in scope. Examples include Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data sets, international travel data, or attendance numbers for local events.

Company websites have a known bias but may give access to reports that may not be available on other platforms. You can also access news releases, contact information, advertising, and product and service information.

Organizations, institutions, and professional associations are often large and well-organized. They have a known bias but can be great sources. They are excellent at communicating professional standards and practices. They may also have job boards specific to a field. Membership may be required in order to access all of their web material.

“Open access” content is available to everyone and is typically copyright cleared for use. The information may or may not be academic. It may be found on sites like Internet Archives, Creative Commons, or discipline-specific sites. Directories of some open access content can also be found.

Social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest are not academic sources. However, they may point you toward an academic source or indicate a trend.

Having a good search technique is essential to locating web material efficiently and effectively.

You may want to get familiar with one or two search engines and learn their tips and tricks. Google is the most widely used search engine and its Google Scholar platform can help you
locate academic resources. But be warned: Google Scholar may ask you to pay for access to resources. The library may have those resources already in its collection, free for you to use.

Google is not the only search engine, and others may work better depending on your specific needs.

You can use web resources when it’s appropriate for your research and assignments. Just make sure that you seek out high quality information and have a specific search goal in mind.