

Online Research Techniques

Teacher's Guide

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Online RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Time: 18 minutes

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Intended Audience and Uses

This video is intended to be used with youngsters in junior high and middle schools. The program has been designed to be used in classroom and independent study settings in study skills and computer skills classes.

Program Synopsis

Online Research Techniques begins by explaining what kinds of information are available online and the composition of the online world. The key sources for obtaining information for term papers and other research projects are World Wide Web research sites, Usenet sites and e-mail. Because there is so much information available on the Internet, it's helpful to develop a strategy before going online. Developing a search strategy also keeps the phone line in your house open because you won't waste time searching needlessly. The program then shows a student who has been assigned to write a paper on some aspect of the Civil War. He uses an encyclopedia on a CD as his starting point. The narrator states that using a print encyclopedia is another alternative, as is accessing an online encyclopedia. A common procedure for accessing an online encyclopedia, and an appropriate article, is shown. Downloading procedures are also discussed, as are virus protection programs. After the student reads the article, he decides to write his paper on the Battle of Gettysburg. There is a hypertext link for the Battle of Gettysburg in the downloaded article, and the narrator explains how to use it. The student then turns to an Internet address book, where he finds some promising sites in the history section. He then uses a search engine to find other possible sites on the Internet. Viewers are warned about excessive browsing when using hypertext links. The program then discusses the Usenet (composed of forums or discussion groups), showing how they may be used to obtain information from experts in various fields. E-mail is also discussed, as are warnings against giving one's name, address and phone number to persons on the Internet. Other warnings include the uneven quality of online information, and the fact that more than a lot of information is needed to write a good report.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, students should be able to do the following:

1. Tell three major components of the Internet.
2. Name five major online research sites.
3. Develop an off-line strategy that can be used to conduct online research.
4. Gather from online sources research needed to complete a written research project.
5. Tell why one must never give his name, address or phone number online.
6. Demonstrate an ability to gather information from Usenet sources and e-mail.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Note: The online world constantly changes. Although special care has been taken to use visuals that are as generic as possible, there may be some differences between what is seen in the video and what is seen on some students' computers. For example, there are slight differences between computers run on Windows and Macintosh platforms. Netscape and Microsoft web icons differ somewhat in appearance. If there are slight variances, however, the basic operations depicted will be very similar. Students should be told that they may have to do slightly different operations to obtain similar results. For example, some search engines (such as AltaVista) have a pull-down menu to activate a Usenet search, while others (such as InfoSeek) have a dot that needs to be clicked to do the same operation. Students should also know that web sites come and go, and may not always be available due to construction activity.

1. Introduction

Ask your students how they find information for their term papers or other written assignments that require research. What sources do they use? Where do they go to find those resources? Is it time-consuming? Is it sometimes difficult to find what's needed? Has anyone ever gone to a library or media center, only to discover what he or she needs has been checked out, or isn't on the shelves? Does anyone use his or her computer for research? If so, ask for information. Do computer users find online searches useful and productive?

2. Previewing Activities

Tell the class that they are going to see a video called ***Online Research Techniques***. Mention that even though some students may already use computers to do research, this video contains many tips and a great deal of information that may speed up the process and make it more effective. Hand out the ***Online Research Vocabulary List***. Explain that in order to navigate successfully through the online world, one has to know certain terms, some of which are used in the video. Go over the list with your students. Make certain they have at least a general understanding of each term. Then pass out the ***Viewer's Concept Guide***. Explain that the class will be expected to answer the questions after seeing the video. Give everyone a chance to read this handout.

3. Post-viewing Activities

Have your students complete the ***Viewer's Concept Guide***, either as class activity or as seat work. If done as seat work, go over the answers after your students have completed the exercise. Then pass out ***Search Engines and Search Newsgroups on the Usenet***. Tell your students these

informational handouts will help them better decide how to do their online research. Discuss the handouts if you feel it will be beneficial. Next, hand out *Copying from the Net*. As most people know, the Internet, as with most other major technological developments, has several factors that compose a downside. One is making plagiarism very easy. Have this handout read aloud, and discuss it with your class. You also may wish to deal with the ethical issues involved in copying. First, plagiarism is lying. It is saying, "I've written this," when, in truth, someone else has written it. Second, plagiarism is cheating. It demeans the person who does it. Few people want to think of themselves as cheaters. Finally, assign a research project (perhaps with the cooperation of another teacher) that requires online research. Pass out the *Web Site Search Record*, and explain that students can use this chart to log possible web sites. Have the students pass in their charts with their reports.

PURPOSES OF HANDOUT MATERIAL

Online Research Vocabulary List Provides students with terms they will need to know to have a basic understanding of the online world.

Viewer's Concept Guide Reviews and highlights the key concepts in the video.

Search Engines Provides a brief overview of the major search engines.

Searching Newsgroups on the Usenet Gives an alternate, and sometimes more efficient, method to search for topics discussed on Newsgroups.

Copying from the Net Helps students understand the possible consequences of plagiarizing from net sources.

Web Site Search Record Provide a template students may use when they access search engines (or perform a newsgroup search on DejaNews).

ANSWER KEY

Viewer's Concept Guide – 1. America Online, CompuServe, Prodigy, Microsoft Network 2. E-mail, Newsgroup forums (Usenet), research sites 3. World Wide Web 4. Saves money, allows others to use the phone line 5. With a print encyclopedia, with an encyclopedia on a CD, with an online encyclopedia 6. Saves time 7. HTML documents have different kinds of type, pictures, maps, etc.; plain text documents have only text. 8. A virus protection program 9. An underlined word that, when clicked, will call up a related topic, usually from another web site 10. A book (usually in directory form) that contains web sites that have been checked; saves the time and money of conducting an online search 11. A computer program that searches, by topic, for web sites 12. An electronic bulletin board that deals with a particular topic; postings may contain information, or the author of a posting may be contacted via e-mail to obtain needed information 13. Never give out your name, address or phone number when online.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

NARRATOR: Suppose that you had a magical device, a key that would unlock the world's largest library – a place filled with hundreds of millions of magazine articles, video clips, music, correspondence and speeches, paintings, photographs, and so on.

This place is so big, in fact, that a person could spend an

entire lifetime going through it, and see only a tiny fraction of what's there!

Well, there is such a place, but it's not a library building. It's the world of online information. And it's available to millions of people around the globe, including people just like you!

The online world is composed of individuals and the computers they use – computers in schools, libraries and homes as well as other, more powerful computers operated by businesses, government organizations and universities.

They're all tied together by telephone lines (and sometimes by other means, too, such as signals from satellites) through which electronic messages pass.

We see those messages as words and pictures on a monitor.

Around the world, there are millions of online information sources – mainframes and servers that hold all kinds of information that we can retrieve on our home and school computers.

Such a large number of information sources can make it very difficult to find what's wanted. In fact, without an orderly way to conduct a search, it's easy to become lost in that vast, online sea of information.

So we'll construct a road map with some key locations on this so-called "information superhighway."

Hopefully, it will help you find your destination: the information you need for that term paper or other written assignment.

Now, your starting point will be an online service provider. Although there are many fine small online service providers, big companies such as America Online, CompuServe, Prodigy and Microsoft Network provide online services to most of us.

As many of you already know, these large companies have ways for you to shop, find out about almost anything (including health matters and how people live), contact others around the world – and much more, including a way to get to the Internet.

The Internet is a huge collection of computerized information resources that spans the globe. And it is made up of several parts.

An electronic postal system, commonly known as e-mail, is one of them. We'll explain how to use e-mail to get information in a few minutes.

Newsgroups (or forums) are another part of the Internet that can be useful when conducting research. There are thousands of these electronic bulletin boards on what's called the "Usenet," and we'll discuss them in a few minutes, also.

Research sites are still another, and very important, part of the Internet. They help people locate information.

For most people, the major research sites are "Gopher," "Archie," "Veronica," "WAIS," and the "World Wide Web," or "WWW."

We'll focus on the World Wide Web in this program since it's the easiest and most commonly used research site – and because the others are designed for mostly upper level high

school and college students, scholars, teachers, and other people with special research needs.

Okay, now you have a general idea of what's available to you when you want to do some online research.

Before we cover the specifics of moving around this vast resource, however, a few words of advice are in order.

First, if you're like most people, you use a phone whenever you go on the net or log onto a service provider.

The longer you're on, the larger your phone bill – or rather, your parents' phone bill. So if you don't want your dad or mom to blow a gasket when next month's phone bill arrives, you'll want to devise a strategy to keep your online time to a minimum.

And, of course, others in your household may need to use that phone line, also. So try to exercise a little restraint.

BROTHER: I need to call Gregg by 7:30 so I can see what we're doing this weekend.

STUDENT: I'll be off line by 7:30, for sure.

NARRATOR: Keeping your online time to a minimum will require some advanced planning, which means doing some preliminary work off line.

Now, let's say that you've been assigned to write a paper on some aspect of the American Civil War.

Well, you could start with an encyclopedia article. If you have an encyclopedia on a CD, great! Go ahead and use it.

If not, there's nothing wrong with using a print encyclopedia in your library or media center. Reading it will give you an overall picture of the topic, and may suggest something on which you'd like to write.

You don't have to do this phase of your research on line, unless, of course, you can't get to a library, or you can't readily get to an encyclopedia.

If that's the case, then you can always access an encyclopedia on line. It's very easy to do if you subscribe to one of the major service providers.

When you connect to the provider, you'll see a welcome page. Somewhere on it, there will be a button or a screen message that will take you to a menu of services – including this one: “research and learn.”

Since you're doing research, you'd click it. And, lo and behold, an encyclopedia button appears.

Click it, and three choices come on screen. We'll try the last one.

On the next page, there's a search panel. Just type in the article you want, in this case, the "Civil War." Press "search," and a list of articles appears.

Obviously, you'll want the two articles on the "Civil War in the United States." So you'd click one at a time.

There's the first article. As you scroll down, you see it's 13 pages long.

Keep in mind that you don't want to spend a lot of time tying up your phone line. So you can either print it out immediately or save it, which would be even quicker.

You can then print it later, off line.

Now, when you save the article on your computer's hard drive, you'll have to name and tell what format you want it saved in.

Plain text documents, when printed, have no graphics. HTML documents may have maps, paintings, photographs and so on.

Once you choose the format, click the "save" button, sign off and print out everything.

In several minutes, you've started your research.

If you download an article (that is, electronically transfer it to your computer and save it there), you should make sure that you have a virus-protection program on your computer, and that it's set to run periodically.

If there's a computer virus on a download, it could destroy every file and every program in your computer! So it's very important that you have a virus protection program – and that you use it!

Now, let's say you read the article and something looks very interesting to you – the Battle of Gettysburg.

Notice that it's underlined. That means there's a hypertext link that will give more detailed information if you click the word when you're on line.

As you may know, a hypertext linked word, when clicked, takes you to another article or another web site that often gives you more detailed or related information on that particular word, or topic.

You should note the link as part of your off-line planning process. The note will remind you that the next time you go on line, you can return to the encyclopedia article, click the hypertext reference, and retrieve more detailed information.

After you've reviewed one or more encyclopedia articles, it's time to see if there are any other Internet references on the Battle of Gettysburg.

One of the best ways to find out is to look in at least one of the growing number of Internet address books.

This one is arranged alphabetically, by topic, somewhat like the telephone yellow pages. Under the topic heading "history," there are two possibilities.

The first is the "US Civil War Center – Civil War Links Index;" and the second, "Welcome to Gettysburg."

Read the description of the site, and if it looks promising, jot down the address.

Using Internet address books can save hours of online searching because the writers and editors have done all the work of searching the sites for you – and selecting the best ones.

Now, if you can't find any possibilities in the directories, or if you'd like more than what's in them, you can certainly conduct an online search.

To do that, you'll use what's known as a search engine, a program that lists web sites by topic.

Most service providers have a search engine on their Internet access page. Just click the Internet icon, and look for a button that has the word "search" or "explore" or a similar word next to it.

Click it and a search page will come on screen. Somewhere on the page, there will be a box with a "find" or "search" button next to it.

Type in the box the topic you're researching – in this case, the "Battle of Gettysburg." Press "find," and after a few seconds, a list of web sites that have information on that topic appears.

Notice that there are more than 300,000 web sites listed! That's why it's such a good idea to do your search off line, using directories, if at all possible.

Nevertheless, you could find what you're looking for fairly quickly since the more popular sites are often listed first.

Jot them down for later reference, or if you have time, you can click the underlined words – again, they have a hypertext link – to go directly to the suggested web site.

There are many different search engines besides the one used by your service provider, and each has its own particular strengths and weaknesses.

You can find them by activating a search on your access provider's web search page. Just type "search engine" next to the find button and press "find."

In an instant, a list of web pages concerning search engines appears.

Then click the "Front Page Collection of Search Engines." Most of the major ones are listed, and they've all got a hypertext link.

So when you click any one of them, its search engine home page will appear on screen.

As before, you'll need to type your topic, the "Battle of Gettysburg," in the dialog box, click the "seek" or "find" button, and scroll through the list of web sites.

As you read their descriptions, jot down any that might be used for your project.

In short order, you'll find that you're ready to log on to all the web sites you've listed.

When you go to each site, quickly scan it to see if it has any information you can use. If it does, download the data or print it out.

Now, a word of warning. Be sure to stick to your plan.

It's very easy to wander off into hypertext-land, where you can surf forever, clicking from one hypertext topic to another. Don't let it happen to you!

Using your online search plan alone will give you, in all likelihood, more than enough research to write your paper.

Now, as you write, you may run across a question, or think of something you'd like to include, that your research doesn't cover.

You could go to some more web sites, or you could try another tack – a newsgroup.

Newsgroups are electronic message boards, grouped by topic.

Now, here's something your dad or mom will appreciate: before you go on line to find a newsgroup, write down your question. That way, you won't spend time collecting your thoughts while running up that telephone bill.

Okay, to find an appropriate newsgroup, you'll need to go to your service provider's Internet home page and type in your favorite search engine's web address.

Press the "Go to the web" button or hit "enter."

In the search dialog box, choose "Usenet," and then type in your topic. Let's say you've decided to include something about Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in your paper.

Next, press "submit."

Soon, you'll see a list of messages that relate to your topic. Scroll down until you find one that seems to cover what you need.

When you find one, click it.

Now, more often than not, the message won't answer your specific question. But you can e-mail the author of the message if he or she seems knowledgeable about the topic.

The author's e-mail address is shown.

On some Usenet sites, an e-mail button will deliver your

message to the author.

And of course, you can post your own message, too, on a Usenet site. Some caution must be taken, however, whenever you communicate on a newsgroup bulletin board, or e-mail someone you don't know.

First, never give your full name, address or phone number. While the overwhelming majority of the people online are upstanding citizens, there are a few who aren't, and you do *not* want them to know your name, address and phone number.

Be especially wary if someone online asks you for them.

Second, be wary of the information you receive online. While it can be excellent – especially if it's from someone affiliated with an educational institution or museum – other online information is written by people who are not qualified to write on the subject.

On most newsgroup sites, the information isn't checked by anyone.

So it might be a good idea for a teacher, parent or other adult to look over the material before you use it in your report.

And finally, one more word of caution: all the information in the world won't result in an A+ report. Good information is needed, of course.

But so is solid organization, good grammar, proper punctuation, and expressing yourself clearly.

Online research is only one part of the whole picture, then.

Nevertheless, it can be a very important part.

To do online research properly, you need to do some off-line planning, making certain that you use off-line research sources, if you can, to point yourself in the right direction.

Once your basic research is done, you can narrow your list of web sites by consulting an Internet address book.

You may not need any more than that to find what you need.

If you do need more information, you can use one of the many search engines online to call up a list of possible web sites.

Two other ways to get information are contacting newsgroups and writing experts through e-mail.

The Internet! Many believe it's a wonder of the modern world, and it's there for all of us to use!