

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Information Literacy and the “Digital Native”

What Students Know

- *Google is magic*
- “I basically throw whatever I want into the search box and hope it comes up....I don’t know how to use it any other way”
- Because it holds the power to create a list of results, the search engine (Google) self-validates result quality. Students depend solely on their trust in the Google brand

Reality Check

- Any technology, sufficiently advanced, is indistinguishable from magic. (Arthur C. Clarke)
- The Google search algorithm uses more than 200 “signals” to rank its search results—including measures related to localization, personalization, timeliness, and quality (e.g. spam/content farms)
- Results can be influenced by all these factors. Different users can get different results from the same search.

What Students Know

- *If the information exists, it will be on the first page of results*
- Users regularly assume that information that is objectively “best” will be ranked first.
- 92% of resources utilized were found on the first page of search results.

Reality Check

- More advanced search techniques exist which can help retrieve better results.
- Examples in Google include [Google Scholar](#) and Google [Advanced Search](#)
- Examples in Library Databases include Boolean searching and [Advanced Search](#).

What Students Know

- *It is easier to change my topic than refine my search.*
- Students show remarkable willingness to change topics to fit the information found.
- They pass up unique topics for those with widespread coverage
- The first few sources located define the research question.

Reality Check

- Coaching on effective search strategies and appropriate resources will often lead to discovery of high quality sources on the original question
- The topic can often be refined so that a manageable number of sources are located.

What Students Know

- *All search boxes work the same, like Google.*
- Google's simplicity and single search box have created an expectation among students for a single search box that quickly accesses many resources with a simple keyword search.

Reality Check

- Much effort has gone into the attempt to make searching library databases more like Google.
- The Evergreen library catalog now in use by NECC and the NOBLE libraries utilizes a simple keyword style search.
- Most databases still yield better results with Boolean searches or advanced search techniques.
- The best results can be achieved with these targeted searches.

What Students Know

- *If I find good articles on my topic in one database, I should use that database for all my projects.*
- Students typically return repeatedly to a resource that has worked in the past, even if it is not appropriate for the current project.
- Students often don't realize the strengths, limitations, and intended purposes of different resources.

Reality Check

- Although we offer a Google style keyword search box for the Academic Search Premier database on the NECC library webpage, the libraries also offer a wide variety of subject specific databases better suited for some projects.
- Examples include **CQ Researcher** for current events, **Lexis/Nexis** for Law and many more [Databases](#)

What Students Know

- *I know how to recognize a reliable web site.*
- Students often assume that a website with a slick or professional appearance must be reliable.
- Students often assume that a website they link to through a trusted source must be reliable.

Reality Check

- Before being used in academic research, any website should be evaluated for:
- **Currency:** when was the information last updated?
- **Relevance:** is the information appropriate to the project?
- **Authority:** who created the information and are they expert?
- **Accuracy:** is the information well researched and is evidence provided?
- **Purpose:** why was this source written (to sell, inform, teach, persuade, entertain?)

How can we lead students to better sources?

- The [NECC Libraries](#) offer resources to help integrate Information Literacy into your courses.
- These include LibGuides on [Information Literacy](#) for faculty and many others designed for students.
- Library instruction doesn't have to mean a "one-shot" library visit.
- We can also meet with you to help design effective assignments, visit your classroom at point of need, or design a LibGuide for your class.

The Erial Project

For more information on the research behind these observations, see The [Erial Project](#) website.

Sources

- Asher, Andrew D. “Search Magic: Discovering How Undergraduates Find Information.” 2011. PDF file.
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- Discovery Tool Research Results, Illinois Wesleyan University/Bucknell University, 2011.