Research for Writers:

Unearthing Online Treasures

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)
June 2003

P a g e | **1**

Day 1: Intro to the Internet

What is the Internet?

The Internet is a network of separate computer networks worldwide, all able to "speak" to each other. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) provide a way for you to access this network of networks.

The **World Wide Web** (www) is a part of the Internet that is more "user friendly" with graphics, sound, motion, and links.

How I Know Where Things Are Located on the Internet?

The Internet uses Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) as the address for locations on the Internet. We are going to use the World Wide Web for most examples when referring to the Internet. If you understand how to read a URL, you will better be able to not only find things online but to evaluate the legitimacy of the information you find. Let us look at this URL as an example:

http://www.fthrw.com/members/officers.htm

http: this signifies the way the computers transfer the information and stands for hypertext transfer protocol; you really don't need to worry about this part of it

www: this indicates that this particular document is on the World Wide Web

fthrw: this shows who owns/controls/hosts the site; in this case it is FTHRW

com: specifies the type of site. There are several types of sites:

- .com - commercial site (open to the public)
- .edu - educational site (has to be a non-profit school)
- .gov - government site
- .net - network (open to the public)
- .org - organization (not all non-profits have a .org, as with FTHRW)
- .mil - military
- .info - open to the public

From the Heart Romance Writers is chapter #177 of the
Romance Writers of America®.

Research for Writers:

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)

Unearthing Online Treasures

June 2003

P a g e | **2**

- .biz - open to the public, usually used by businesses
- .tv - open to the public; often see entertainment outlets using this
- .us - United States - open to the public now

You may also see a two-digit extension after the .com; these are for international sites. For example, .ca is for Canada, .uk for the United Kingdom, .mx for Mexico, .nz for New Zealand, .au for Australia, .de for Germany (Deutschland)

members: the folder in which the file is located

officers: filename

htm: the type of document; this is hypertext language, meaning it will open in your browser (it might also display as html); you might see .pdf for a document that opens in Adobe Acrobat, and other extensions for documents; most will open in your browser or will ask you to save them to your hard drive.

So, in the example above, FTHRW has a commercial website on the WWW and it includes an article, in the members folder, entitled officers that you will be able to view in your browser.

What is a search engine?

Search engines are locations on the WWW where you can go to find specific information you need. They include several components, most of which you never see. They include:

- something known as a "spider" or "bot" that goes wandering around cyberspace locating web sites and web pages and putting everything into one master list (you never see this)
- some type of an index program that organizes all that data (you never see this, either)
- retrieval method for locating data based on something a user inputs (nope, you don't see this either)
- an interface -- the page you see

Types of Search Engines

Research for Writers:

Unearthing Online Treasures

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)
June 2003

P a g e | **3**

There are three basic types of search engines and we will be working with all of these in more detail as we progress this week.

- **Meta Search Engines** explore numerous search engine sites and combine the results for you
  o Ask Jeeves: www.ask.com
  o DogPile: www.dogpile.com
  o Mamma: www.mamma.com
  o Yahoo!: www.yahoo.com
  o Alta Vista: www.altavista.com
  o Excite: www.excite.com
- **General Purpose Search Engines** are best for common searches and a good starting place
  o Google: www.google.com
  o Teoma: www.teoma.com
  o Webmyway: www.webmyway.com
- **Search Agents/Bots** are software tools for complex searches
  o Bot Spot: http://bots.internet.com

Types of Websites

There are many different types of websites on the Internet, all with a specific purpose. We will categorize websites into one of seven different types. You will use this more as you begin to evaluate the validity/accuracy of the information you find on the Internet.

- **Advocacy sites**: solicit contributions; encourage activism; try to sway public opinion
- **Commercial sites**: include advertisements and product information; provide customer service; promote a business or industry
- **Informational sites**: provide data or statistics, schedules, directories, miscellaneous factual information
- **Entertainment sites**: may amuse; provide music or images; provide news and information about the entertainment industry
- **Educational sites**: may have URLs ending in .edu but not always; promote educational institutions; provide access to educational institutions
- **News sites**: provide information on local, regional, national, and international events; may be related to print magazine/paper or to a TV broadcast
- **Personal sites**: showcases an individual

From the Heart Romance Writers is chapter #177 of the
Romance Writers of America®.

Day 1: Homework Assignment

This is that time of the day you all look forward to: homework. It's really not much this time, I just want to make sure everyone starts thinking about the topics you will be researching.

Remember, we haven't gotten into narrowing down our topics yet. When you do tonight's assignment, you might get more than a million references or you might get none. That's the point of this first exercise. Go ahead and try the exercise. Reply to this email and share your findings with all of us.

1. Choose one of the following web search sites:

www.yahoo.com

www.altavista.com

www.excite.com

www.google.com

www.teoma.com

Which one did you choose?

2. Using the topic you indicated to me on your questionnaire (or some other search topic of interest to you), conduct a basic search as you normally would on the site you selected. For example, if you are trying to discover information about cattle, you might go to www.yahoo.com and simply type cattle in the "Search the Web" box on Yahoo. (If you want to add a couple of words, such as cattle brands, just type the multiple words into the search box.

What did you search for (exactly)?

3. When you typed in the search term in number 2 above, what results did you get back? Specifically, how many results were there? For example, in the sample I gave above, the

search for cattle on Yahoo returned several "sponsor results" and 3,470,000 general results.

Your results:

4. Look at the top two sites that displayed in the general list of search results. When you visit those sites, use the "lecture" from today and the actual websites to answer these questions about each one:

What was the site's URL:

Which of the 7 basic types of websites was it?

Did it give you any helpful information or tell you something you didn't know?

Explain.

What was the site's URL:

Which of the 7 basic types of websites was it?

Did it give you any helpful information or tell you something you didn't know?

Explain.

Well, that's it for the first day. I just want you to go out there and get an idea of the vast amount of information that's available. In all likelihood, you won't find anything you can use today. That's okay. We're going to learn how to refine searches as we go along.

Day 2 is Searching Tips for the Internet. We'll learn about conducting advanced searches, learn about Boolean searches and phrase searching, check out a few general rules for searching on the Internet, and even touch on some of the things you'll want to avoid online.

Day 2: Searching Tips for the Internet

Advanced Searches

Most search engine sites begin with a basic page that includes a simple text box for entering keywords. If you notice, however, there is usually a link or icon for an advanced search, power search, or whatever cute phrase the creators chose to use. Unless I'm after something basic, I very seldom do searches from these basic text boxes. I always click on the link for the Advanced Search or I use something called Boolean operators, which we'll learn all about in just a few moments.

Go ahead. Try it right now. So that we can all follow along with the same one, go to www.google.com . Notice to the right of the text box, there is a link for Advanced Search. Click on that. The Google Advanced Search page lets you customize a bit more how you search for information. You have four choices at the top:

1. Search using all of the words that you type in the box
2. Search using exact phrase
3. Search using one of the words
4. Search without the specified words

Let me take a minute and explain each one of these. You'll see these same basic concepts on every single Advanced Search page, even if they use different terminology. You will also do the same things when we start using what is known as Boolean logic to search. So, it's important that you understand these concepts.

Search using all of the words

We're going to use Connie's example of Healing Herbs for this one. You can follow along with me on the Google page to do these, if you like.

In the box next to "with all of the words," type healing herbs and then click on the Google Search button. This is the same as if you had typed these two words into the box on the main page. Notice that Connie now has 478,000 sites that contain the two words healing and herbs.

Click on Advanced Search at the top of the page next to the Google logo to return to the previous page.

Search using the exact phrase

Research for Writers:

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)

Unearthing Online Treasures

June 2003

P a g e | **7**

Now, delete the text out of the "with all of the words" box, type healing herbs in the "with exact phrase" text box, and then click on the Google Search button. This only locates websites where the phrase healing herbs must occur together on the page. Notice that this has narrowed the search down to 36,300 results.

Click on Advanced Search at the top of the page next to the Google logo to return to the previous page.

Search with at least one of the words

Once again, delete the text out of the "with exact phrase" box, type healing herbs in the "with at least one of the words" text box, and then click on the Google Search button. This expands the search. This time, Connie gets 3,370,000 results. Why? Because this finds all websites that have the word "healing" on them; it also finds all websites containing the word "herbs".

Click on Advanced Search at the top of the page next to the Google logo to return to the previous page.

Search without the words

This time, delete the text you typed above, then type healing herbs in the "with exact phrase" text box. When you exclude words by typing them in the "without the words" text box, you have to indicate which word you want to search for first. Remember, when you searched for the phrase healing herbs, you found 36,300 sites. This time, you want to exclude all sites that mention Chinese herbs and vitamins. In the "without the words" text box, type vitamins Chinese, and then click on the Google Search button. This narrows the search to 30,200 sites.

Click on Advanced Search at the top of the page next to the Google logo to return to the previous page one last time.

Advanced Options

Notice that there are other options in the advanced window. For example, you can specify to only find sites in English, to select sites within a specific time frame, and to eliminate or search for only sites in a specific format.

Research for Writers:

Unearthing Online Treasures

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)
June 2003

P a g e | **8**

Getting Help

One word of caution: every search engine is a little bit different. If you look on any search engine site, you will find a HELP link. For example, in the Google window you were using earlier, there is a link on the home page that leads to Help or on the search pages to "Search Tips". This includes a vast amount of information that you will find helpful. When visiting a new website, I ALWAYS check out the help first. For a good example, check out this link on Google: http://www.google.com/help/interpret.html that tells you how to interpret the results. Or, you can check out this link: http://www.google.com/help/refinesearch.html that explains how Google handles Boolean searching, which we're going jump right into now.

Boolean Searching

Boolean searching is another way for you to narrow down your searches. When you get on niche search sites and some that aren't so commercialized, you won't necessarily find the "advanced search" options. Even on the sites that have that feature, you might find better results using the Boolean "operators" of OR, AND, and NOT (sometimes ANDNOT is used). There are also "implied Boolean operators" that we'll talk about. These are becoming more and more prevalent, especially on general interest websites, such as Yahoo and Google. These are symbols, such as plus (+) and minus (-).

Let's look at each one of these. I am going to demonstrate the results I get in each of the next few by looking at HotBot. If you want to follow along, go to www.hotbot.com. Make sure that "Inktomi" is selected in the check list -- this is the default. I use this because it handles Boolean searching in a simple way, so it helps me to easily demonstrate this to you. I am NOT using the advanced search, just the basic search text box.

Let's assume I want to search for information about the history of Victoria, Kansas. If I go to HotBot and type victoria kansas into the search box, I get 194,800 hits on topics including Victoria, Kansas, Victoria, BC, and Crown Victoria cars in Kansas. So I will try an operator.

OR Operator

Research for Writers:

Unearthing Online Treasures

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)
June 2003

P a g e | **9**

In HotBot, I will type victoria OR kansas. Uh oh. Now I have even more results. This turned up 11,625,005 results. What you've done is indicate that you want the search engine find all instances of websites with the word victoria or instances of the word kansas. The results do not need to have both. One way to remember it is OR IS MORE. This is helpful if you are looking for something that might have more than one word to describe it. For example, if you are searching for information about cats, you might want to search for cats or felines so that you get MORE information. Note: Most search engines, despite the way HotBot works, assume OR and will give you more results if you just enter the words. This is the same as the search we did above with at least one of the words in the advanced search engine window.

AND Operator

In HotBot, this time I will type victoria AND kansas. In this case, I get the same results as I did when I typed victoria kansas. In some search engines, the AND is assumed. This will vary by search engine and you will just need to experiment a little bit. This will only find websites in which BOTH words are located. If it contains Victoria, but not Kansas, the AND operator will not select that website. This is the same as the "using all of the words" search we did in the Advanced Search window.

NOT Operator (sometimes ANDNOT)

In HotBot, I want to get the sites about Victoria, Kansas and eliminate references to Canada. I will type victoria kansas NOT canada. This time, I get 82,710 hits and I have eliminated the references to Canada. You may have to use ANDNOT for some search engines, such as Alta Vista. You need to review the help files for the search engine you plan to use. I will also include a chart of search engines as a "hand out" later in the week that shows some of the more popular search engines and the Boolean operators each one accepts. This is the same as the "without the words" search we did in the Advanced Search window.

Combining Operators

This time, I want to combine operators. I can do that by using parentheses to force the order of processing. This is just like you learned in math class. Okay, I promise. No more math. We have to specify what things we want grouped together so the search engine can properly group everything. I use the parentheses for this. I am also interested in

information about Mr. George Grant who lived in Victoria, Kansas. I don't want to limit my search to just information about George Grant, but I can expand it so I can search for both at one time. I will also need to specify that the search engine needs to locate "george grant" as a phrase to avoid getting millions of hits that include Ulysses Grant and George Washington.

In the HotBot search box, I type (victoria AND kansas) OR (george AND grant). This time, I uncover 200,237 sites. I notice right away that there are a few excellent sites, including an oral history done by the BBC on Victoria's colonists (http://ktwu.washburn.edu/journeys/scripts/1408b.html).

Plus (+) Operator

The plus operator works very similar to the AND operator. If I type +victoria +kansas in HotBot, I get the same 194,800 hits I did when typing victoria kansas. Again, this isn't always the case; you'll have to check the individual website.

Minus (-) Operator

The minus operator is similar to the NOT operator. HotBot does not recognize the minus (-) operator in the regular search window, so I will switch to Google to demonstrate this one. At www.google.com, I type the word greyhound. I get 1,190,000 results. If I add the minus operator and type greyhound -bus, I get 427,000 results that do not include references to greyhound buses.

Phrase Searching

You can use phrase searching to search for a particular phrase. You usually do this by using quotation marks. You've already worked with phrase searching a bit when you searched for George Grant -- you could have entered (victoria AND kansas) OR "george grant". A phrase search is helpful if you plan to search for something like the World Health Organization, US Military Bases, Star Trek Deep Space Nine, Windows XP bugs, or George Grant.

One thing that is important to remember is that you can get similar results in several different ways. For example, if you just type world health organization in Google, you get 2,930,000 hits, but if you type "world health organization", indicating that you want

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)
June 2003

to search for the phrase, you retrieve 898,000 results. This is the same as the "using exact phrase" search we did in the Advanced Search window.

Using Truncation

If you want to search for something and you aren't sure exactly how the word ends, you can use a wildcard character. This is most often an asterisk or a dollar sign that signifies any possible letters. For example, if you type book*, you will find references to book, books, bookstore, booksale, bookend, bookseller, etc. Once again, you need to look in the help files for the search engine you are using, or just try it and see which symbol gives you the desired results.

Search Tips

Okay, we're in the homestretch here for what I want to cover today. I need to give you a few tips.

1. Always search on more than one engine. You'll get different results from different search engines. We're going to learn about some niche search engines and some on what is called the "Invisible Web". Use those in addition to the general, commercial sites.
2. Remember that on many sites, especially Yahoo and Excite, the entries at the top paid to be there. So, search a little further and use search engines that are less commercial.
3. Get to know the advanced search features. Use them.
4. Read the help files.
5. Watch your spelling -- both right and wrong. For example, if you are searching for something on the Renaissance, you might want to search under the correct spelling, as well as search for rennaisance and rennaissance to ensure that you get those sites where someone else might have made an error. Also, remember foreign spellings (color and colour; dialog and dialogue).
6. Brainstorm alternative words. Remember the example of the cats? You might want to also search for feline. One of the handouts that I will have for you on Friday is a brainstorm list of alternative words for some popular topics.

Things to Avoid When Searching Online

From the Heart Romance Writers is chapter #177 of the
Romance Writers of America®.

1. Do not browse directories if there is a search option. It can be overwhelming the amount of material you find on some sites. It may sound like a good idea to just start clicking links and see what you can find. It's usually a waste of time. Use the search box. Try all the words you have brainstormed and see if you can locate anything about your particular topic.
2. Be wary of "cool sites" or "recommended links" on commercial search engine sites. These are usually paid links and the material might not be as reliable as on sites that you have to dig a little deeper to find.
3. Verify the source of the material. Know that there is a lot of good information out there, so don't discount it all. There is also a lot of bad information, so use a bit of caution.

That concludes today's lecture. The homework assignment is on the next page. Tomorrow we will explore targeted searches, and then we will follow that discussion with evaluating web sites. This is a lot of information to take in all at once. Don't worry about it. We will go back through everything. Use this as a guideline, just jump in and try things -- that way I can give you more one-on-one assistance, and hang on to this as a reference.

Day 2 Homework Assignment

This assignment is going to get you thinking a little deeper about your topic. I want you to break this exercise down into parts.

1. What are the keywords you need to be able to search your topic? For example, Victoria, Kansas, George Grant, Ft. Hays. What else? Use the same topic you chose for Monday's homework and brainstorm as many words as possible. Remember the "cat" "feline" example. Synonyms. Misspellings. Alternative spellings. List them here. (I have a list of words for each of you that I will give to you AFTER you do the assignment!)

Research for Writers:

Unearthing Online Treasures

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)
June 2003

P a g e | **13**

2. Now, use the words you created above and go back to the same website you used Monday. This time, use the Advanced Search window. If you want to try the Boolean operators, try those. Whatever it takes to search deeper into your topic. Once again, answer these questions:

Which website did you choose?

What did you search for (exactly)?

How many sites did your search retrieve?

3. Look at the top two sites that displayed in the general list of search results. When you visit those sites, use the "lecture" from today and the actual websites to answer these questions about each one:

What was the site's URL:

Which of the 7 basic types of websites was it?

Did it give you any helpful information or tell you something you didn't know?

Explain.

What was the site's URL:

Which of the 7 basic types of websites was it?

Did it give you any helpful information or tell you something you didn't know?

Explain.

Day 3: Targeted Searches

Understanding the "Hidden Web"

As the web becomes more interactive with formats that include video, sound, graphics, even PDF files, it becomes more difficult to find all of that information using general search engines. To access that type of information, you need some specific search tools.

There are several specific tools for finding this hidden content:

1. Directories/Portals: useful for a broader topic
2. Invisible/Deep Web: when you need information that would likely be in a database or changes more often than "static" content
3. Specialized search engines: when you want to narrow the topic

Directories/Portals

Directory/portal websites include large collections of links, arranged in some type of a logical format. Directories are NOT search engines, although some of the more general directories, such as Yahoo!, also include a search engine. The content is pre-screened, evaluated, and annotated, so it's controlled by others. This has a tendency to date the information and can change the outcome of a raw search.

Examples:

- **Librarians' Index to the Internet**: www.lii.org, which lists 11,000+ Internet resources, including invisible Web resources.
- **FindLaw**: www.findlaw.com, which lists legal resources for lawyers, businesses, students, and individuals.
- **InfoMine**: http://infomine.ucr.edu, which lists scholarly resources from University of California - Riverside and contains 118,000+ sites
- **WWW Virtual Library**: www.vlib.org, which provides subject guides
- **About.com**: www.about.com, which is a portal of topics (not one of my favorites because of the questionable way in which they deal with contracted writers, but they do have a lot of information)

Invisible/Deep Web

The invisible web is what you cannot retrieve in general search engines. Most of the invisible web consists of thousands of specialized databases. The rest consists of excluded pages -- page the general "spiders' cannot retrieve -- such as PDF files, those requiring a username and/or password, pages where you need to type the input to get information.

Let me give you an example: I go to Yahoo! And search for government agent. Yahoo! Gathers information from previously indexed sites and shows me the results. In a specialized database, I can enter government agent and that data is not collected ahead of time or even indexed; the search engine gathers the information at that time and pulls it out just for my search.

There are several gateways to the Invisible Web:

- **Invisible-Web**: www.invisible-web.net (my personal favorite)
- **CompletePlanet**: www.completeplanet.com (my second favorite)
- **InvisibleWeb**: www.invisibleweb.com
- **DirectSearch**: www.freepint.com/gary/direct.htm
- **LincOn.com**: www.lincon.com (3000+ databases divided into 34 topics; primarily business)
- **Internets**: www.internets.com
- **Internet Public Library**: www.ipl.org
- **Fossick**: www.fossick.com (mostly academic)

Within these "gateways" you will find information about specific databases, including such things as:

- **AnimalSearch** (http://animalsearch.net) about animals
- **ERIC** (www.askeric.org) about education
- **Nature Serve Explorer** (www.natureserve.org/explorer)
- **Nuclear Explosions Database** (www.agso.gov.au/databases/20010926_4.jsp)
- **PubMed** (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi)
- **FindArticles** (www.findarticles.com/cf_0/PI/index.jhtml)

Specialized Search Engines

Research for Writers:

Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)

Unearthing Online Treasures

June 2003

P a g e | **16**

Specialized search engines search collections of material about a particular subject. This can include actual material on the Internet, collections of documents, abstracts of documents located in a separate physical location, collections of data.

Specialized search engines can be small or large. Examples include Medline, Thomas Legislative Information, America's Job Bank, and Internet Movie Database.

Tips for using Specialized Search Engines:

1. If a specialized search engine has a search box for a collection of sites, you can try it, but I suggest going to individual specialized sites to do the actual search.
2. Use a keyword that pertains to the specialized search engine. For example, on a site for sheriffs, you would search for officer rather than cop.
3. Many specialized search engines are not as powerful as general search engines and most require you to use regular Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) rather than plus/minus signs.

Developing a Search Strategy

Now that you've had a chance to see some of the tools, you can think about your own web search strategy. I usually procede this way:

1. Search with the first words that come to mind using www.teoma.com and www.google.com. That helps me brainstorm.
2. Brainstorm as many words as I can about my topic. Write them all down.
3. Do more advanced searches on www.teoma.com and www.google.com. Gather as much info as possible, bookmarking sites that offer additional information.
4. I go to one of the gateway sites for the "Invisible Web" and do a search on the terms I brainstormed. I start making a list of hits.
5. I go to each one of the sites that turn up in the search I conducted in step 4 and find the ones that seem to relate to my topic.
6. At the specific specialized sites, I do another search of my topics.
7. I also use the library if I find books that I cannot access online.

Using these steps helps you find information that you would not have located had you limited your search to the general Internet.

From the Heart Romance Writers is chapter #177 of the
Romance Writers of America®.

Research for Writers:
Susan D. Lanier-Graham©
(http://www.thotinfo.com)

Unearthing Online Treasures
June 2003

P a g e | **17**

Day 3: Homework Assignment

1. Using the terms you came up with yesterday while brainstorming, I want you to pick one of these gateway sites to visit:

- **Invisible-Web**: www.invisible-web.net (my personal favorite)
- **CompletePlanet**: www.completeplanet.com (my second favorite)
- **InvisibleWeb**: www.invisibleweb.com
- **DirectSearch**: www.freepint.com/gary/direct.htm
- **LincOn.com**: www.lincon.com (3000+ databases divided into 34 topics; primarily business)
- **Internets**: www.internets.com
- **Internet Public Library**: www.ipl.org
- **Fossick**: www.fossick.com (mostly academic)

Which one did you pick?

2. Now, using the terms you selected yesterday, or ones you've come up with since then, do your search for specialized and hidden sites.

What terms did you use?

Briefly explain the results.

3. Now pick one or two of the results and visit those sites.

List the URLs for the sites you visited:

Explain how that site helped, if at all.

Explain how it was different from the earlier searches.

Day 4: Evaluating Web Sites and Information and Examining Web Tools

Evaluating Web Sites and Information

Remember back on the first day we talked about the seven different types of web sites? Advocacy, commercial, informational, entertainment, educational, news, and personal. Each of those offers different types of information. Although finding a personal site does not necessarily mean it's a bad site, you need to be aware of the type of site and be able to evaluate the information. There are five major things to consider when you evaluate websites.

1. **Authority**: Look at who authored/created the site. Does that person/entity have the expertise, knowledge, insight, or credentials to make him/her an authority? To evaluate authority, ask:
   a. who is responsible for the content?
   b. what are that person's qualifications?
   c. how can you contact that person/organization?
2. **Accuracy**: Determine if the information is reliable and free from factual error. Reliable sites should be accurate. To determine accuracy, check to determine:
   . are references cited?
   a. is there a description of the research methods used to obtain data?
   b. are there links leading to other sites of good quality?
   c. is the page free of spelling and other errors?
3. **Objectivity**: Determine if the site is free of bias or distortion. Sights should be objective to ensure the best quality research information. To evaluate the objectivity, ask:
   . is the site selling something, supporting a cause, expressing personal opinions?
   a. are viewpoints balanced or one-sided?
   b. has factual information been distorted or broadly interpreted?
4. **Currency**: Determine if the site is current and then ask yourself how important that is in your research. To determine the site's currency, determine:
   . when was the site created?
   a. when was the site last updated?
   b. is the date provided for important information found on the site?

5. **Coverage**: Considering the users the site targets, is the depth of information satisfactory?
   To determine the level of coverage, ask:
   . is information on the site geared to a specific audience?
      a. is the site devoted to one topic or many topics?
      b. is there a site map that lists all of the information available on the site?

Note: Just because a site is specifically targeted to a narrow audience, is attempting to sell something, or contains old data, it doesn't necessarily mean the site is not useful. You must just be aware of the data, where it's coming from, and why it presents the information in the way it does.

Web Tools

This isn't really a necessity for doing research on the Internet, but I wanted to take a moment to talk about some of the web tools available to assist you. Most of the web tools available to assist in searches are in the forms of toolbars and search agents.

The search toolbars are free programs you can download. They add a row of search buttons to the browser. Most of these work best with Internet Explorer rather than Netscape Navigator. I really enjoy the Google toolbar, but it's not yet available for use with Netscape Navigator. Here are three of my favorites:

1. **Google Toolbar**: http://toolbar.google.com
2. **Teoma Search bar**: http://sp.ask.com/docs/teoma/toolbar
3. **Yahoo! Companion bar**: http://companion.yahoo.com

There are also search agents that I have found useful. These agents are free standing applications that organize your searches for you. There are free versions of both available for download and more advanced versions that range from $19.95 to $79.95, offering advanced tools for managing, analyzing, and tracking web-based information. Here is an overview of the two top search agents:

1. **Copernic**: www.copernic.com (I have Copernic on my own system, but just the basic free version)
2. **First Stop WebSearch**: www.firststopwebsearch.com

From the Heart Romance Writers is chapter #177 of the
Romance Writers of America®.

Day 4 Homework Assignments

Part I: Using the five points above, evaluate the following information you might find in a typical web search. Explain how you would rate the site based on all five of those points. Remember to examine the links on the page to get as much information as you can about the site, its author(s), and the accuracy of the information. Here are the sites you need to evaluate (by the way, some of you might find these useful for your own research topics):

1. http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/british_social_history
2. http://www.dohistory.org/archive/doc071/071_p35_img.html
3. http://www.over-land.com/station.html

Part II:

Answer the following questions to see how much you know about the five ways to evaluate websites:

1. Two good indicators of accuracy are:
   a. Author is professor of major university
   b. Facts and figures are what you were expecting
   c. Page is sponsored by reputable corporation
   d. References are cited
   e. There's a description of research methods used to obtain data
2. If you do an internet search for a news topic and find a CNN report on it, you should remember to check for what?
. Date page was created or last updated
   a. News desk editor's name
   b. Contact information for webmaster
   c. The URL to see if it's a .edu site
   d. Names of companies advertising in the banner ads
3. Choose three questions to ask yourself when evaluating the authority of information on the web:
. What are their qualifications for providing information on this topic?
   a. Who is responsible for content?
   b. Is the site selling something, supporting a cause, expressing personal opinions?
   c. Is there a description of the research methods used to obtain data?

From the Heart Romance Writers is chapter #177 of the
Romance Writers of America®.

d.   How can the responsible person or organization be contacted?
4.   Choose the three reasons that explain why it is so hard to determine the objectivity of information on the web.

.   Because inaccurate information can sometimes be useful
  a.   Because sometimes information on the web is deceptive
  b.   Because sometimes information is biased in a positive way
  c.   Because it can be hard to determine who is responsible for information on a site
  d.   Because there's little difference between opinion and fact

5.   A site that is deliberately misleading, deceptive in design, and that contains inaccurate facts and false contact information is most likely what?

.   Maintained by a non-profit organization
  a.   Selling you something
  b.   Authoritative
  c.   Current
  d.   A hoax, propaganda, or satiric site

6.   What kind of site provides a forum for individual expression?

.   A biased site
  a.   An entertainment site
  b.   A personal site
  c.   An objective site
  d.   An inaccurate site

7.   What feature on a web site will give you a feel for its coverage?

.   A hit counter
  a.   A "Best of the Web" award emblem
  b.   A URL ending in .org
  c.   A bio
  d.   A site map or index

8.   Which of these is NOT one of the five criteria for evaluating information on the web?

.   Objectivity
  a.   Currency
  b.   Reliability
  c.   Accuracy
  d.   Authority