Writing@CSU

Writing@CSU Writing Guide

Reading the Internet

This guide provides a brief overview of the processes involved in reading the "Web" (or internet). Developed in the late 1990s, while the Web was still a relatively new and rapidly changing environment, it continues to offer useful insights into the challenges of reading documents intended for delivery on the internet. The internet is an incredible resource for writing and research. And in order to use it properly, it's crucial to have at least a basic understanding of how it works. See our guide on ' Conducting Digital Research' for further information on using the internet as a resource.

How Online Documents Differ from Print Documents

Though online documents are similar to print documents in many ways there are some key differences that you should be aware of in order to become a better reader of online material. In today's world, journals and other documents are becoming more and more available online, and less available in print. So, it's important to understand how to use the internet as a scholarly resource, and to have some understanding of the inner-workings of the Web.

Associative Structures

Texts on the Web are structured in a more associative manner than traditional print texts. Information is displayed using nodes and links. A node is a chunk of information. it may be a page, a paragraph, a sentence, or a character. A node can even be a graphic. A link is a connection between nodes. You will often see links

represented in blue underlined text that turns purple after you visit that link, these are the default colors. links will not always appear this way, oftentimes links are buttons or graphics.

There are three basic structures of links and nodes that Web documents usually follow. Every document may not resemble wholly one of these structures but may contain elements of any number of these structures.

Linear Structures

A linear structure is much like turning the pages of a book, you can move through the text in two directions forward and backwards. Nodes and links are arranged in a linear pattern.
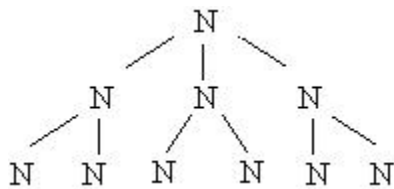
This is a model of a linear structure.

N— N— N— N— N— N

"N" represents a node and "—" represents a link.

Hierarchical Structures

A hierarchical structure

This is a model of a hierarchical structure.

"N" represents a node and "—" represents a link.

Web-like Structures

A Web-like structure has no apparent structure. Nodes may be linked to a variety of other nodes. If you imagine each node as a particular Web-site, the World Wide Web is structured this way.

This is a model of a Web-like structure.

"N" represents a node and "—" represents a link.

Web Documents are Highly Interactive

Not to say that searching the library or picking up the phone is not interactive, but within Web documents everything is at your fingertips. And you, the reader, have far greater control over how the interaction takes place. Imagine being in the library and having to go from the West wing on the third floor to the south wing in the basement, with the Web you could be at the library at Oxford looking at the Canterbury Tales before you could make it downstairs.

Web Documents are More Navigable

Web documents contain built in navigational features. The Web encourages and supports movement to other pieces information in multiple directions. For instance to access information quickly in a book you look in the index and then flip to any of a number of pages, if the information you seek is not on that page you go back to the index and repeat the process until you find what you're looking for. With the Web this process is condensed significantly, you can "flip" pages instantaneously with a click of the mouse.

Web Documents Contain an Abundance of Graphics

When reading the Web you have to deal with a large amount of graphics. You're likely familiar with ads, photos, tables, and figures; but what about icons, buttons, thumbnails, mouse-overs, or virtual reality.

Icons

Web documents often use icons to represent some sort of functionality. For instance on your desktop the icon for Microsoft Word is a piece of paper that represents the word processor.

Buttons

Buttons are often used as graphical links, when you click on them you go somewhere else. For instance the graphic in the top right hand corner of this frame is a button that allows you to go back to the Graphics overview page.

Menu bars

Menu bars are a collection of buttons that usually contain key links within the site. For example the menu bar on the bottom of this page contains buttons that link to the homepage, the sitemap, the index, help, etc.

Thumbnails

Thumbnails are small versions of graphics that produce larger versions of the graphic when clicked on. The smaller file size of thumbnails allows them to be loaded more quickly and saves space on the page for other information. Thumbnails also allow you a quick view at a graphic and the choice to view it in more detail if you wish.

Mouse-overs

Have you ever noticed a change in a graphic when you move your mouse over it? Mouse-overs are used mainly to draw attention to where your mouse is on the screen, but they also may highlight other features. For example run your mouse over the menu bar at the bottom of this page. You will notice that the button your mouse is over changes from gold to blue when your mouse is over it.

Virtual Reality

Virtual Reality is a three dimensional graphical representation on your screen. When viewing virtual reality you move through the space just as you would in say a

three dimensional video game. You might have to open doors or retrieve objects, to get the information you are looking for. Today, virtual reality is mainly used for video games and AI research. But in the future, who knows? Perhaps we will live, work, and operate in a completely Virtual Reality.

The Web is Inconceivably Huge

The Web grows by the day increasing, increasing it's own size exponentially and constantly. The amount of information on the internet far exceeds what the largest library in the world could hold in print. There are both advantages and disadvantages to the infinite nature of working online. The internet contains a great deal of useful information that is easily accessible. At the same time, there is quite a bit of false, biased, filtered, and/or distracting content as well. An effective internet researcher is both wary and sure of what they're looking for.

How We Read the World Wide Web

When reading the Web you have strong Critical Reading skills. When reading online we use clues from the text to decode messages just as we do when reading print. Online documents use many of the same clues you'll find when reading print and a few new ones. Knowing what these new clues are and how readers use them can make your online reading experience more enjoyable and more productive.

What's New When Reading the Web

The multimedia nature and computer interface of the Web enables it to offer the reader more assistance in finding the information they need than print documents can. Knowledge of the features presented here will help you locate information quickly within a site and remember where you are.

URLs—Web addresses

URL— Universal Resource Locators— are addresses for websites. Every webpage has its own URL. You're probably familiar with URLs, they look like this: **http://www. colostate.edu/** You can find the URL of a page in the address bar of your browser.

Address 🔲 http://www.colostate.edu/Depts

If you want to remember the exact location of a page be sure to record the entire URL.

The URL can reveal quite a bit of useful information about the website, information you need to determine how well the site meets your needs: **http://www.colostate. edu/index.html**

- **http:** is the protocol, it tells the computer how to interpret the page
- **www** is the host of the site
- **colostate** is the directory that the page is in
- **.edu** is the type of site it is (educational)
    - **.com** is a commercial site
    - **.gov** is a government site
    - **.org** is a non-profit site
- **index.html** is the particular webpage you are at

Site Maps

Site maps are rather self explanatory, nevertheless a helpful feature of many websites that you may not be aware of. A site map is a graphical representation of the site. It will tell you where particular sections and pages are found within the site.

Click on the "site map" button on the bottom of this page to view the site map of the Writing Center. The "previous" button on the top left hand corner of the site map will bring you back here.

Search

Many large websites will contain search functions. There are large search engines, such as Yahoo! or Google, and there are smaller search engines that may be contained within one website.

Search functions can be very helpful if you are looking for a specific piece of information within a large site.

Within a search engine, there are various symbols/words you can utilize to specify /narrow your search. They are known as "Search Operators". Here are some examples:

- Quotations ("...") can be used to search for an exact match in phrasing. This can be more useful than using keywords if you know exactly what you're looking for.
- "OR" when written in capital letters can separate two terms and create a search for either one or the other.
- Minus (-) can be used to exclude terms from a search.

Frames

Frames break up the document into multiple areas. This site is displayed using frames: this window appears in the right frame, the overview in the left frame, and the menu in the bottom frame. Notice that the menu bar never changes as you move through the site—this is possible because of frames.

When reading documents displayed in frames try to figure out the pattern that the information is displayed in. More often than not there will be a menu bar or other functional area that stays with you as you move through the site, they are helpful in navigating the site and in avoiding getting lost.

Functional Areas

Functional areas are a part of the screen that serves a particular use. Functional areas may include menus, forms, toolbars, etc. Functional areas are helpful places to look when you are lost. Well designed functional areas will be consistent throughout the site.

- ### Headers, Footers, Side Bars

Many times you will find key information pertaining to a site in areas you would consider a header or footer in a print document. Similarly, in webpages, you might

find key information in a sidebar. Look to the top and bottom of the page or the top and bottom of your screen and along both sides for menu items, important links and important information about the site.

- **Menu bars**

Menu bars are a collection of buttons that usually contain key links within the site. For example the menu bar on the bottom of this page contains buttons that link to the homepage, the sitemap, the index, help, etc.

- **Toolbars**

You're likely familiar with tool bars in the software that you use—a group of buttons that each allow you to perform a function. Though less common in webpages, you may still encounter them and if they are present they may be helpful in using the site.

The Successful Internet Reader

Just as with print, we read on the internet for a variety of reasons. We may be online to carelessly surf and entertain ourselves, or to find some needed piece of information, or to interact with people and texts around the world. While the following criteria for success apply mainly to the reader in search of research-related information, you may find them helpful in other ways as well.

Synthesize, Associate, Connect!

To succeed on the internet you have to think like the internet. Information is not stored or presented in a linear manner, you've got to be willing to think associatively—what connections can you make between the text you are reading and a text that may contain the information you are looking for? Or a piece of text that you've recently read?

You've got to synthesize material quickly, yet carefully. You'll be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information available online. So, be prepared to evaluate information and decide how it meets or does not meet your needs. Where does this or that piece of information fit into the schema of your work?

Always ensure that what you're reading is worth reading at all. The internet is a wide and unfiltered platform, equally full of both reliable resources and false information.

Distracted— To Be or Not To Be

You may be carelessly surfing the Web for pure entertainment, but if you have a goal in mind do your best to stick to it. The internet is full of distractions such as advertisements, links to this and that, etc. You may find something of use if you wander a bit, but you also could get hopelessly lost. Some would argue that the distractions are what makes the internet great, but it comes down to what is your purpose for being there.

Where Am I and How Did I Get Here?

Being lost on the internet isn't as life threatening as being lost in the woods, but it can be equally frustrating at times. Do your best to avoid that lost feeling and the ensuing panic. Many of the tips in the Strategies for online reading section help with knowing where you are including using the history function on your browser, using sitemaps, and menu bars.

Strategies for effective reading on the World Wide Web

Reading the Web takes some getting used to. Just remember that with every focused visit to the internet, you will become a better reader of online material— practice makes perfect.

Be a confident Web reader

When reading online, it helps tremendously to be a calm and confident reader. Avoid panic and frustration and concentrate on fixing any problems you may

encounter with a clear head. The more patient you are the more you will learn. Each time you surf the Web you will become better at it. Think of how comfortable you are reading a book, that comfort level has developed over many years as will your comfort level with reading online.

Making your Browser Work for You

Your browser is your way into the internet. Google Chrome is by far the most popular internet browser; some alternatives are Safari, Firefox, and Microsoft Edge. To make the most out of your visits to the Web, take advantage of the built-in functionality of your browser. The following list offers some simple suggestions to make your browser work for you.

Histories

Both Apple and Microsoft incorporate History functions into their browsers. A history is a list of the webpages you have visited. If you get lost or wish to go back to a page you were previously at, check the history list for where you want to be.

Favorites/bookmarks

Browsers allow you to mark and save a list of webpages that you find useful or entertaining. In almost any modern browser, you can "bookmark" the webpage to access it easily anytime. Creating a list of bookmarks or favorites is a handy tool especially when you visit sites frequently and want to get to them quickly. Once you create a bookmark or favorite file you can access the list at any time and click on one of the sites to go directly there.

Following path names

The URL is also what is called a path name. it describes the path to a particular file. By following the path name you may be able to locate your position and find key pages within a website. For Example:

> http://writing.colostate.edu/index.html

Notice that it ends in "index.html." this is a standard name for a homepage (this happens to be the homepage to the Writing Center Web site at CSU) so if you see it in the URL you know you're at a homepage or you can type it in at the end of the URL and you may get to a homepage.

Each backslash "/" denotes a new directory.Every directory that you chop off will lead you to a new directory homepage. For example if you chop off "/WritingCenter /index.html" you will end up at the department directory. If you then chop off " /Depts" you will end up with "http://www.colostate.edu" which is the homepage for CSU.

Using multiple browser windows

You should know about multiple browser windows for two reasons to avoid confusion when they open up on you and to use this tactic to your advantage.

A link may open up a new browser window and you might find that when you click your back button, you don't go back to the site you were at. Just click on the button on the toolbar at the bottom of your screen with the other browser, find the original window or tab, and you will get back to where you were.

Sometimes you may find it helpful to use multiple browser windows, perhaps when you are filling out a form at one place and want to view information from another while you fill out the form or when you don't want to lose a site, but want to continue surfing. All internet browsers have various window/tab settings related to links, which can usually be changed by the user.

Browser information

Different browsers work better or worse for different users, do some research and find out what works best for you! Click the links below for further information about each of these major internet browsers:

Note: Clicking on these links will open up a new browser window

- [Google Chrome](#)

- [Firefox](#)
- [Microsoft Edge](#)
- [Safari](#)

Additional Resources

Indeed - '[The Complete Guide To Google Search Operators](#)'

Purdue OWL - '[Evaluating Digital Sources](#)'

Purdue OWL - '[Internet References](#)'

Purdue OWL - '[The Internet and Search Engines](#)'

University System of Georgia - '[Tips for Using the Internet](#)'

University of Minnesota Crookston - '[Using Internet Sources](#)'

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