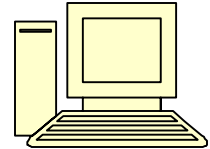# Net-Wise Tips for Writers

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Need to find that special fact or statistic?   In search of credibility:

Today-in-History for any day of the year	http://www.scopesys.com/anyday/
U.S. Biographical Info for American History	http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/B/
Harper's Statistical Index	http://www.harpers.org/harpers-index/listing.html
Statistical Abstract of the U.S. social trends	http://www.census.gov/statab/www/
Roper Center for Public Opinion polls	http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu
Gallup Organization poll archives	http://www.gallup.com
News, medical conditions, & research	http://www.citeline.com
Who runs the web site you're quoting?	http://find.pcworld.com/40691

Can't find your topic on the Internet?   Basic search engine savvy:

- ✓ If you're writing about ski resorts in Vermont, in the search box type: **ski vermont**
  Using uppercase retrieves only web sites with Vermont capitalized, lowercase gets both.
- ✓ If you want sites about Tolstoy's novel "War and Peace," type: **"War and Peace"**
  The double quotes make it a phrase search, not just any pages about war & any about peace.
- ✓ If you're not sure about a spelling, use wildcard characters: **gene*logy and chemi***
  The asterisk replaces one or more characters, so **chemi*** gets chemical, chemistry, chemist.
- ✓ If you want multiple topics in a single web site, use AND or NEAR:
  So, **"war and peace" AND tolstoy** gets web pages with the phrase and the name present.
  But, **"war and peace" NEAR tolstoy** gets pages with the phrase & name <10 words apart.
- ✓ If you want either topic or to exclude a topic, use OR or NOT:
  Typing: **peanut OR butter** retrieves web pages with either word present.
  Typing: **peanut NOT butter** gets web pages about peanuts that do not mention butter.
  What happens if you type: **"peanut butter"** as a phrase?
- ✓ So typing: **"chocolate cake" AND recipe NOT nuts** gets you chocolate cake recipes (not cookie recipes) that don't include nuts, caveat—if nuts are listed as optional you still won't get that web page in your results because you excluded pages where the word nuts existed.
- ✓ The search string you type into the search engine's "search box" can become very complex to get exactly what you want the first time— and without a lot of extra *misfits*. For instance:
  For information on the history of the ownership of the Mona Lisa masterpiece, type:

  ("mona lisa" AND owner*) OR ("mona lisa" NEAR history)

When I needed information for a Christian History article on Dante's epic poem *The Divine Comedy* and it's link with the 1st Jubilee Pilgrimage of 1300 A.D., I used special keywords:

like:www.dante.com   this gets web sites similar to the one I specified

url:dante   this gets web sites with "dante" in the URL

Need a small fact without reading web sites?   Search Engine Tricks:

www.alltheweb.com   See more information about any URL with this downloadable
bookmark/toolbar button. Visit http://find.pcworld.com/40760 to add it to your web browser.

www.ask.com   Type common questions in the knowledge base, such as *how many cups are in a gallon?* , and you'll receive a direct answer.

www.google.com   Type **define** and then a term in the search box to check what it means. Try this with new terms or genre jargon that is not yet in standard or on-line dictionaries.

www.search.msn.com   View your search term in bold text throughout the result descriptions.

www.yahoo.com   NewsSearch lets you peruse topics from more than 7000 news sources.

Still can't find quite what you need?   Search the *INVISIBLE* Web:

➢ More and more companies are migrating to providing information via on-line databases rather than creating web pages for large amounts of data – it's cheaper and easier to update.

➢ Each database, or group of databases, provides specialized search tools because the information contained is NOT searchable by normal web browser's search engines.

➢ Here are a few web sites with database directories, which break information into categories.
  1. The Invisible Web Directory   www.invisible-web.net
  2. For Academic Research   http://infomine.ucr.edu
  3. Complete Planet   www.completeplanet.com
  4. Lycos Invisible Web Catalog   http://dir.lycos.com/Reference/Searchable%5FDatabases

➢ Three MetaSearch sites query web catalogs and some invisible web material:
  www.dogpile.com   www.search.com   and   http://ez2find.com/

➢ For updated advice on hidden sources, periodically check http://lii.org

Evaluating the Quality of Web Research Resources   Credibility Challenge

Information published on the web is seldom subjected to the level of review (by peers, editors or experts) that has become standard practice in print publishing. When you search the web for serious research questions, you run the risk of being misled by ill-informed web sites.

1. **Author Identity and Objectivity** – Identify the author and evaluate his or her credentials.

2. **Content** – Examine the content of the web site. A date on the page helps identify timeliness. To what depth is the subject covered? Have important topics or considerations been omitted?

3. **Form and Appearance** – Look for poor grammar, spelling errors, loud colors, graphics that do not add to the content of the page. All these indicators suggest a low-quality resource.

4. **What to do**? – If you decide to rely on a questionable resource, find a corroborating source.

E-mail driving you crazy? A new trend is *targeted e-mail addresses*:

Clutter Attacks our E-mail in-boxes and tempts us to fritter away our time.

Writers tend to become over-involved in multiple projects in various areas of their lives. Until recently, I received 120-150 e-mails daily in my "nitepand" mailbox. A recent trend among on-line research professionals is *targeted e-mail addresses*.

Basically, these net-savvy folks create an e-mail address for each project or segment of their life. While this initially sounds disjointed and confusing, with a bit of practice it becomes *a time-saving tool*. I've found it *relieves that mental whiplash* of trying to wade through a myriad of e-mail topics, sources, and spam. Also, using *targeted e-mail addresses,* lets the SPAM filter on my *sub* e-mail accounts be set to *high* without compromising my ability to receive large attachments when necessary on my primary e-mail.

ISP's Support Targeted E-mail Addresses

Many ISPs (Internet Service Providers, such as Earthlink and MSN) allow you to create up to 10 different email addresses within your account. In addition, several free e-mail providers such as Yahoo and Juno are still available.

Start SLOWLY if you want to give this a try

How does this work? Start gradually! Creating several e-mail addresses at once is merely an exercise in *crazy-making*. Creating targeted e-mail address allows me to only check sub e-mail accounts on the weekend. If you want more details, read on; otherwise, skip to the next topic.

How It Worked for Me

Last summer my husband and I created a "nitepanda" account to separate his e-mail from mine, and "applesofgold" for my college teaching-related research. I never check his email, immediately dropping my *eyeball-deep* daily e-mails 40-50 messages; then I set an automated response on "applesofgold" saying it is only checked when I'm actively researching a topic, and it is set so senders must be in my address book or incoming messages are automatically deleted – i.e., no spam allowed. Last December I created a "learnhtml54" account for former students to use since my college e-mail account goes away when I'm not actively teaching yet I don't want to give them my personal e-mail. I created "picketfence13" for fellow speakers and speaking contacts to use, further segmenting my e-mail inbox and allowing me to focus on e-mail about a particular area of my life at a time. For all those Internet sites that insist on having my email address before I can access information, I use a Juno e-mail address; I delete everything in it once a month. Since I purchased my Internet domain name, ClearGlassView.com, I've set up my latest e-mail sub-account: ClearGlassView@netscape.net for use by editors and writing research contacts.

Success Saves Me Almost Ten Hours Per Week

Try it gradually; see if it works as well for you as it has for me. Now, using *targeted e-mail addresses*, I only received 25-30 e-mail messages a day in my primary account, the other accounts I check weekly or monthly, and e-mail no longer eats away hours of my writing time each day.

I continue to fine-tune my e-mail handling, some e-mail likely bounces off my SPAM filters never to be seen, some e-mail still gets *lost* among the myriad of listserv e-mails I receive, but I'm not giving away two hours a day of my valuable time either. Every tool has trade-offs, you decide.

Writer's Toolbox of Most-Used Web Sites

- Guide to Grammar and Writing   http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/
- Miriam-Webster Online Dictionary & Thesaurus http://www.m-w.com
- Dictionary & Thesaurus   http://www.dictionary.com
- My favorite Writing Supplies Superstore   http://www.papyrusplace.com
- Find a Writer's Conference near you   http://writing.shawguides.com

Seven Favorites from hundreds of Quotations Databases on the Web
1. Quotation Center database http://www.cybernation.com/victory/quotations/directory.html
2. Bartlett's Quotations   http://www.online-literature.com/quotes/quotations.php
3. Quote of the Day   http://vicky.com/quotes/index.html
4. Inspiration Peak   http://www.inspirationpeak.com
5. Pilgrim's Path   http://pilgrimspath.org/quotes.html
6. Quotable Quotes   http://www.quotableonline.com/
7. QuoteLand   http://www.quoteland.com

Children's Writing Resource Sites
1. Writing Children's Books @ Write4Kids.com www.write4kids.com/
2. The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators - http://www.scbwi.org/

Poetry Resource Sites
3. Semantic Rhyming Dictionary http://rhyme.lycos.com/
4. Poetry Writing Workshops www.WritingClasses.com

Songwriter's Resource Sites
5. Songwriters' Muse http://www.musesmuse.com/
6. Songwriters, Composers & Lyricists http://www.scala.org.au/

Nonfiction Resource Sites
7. Creative NonFiction on-line journal http://www.creativenonfiction.org/
8. Technical Writing – Mining Company http://techwriting.miningco.com/

General Fiction Resource Sites
9. Historical Fiction http://www.writepage.com/history.htm
10. Articles about Fiction Writing http://www.angelfire.com/va/storyguide/marn.html

Mystery Resource Site
11. Mystery Writers - a six week on-line course   www.zott.com/mysforum/links.htm

Romance Resource Sites
12. Romance novels: writing tips - www.writing.co.nz/writing/romance.htm
13. Romance Writers of America   http://www.rwanational.org/

Science Fiction Resource Site
14. Clarion West Science Fiction Writers' Workshop http://clarionwest.org/website/index.html