

The Internet: To Use or Not to Use, That is The Question.

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These days one just has to wake up in the morning and the constant bombardment of Internet addresses begin. The Internet provides a wealth of information some good, however most is garbage, and sifting through it can sometimes be long and tedious. This information can be used to enhance the classroom experience, but we must remember that information on the Internet changes everyday. Once we become aware of this fact we can better prepare to share the wonders of the Internet with our students.

One experience I remember from my days as an education student involved one teacher I was observing. In an attempt to incorporate the Internet into a lesson on the HMS Titanic on the Internet, she would have them perform a directed search to find information on the topic. She spent the night before searching for a web site that would meet her needs and then recorded the steps she took to get there. The day of the lesson she took her students to the computer lab and instructed them on how to find the desired website. She gave them the web address URL for the search engine that she used and explained how to perform a search using the qualifier "HMS Titanic". She then told them to click on the fifth item listed in the search results, and to her horror the students ended up at an adult oriented site.

It is situations like this one that can lead us away from using the Internet as a classroom tool. I myself have been in a situation where the Internet has been more trouble than it is worth. We must take the time to sort the good from the bad. Here are some useful tips I use when I am looking for information on the Internet:

1. Use a meta-search engine like www.metacrawler.com or www.mamma.com to look for information. These sites let you qualify your search requests and they use several other engines like Yahoo and Excite to find results. Mamma even allows you to cut out any adult oriented content from your searches. This can cut down on the time that you spend searching.
2. When students are looking for information on the Internet, give them the web page addresses, or URLs, not the topic to search for. Doing this will limit the time they spend looking for information, and will maximize the time spent on relevant information.
3. When searching for information on the Internet for a class, use the computers the students will use. Some schools have firewalls set up to block specific content, so it is important to know if students will be able to access the information you want. I found this one out the hard way. I wanted students to look up credit card contracts and I found the information easily at home. I got to school the next day and gave them the web page addresses, only to be stopped by the school firewall. The students were unable to do the assignment and I had wasted an 80-minute class.

I hope these tips will help you get the most from the wealth of information available on the Internet.