

Internet – searching in the data ocean

The Internet offers manifold possibilities. You can download music, films, pictures and software, read and write e-mail, play games, chat, publish your own sites on the net and – last but not least – search for information.

There are many Internet websites that offer well-grounded knowledge. For example, quite a few **newspapers** and **periodicals** today have an online component. **Scientific institutions** also publish excerpts of essays and prognoses on the Internet. On the websites of important **museums**, you can read about the treasures in their collections, and you can search for books in the online catalogues of large **libraries**. So you should certainly use the Internet as a source of information for your work.

If you don't know about a specific Internet site containing information on your research topic, you can use a **search engine**. The website <http://www.internettutorials.net>, for example, can tell you how best to use a search engine and which ones exist.

There is so much data on the Internet that a search term like "migration" yields an abundance of web addresses and information. To examine and wade through them all would require a great deal of time. Therefore it makes sense to narrow the **search goal** by clarifying precisely in advance those questions you want to answer using the Internet. Convert these questions into appropriate **catchwords** and combine several during your research. Be aware that the rating in a search engine's results list reveals nothing about either the quality or the applicability of an Internet offering. When you have used your catchwords to find specific sites, note down which Internet addresses offer which information, in order to avoid a multiple search. In addition, decide how you want to handle the data: whether to print it out immediately, save it, send it per e-mail, copy down information by hand, etc.

As wonderful as the Internet's possibilities are, the information it contains is often questionable. So be careful: Just as you would not simply download files from the Internet indiscriminately, so should you not indiscriminately accept information you find there as fact. As with any other source, you must check the reliability and credibility of the information on your theme. In order to judge the **reliability of the Internet sites**, you should check them against the following questions:

- Who is the **author** of the site or who is operating the website? Do they have a specialist background? Are they museums, institutions, companies or private individuals? Here, the legal notice ("about us") required of every website can help.

Where to search

How to search

Checking
the information



- Is the **origin of the information** proven? Are there records such as source indicators, citations or references? If so, are they “reliable sources”?
- Are there **opinions** or references by other people or institutions about the website’s offerings or about its operator?
- What **content-related information** does the website offer? How comprehensive is its information on the subject? Does it conform with information from other sources (books, professional journals, archives, etc.)?
- How **topical** is the information? Is it presented in a factual, convincing, detailed and comprehensive way?
- How are the contents **presented**? Are there spelling mistakes? Are there problems with sentence structure or logic? Does the wording contain open or hidden judgements?

If you use these methods to check the information you’ve found on the Internet, you will quickly observe that the Internet cannot be your only source of information when you’re conducting historical research. Libraries, archives, museums but also interviews provide you with more material for your project.