

Internet Starting Points for Students

Finding Appropriate Starting Points for Online Research

Online Databases

Subscription Databases: Quality information, traditionally published in print as encyclopedias, almanacs, journals and other subject-specific, specialized publications, are now available through online subscriptions. Comprehensive coverage, sophisticated indexing and multi-media content make these databases appealing, powerful and reliable information sources. Public, academic and school libraries now offer this quality content to their patrons. Some school boards have board-wide licenses for subscription databases. In many boards, purchasing these resources is left up to individual schools.

The Canadian Encyclopedia: This encyclopedia is fully accessible on the free Internet. It is an excellent source for Canadian information. Articles at an easier reading level are available from the Junior Edition. Content is becoming more media-rich, with streamed audio and video from the CBC Archives. Articles include links to selected websites. This database includes the Canadian Encyclopedia of Music, and selected archived articles from Macleans magazine. Useful features include Quick Facts, thematic timelines, and the "100 Greatest Events in Canadian History". In general, the resource is rather text-intensive, but multimedia and interactive content are steadily increasing. Highly recommended.
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com>

Statistics Canada: Statistics Canada provides a wonderful source for original research and primary resources. Select the Learning Resources section to find resources for students and teachers. The Kid's Zone is of particular interest.
<http://www.statcan.ca>

E-STAT: Statistics Canada provides a service to educational institutions called E-STAT. E-STAT contains a wealth of curriculum-related statistics, lesson plans and supporting resources. E-STAT is available free to registered educational institutions, who are required to follow specific licensing guidelines relating to the use of statistical information. Find out your institution's User ID and Password to access this marvelous resource. To find E-STAT, go to the Statistics Canada website. Select Learning Resources, and then E-STAT.

Directories

Yahooligans: This is a directory of websites for children. Its focus is largely recreational, and it is a commercial site. Nevertheless, it provides a good starting point for student research.
<http://www.yahooligans.com>

Ask Jeeves: Ask Jeeves is another commercial directory that can be very useful for students. Its main strength is that it offers a natural language search function. Users may enter a question, word or phrase in the search box.
<http://www.ask.com>

Ask Jeeves Kids: This is the kids' version of Ask Jeeves.
<http://www.ajkids.com>

Information Please: This is a directory created by the Family Education Network. Useful features include the 4Teachers, 4Parents, Fact Monster Kids' Reference and Homework Center sections. Both sites have very busy homepages, and are full of very distracting advertising.
<http://www.infoplease.com>
<http://www.factmonster.com>

About: This is a directory prepared by subject experts. It has very good subject guides. About is now full of sponsored links. The directory is geared to general interests, but nevertheless the Homework Help section is useful.

<http://about.com>

Collections Canada: The National Library of Canada and the National Archives collaborate on this quality, non-commercial site. The site draws on the tremendous archives of both institutions, with links to interactive exhibits. When the two previously separate sites were amalgamated, the National Library's Kid's Page was removed, which is a tremendous loss. Nevertheless, this is one of the best sources for quality Canadian information. Recently, more "kid-specific" pages have appeared on the site. An excellent (but a bit hard to find) feature of this website is the "Canadian Information by Subject" index.

<http://www.collectionscanada.ca>

<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/caninfo/ecaninfo.htm>

Canada's Digital Collections: This is a Canadian government site offering a wonderful digital museum. It is an excellent source for finding reliable Canadian information. Organization tends to be a bit cumbersome, but the site offers a sophisticated full-text search interface.

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca>

Librarian's Index to the Internet: This is an excellent, annotated subject directory of Internet resources, evaluated by librarians. It is a service of the Library of California.

<http://lii.org>

Internet Public Library: The Internet Public Library is a service offered by the University of Michigan School of Information. It is a directory of appropriate information sources, organized by topic, just like a library. The KidSpace feature includes excellent subject links for students. The TeenSpace feature is more popular in content.

<http://www.ipl.org>

<http://www.ipl.org/div/kidspace>

<http://www.ipl.org/div/teen>

Educational Portals

StudentLink: StudentLink is a simple menu system of Internet links for connecting to thousands of appropriate, curriculum-based websites. Websites are selected for StudentLink by Ontario teachers with knowledge of the Ontario curriculum. Links are organized by grade, subject and strand, mirroring the structure of Ontario curriculum documents. StudentLink is available by subscription to individual schools or to school boards. Highly recommended. Find out more about StudentLink at:

<http://www.studentlink.org>

ClassMouse: ClassMouse is a menu system of Internet links selected to support the Ontario curriculum. ClassMouse includes links by specific expectations. ClassMouse is available by subscription to individual schools or to school boards. Highly recommended. Find out more about ClassMouse at:

<http://www.classmouse.com>

Canada's Schoolnet: This is a cooperative project between Industry Canada, provincial and territorial governments and the private sector. The aim of Canada's Schoolnet is to promote connectivity for Canadian schools, and to support the integration of ICT into instruction and learning. The Learning Resources section is a particularly good source for quality information, and includes approximately 7000 selected links for Canadian students.

<http://www.schoolnet.ca>

EdSelect: This site provides a useful starting point for teacher's to find curriculum-related web resources to meet the needs of the Ontario Curriculum and to develop information literacy. The site has been developed by a curriculum consultant with the Simcoe DSB.

<http://www.edselect.com>

Link to Learning: This site's goal is to provide Internet links appropriate for student use in the study of the Ontario curriculum. It is a personal endeavour by a Computer Resource Teacher from the York Region DSB. Links are organized by subject, grade, strand and unit. Useful as a teacher's starting point to preselect websites.

<http://www.linktolearning.com>

Enchanted Learning: This is an excellent and comprehensive directory of websites suitable for children of all ages, but most particularly to younger students. Now offered by subscription, the site still includes much free content. Links are sorted by categories, and there is also a simple search function. The interface is very busy and rather amateurish, which makes it more challenging to navigate.

<http://www.EnchantedLearning.com>

Kidsclick: This is a directory of pre-selected websites chosen by teacher-librarians and sorted in Dewey decimal subject order. All links are annotated. Annotations include reading levels. This is an excellent academic directory for elementary students. Highly recommended. American.

<http://www.kidsclick.org>

42eXplore: This website was created by Annette Lamb, a leader in information literacy for elementary students. The directory has basic organization by subject area. Each topic has definitions, activities, four good research starting points on the Internet, and many more links and resources. Highly recommended. American.

<http://www.42explore.com>

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators: This is a categorized list of sites for enhancing curriculum and for teachers' professional growth. Links are organized by topic. It is comprehensive and frequently updated. More suitable for finding teaching resources than as a student starting point. American.

<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide>

History for Kids: This website is written for school students by university professors. Links are organized on a timeline, by geographic location and by subtopic (architecture, food, clothing, etc.). It looked promising in its infancy, but is now full of very distracting advertising, which seriously detracts from the quality content. American.

<http://www.historyforkids.org>

The Science Spot: This is an excellent starting point for finding relevant websites by topic. A middle school science teacher from Illinois developed this site. The Kid Zone offers an excellent starting point for student research. Highly recommended. American.

<http://www.sciencespot.net>

Media Portals

A strength of using the Internet is the ability to access timely information on current events. Many reliable media organizations have excellent websites with current news stories, searchable archived news stories, and historical archives of broadcasts or articles. More and more media organizations have subscription only access to their websites, and are otherwise only available through subscription databases specializing in current events. Nevertheless, there are some excellent resources available on the "free" Internet.

CBC: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: CBC has a mandate to provide quality, non-commercial content to all Canadians. This is by far the best media website available in Canada. Current and archived content are fully searchable. The most amazing area of this website is the CBC Archives. CBC has been digitizing audio and video broadcasts into streamed media. This is powerful and meaningful content. The archives are very well indexed, include a timeline feature, and related, quality lesson plans for teachers. Highly recommended.

<http://www.cbc.ca>

CTV: CTV offers current and archived news content on its website. Recommended.
<http://www.ctv.ca>

Toronto Star: The Toronto Star is one of the very few newspapers that still offers free content, with a seven-day site search function. Recommended.
<http://thestar.com>

Two other national newspapers that used to offer largely free content have now gone the subscription route. While the Globe and Mail still offers a limited amount of free content, the National Post site is largely inaccessible. This is a growing trend. Most newspapers and journals, including scholarly journals, sell the rights to index their content to online database publishers, who sell this content and their powerful search interfaces to subscribing institutions.

Further Resources

Web Awareness and Safe Searching Links: The following links provide additional information on safe and effective search strategies for students:

Be Web Aware: A website created by the Media Awareness Network of Canada to promote safe use of the Internet. Highly recommended.
<http://www.bewebaware.ca>

Article on kid-friendly search engines, directories and portals:
<http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/KidFriendlySearchEngines.aspx>

American Association of School Librarians - Research Tool Kit for Students.
<http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/schlibrariesandyou/k12students/aaskctools.htm>

ClassZone: Web Research Guide (published by McDougal Littell, educational publishers). Highly recommended.
http://www.classzone.com/books/research_guide/page_build.cfm

NoodleTools: Web-based research tools
<http://www.noodletools.com>

Select the following links in Noodle Tools:
Choose the Best Search for Your Information Need. Search strategies based on an analysis of your topic.
NoodleQuest: Develop the optimum Web-based search strategy, based on your research topic.

Further Reading: Critical Thinking and Internet Research Skills

Alan November. *“Teaching Zack to Think”*
<http://www.anovember.com/articles/zack.htm>