

Searching and Browsing Tip Sheet

Search engines are:

- compiled by computers, Web robots, or spiders (some indexing done by people)
- indexed Web sites and pages by criteria such as titles, authors, subjects, and keywords
- structured to search a Web page's full-text content
- searchable

Directories are:

- compiled by librarians or experts
- indexed Web sites and pages by criteria such as titles, authors, subjects, and keywords
- hierarchical categorization of Web sites and pages by subject
- browsable
- searchable

Deciding which tool to use first depends primarily on how much information a user knows about the topic and the type of information a user requires.

When to use a search engine vs. a directory:

It is best to use a search engine when the user:

- knows a great deal about the topic
- can narrow the topic to a specific sub-field or concept
- can identify specific words or phrases within the scope of the topic

It is best to use a directory when the user:

- knows very little about the topic
- cannot narrow the topic to specific sub-fields or concepts
- cannot identify specific keywords or phrases within the scope of the topic

Answering the following questions can help define your search strategy:

For what am I looking?	
Are there any aspects of this topic that are particularly relevant for my search?	
What words or phrases would I expect to find in Web documents that contain the information for which I am looking?	
Are there any synonymous or equivalent words for the topic / sub-topic / concept?	