

RULES OF THUMB FOR ONLINE RESEARCH

DIANA ROBERTS WIENBROER
Nassau Community College



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TO THE INSTRUCTOR

Rules of Thumb for Online Research is designed for students to use on their own while they are working at the computer. Chapters are organized sequentially within the five parts, but the parts may be used out of order, depending on the student's needs. This book can help students who just need facts from reliable sources and those who are working on sophisticated research projects.

The Basics Although most users of this book will already be familiar with computers, the Internet, and basic principles of research, some won't be. Part 5 provides essential operational information for students who might be inexperienced or confused about the most efficient ways to use a keyboard and mouse. In addition, students unfamiliar with computer terminology will find the definitions of key terms in the glossary, beginning on page 151.

Time/File Management Similarly, students often need help in managing their research projects. Part 3 advises students about organizing their time and the overwhelming amount of information they will find.

Conducting the Search *Rules of Thumb for Online Research* begins at the point where most students want to start: "Hop on the Internet." Part 1 describes how to use each Internet resource in order to gather the greatest amount of useful information. Following the sequence of Part 1

controls students' frustrations of finding too many (lightweight, commercial) and too few (substantial, suitable) results from an Internet search.

Assessing the Results Part 2 helps students evaluate and organize what they find online. This aspect of Internet research requires the most professional advice; it is the one topic of this book that implies classroom or conference support. Students can use the checklists provided on their own, but most will need the guidance of their instructor in interpreting the quality of information found at specific websites.

Documentation Part 4 provides the rules for documentation format. Detailed examples explain the MLA, APA, CBE, Chicago Manual, Columbia, ACS, and footnote/endnote styles for reporting research in an easy-to-understand, rules-of-thumb approach.

Internet Addresses The Appendix collates all the Internet addresses given throughout the book, plus many other recommended sites. From headings alone, the Appendix provides a guide to how the student might best proceed to find information on the Internet.

I hope that you find this guide helpful. All Internet addresses are current as of April 2000. If you have any comments or suggestions, please e-mail or write:

wienbrd@sunynassau.edu

Diana Roberts Wienbroer
English Department
Nassau Community College
Garden City, NY 11530

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Other books in the *Rules of Thumb* Series:

Silverman, Hughes, and Wienbroer. *Rules of Thumb: A Guide for Writers*, 4th ed.

—. *Good Measures: A Practice Book to Accompany Rules of Thumb*, 4th ed.

—. *Rules of Thumb for Research*.

Wienbroer, Hughes, and Silverman. *Rules of Thumb for Business Writers*.

(All from McGraw-Hill copyright 2000, updated to include 1999 MLA guidelines. Some of the material in this book appeared in a different form in the above books.)

TO THE STUDENT

You've been doing research since you were born—discovering how your own observations, thoughts, and feelings compare to those of others. One kind of research is just asking questions and evaluating the answers. This book can help with that basic element of curiosity as you use the Internet.

However, more refined methods of research are used in academic and professional settings, usually resulting in a report or a public presentation.

Rules of Thumb for Online Research is designed to support you as you search for information on the Internet. This book will help you find information more quickly, evaluate its appropriateness for your needs, and then meet the format requirements for a report, whether in business or academic settings.

Rules of Thumb for Online Research is for you

- if you are a hacker or a beginner assigned to write a college research paper in any course.
- if you are in the working world and must find information to solve a problem or to include in a memo or formal report.
- if you're at home seeking information for personal decisions, for activities in your community, or to help a child with homework.

The topics in *Rules of Thumb for Online Research* can be referenced out of order, while you are working at the computer. I assume that most readers of this

book are already familiar with computers, the Internet, and basic principles of research. In that case you're ready to start with Part 1. However, some of you may want to begin by reading the tips for beginners in Part 5 or the tips for planning the research project in Part 3. If you come across an unfamiliar term, you'll find the definition in the glossary beginning on page 151.

Part 1 explains how to gather information. It can be used one chapter at a time as you try different resources. **Part 2** helps you evaluate and organize what you have discovered. **Part 3** gives tips on methods of working and controlling your project. Turn to that section early if you're new to research, new to the Internet, or facing a close deadline. **Part 4** provides details on documentation format for the most commonly used styles for reporting research. **Part 5** gives tips for working with computers. A **glossary** and **all the Internet addresses for resources** mentioned throughout the book are in the **Appendix**.

This book is part of the *Rules of Thumb* series, which is designed to help people meet the requirements of writing assignments. The phrase "rule of thumb" refers to a handy guideline: The top part of your thumb is roughly an inch long. Sometimes you need a ruler, marked in millimeters, but often you can do fine by measuring with just your thumb. Your thumb takes only a second to use, and it's always with you. Similarly, a few basic rules for writing—our *Rules of Thumb*—will serve you for most assignments.

Updated Internet addresses for this book can be found at McGraw-Hill's website: <<http://www.mhhe.com/writers>>.

I hope that you find this guide helpful. All Internet addresses are current as of April 2000. If you have

any comments or suggestions, please e-mail or write:

wienbrd@sunynassau.edu

Diana Roberts Wienbroer
English Department
Nassau Community College
Garden City, NY 11530

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Updated Internet addresses for this book can be found at McGraw-Hill's website: <<http://www.mhhe.com/english>>.

1

PART

HOW TO FIND INFORMATION

Find Your Focus

Use Links and Bookmarks

Search Subject Directories

Use Reference Pages

Prepare Phrases for Your Searches

Use Search Engines and Metasearchers

Use Indexes and Other Databases

Use Library Catalogs, Booksellers,
and E-Texts

Check Discussion Groups

Query by E-Mail

Check Gopher and Telnet

Refine Your Search



FIND YOUR FOCUS

Whether you already have a topic or are facing an assignment where you have a choice of topic, spend some preliminary time either jotting down ideas and questions or browsing online.

■ FIND YOUR CONNECTION TO AN ASSIGNED TOPIC

Brainstorm

Brainstorming is jotting down your ideas without inhibitions. Just list your topic, and then write down questions and subtopics—whatever comes to mind—without worrying about correctness or relevance. This method gets to those ideas that lurk below those on the top of your head; and although some may not be workable, you should discover some that are worthwhile. Brainstorming for 7 to 20 minutes can show you where you would like to learn more.

It is always easier to do required research if your own curiosity motivates you. For example, if you have an interest in film and media, and your general topic is the Great Depression in the United States, your brainstorming might show you a manageable research topic: the effect of the Depression on the movie-making industry.

4 FIND YOUR FOCUS

Browse Online to Find Your Subtopic

Another method is to go online and enter your general topic in a subject directory such as Yahoo <<http://www.yahoo.com>>. Click on some subtopics and visit a few websites to gather some possibilities.

For the Great Depression, a few mouse clicks in Yahoo could lead you to the University of Michigan's history museum site <<http://www.sos.state.mi.us/history/museum/explore/museum>>, where you would find a series of resources that explain what life was like for Americans living in the 1930s, including their radio and film interests.

■ FIND A TOPIC YOU CARE ABOUT

Brainstorm

You may have an assignment where you have total free choice. Let's say that you must write an article for a newsletter for a parents' organization. Making a list of topics that might interest your readers could lead you to a good topic—perhaps how to teach children to be skeptical about what they find on the Internet.

Browse Online to Find Your Subtopic

Instead of brainstorming, you might just hop on the Internet. You can find a topic by going to a