



From the Library of

Internet Lodge of Research

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Doing Research Using the World Wide Web

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The ways of virtue are beautiful. Knowledge is attained by degrees. Wisdom dwells in contemplation; there we must seek her.²

These words from the Master's Opening Charge in the Ancient York Rite contain the essence of Masonry for many of us who labour in a Research Lodge.³ But simply calling ourselves a Research Lodge doesn't make us so. We should keep in mind Henry Coil's observations made in his Compendium:

The name has, however, been more popular than has actual research, so that the title is often used by lodges that do very little research. Such a lodge requires a working membership of dedicated students and a location near one of the great Masonic libraries.⁴

We do have one advantage that Coil could never have foreseen — the World Wide Web — which is probably the world's greatest library. However, none of us came with all the skills necessary to dig right into Masonic research. This is a brief overview of doing research for a presentation to Lodge. It is not meant to be definitive, but simply a guide to simplify the task.

There are two basic types of paper: research and opinion. The former requires a rigorous examination of all facets of the subject to produce complete but unbiased results. The latter requires solid support upon which the opinion is based. Both require research. Both require the same attention to sources, references, integrity of data and openness of process to engender confidence in the paper.

In the end, any author has likely consulted four to ten times the number of references than have been cited in his paper. The trick is to more tightly focus the paper as the process proceeds. For example, the Lodge has a project to make a presentation to the Masonic Spring Workshop on the History of Masonic Charity. Some of us have already started to research this topic using the web. But if one starts simply with the word "charity" in three of the many search engines, one will find thousands of sites.

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| Google.ca | 3,200,000 |
| Altavista.com | 1,889,158 |
| Yahoo.com | 1,536 |

Obviously, the scope of the enquiry must be limited. Suppose we search for “masonic” and “charity” using the advanced search page:

| | |
|---------------|--------|
| Google.ca | 26,100 |
| Altavista.com | 10,880 |
| Yahoo.com | 2 |

Even with this focus, there are far too many sites to deal with. Luckily, most search engines rank the returned sites by relevance. Thus, one can actually more tightly focus the request and still get some returns. The better the focus, the more important the relevance rankings. Let’s add history to our search, “history masonic charity”:

| | |
|---------------|-------|
| Google.ca | 9,960 |
| Altavista.com | 0 |
| Yahoo.com | 1 |

One thing should be obvious. Not all search engines are equal. In fact, no one source alone is enough to give confidence in the results. For example, one would not simply look something up in Mackey’s *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* without also consulting other references in the library such as Coil’s *Masonic Encyclopedia* or Bernard and Jones’ *Compendium*. The simple reason is that Mackey wasn’t always correct, nor always complete. To get the full picture, one must consult the others.

To make the process easier, there are ten easy steps which can be followed:⁵

1. Identify the important concepts of your search.
2. Choose the keywords that describe these concepts.
3. Determine whether there are synonyms, related terms, or other variations of the keywords that should be included.
4. Determine which search features may apply, including truncation, proximity operators, Boolean operators, and so forth.
5. Choose a search engine.
6. Read the search instructions on the search engine’s home page. Look for sections entitled “Help,” “Advanced Search,” “Frequently Asked Questions,” and so forth.
7. Create a search expression, using syntax, which is appropriate for the search engine.
8. Evaluate the results. How many hits were returned? Were the results relevant to your query?
9. Modify your search if needed. Go back to steps 2-4 and revise your query accordingly.
10. Try the same search in a different search engine, following steps 5-9 above.

There are many search engines available for use, and each has its peculiarities. You can find out more than you ever wanted to know at [Search Engine Watch](#) and find a listing of actual engines at [Search Links: Search Engines Worldwide](#).

Search engines aren’t the only source of information. Other information sources on the web include⁶:

- **Directories:** many of the popular engines have also created directories to their archives. Yahoo! was one of the first directories. Another useful directory is the Open Directory Project found at [ODP - Open Directory Project](#).

- **Meta-search tools** allow access to several databases from one place. Examples of meta-search tools are [Dogpile](#), [MetaCrawler®](#) and [The InvisibleWeb](#).
- **Virtual libraries** are directories or subject catalogs consisting of selected Web resources. Two excellent examples are the [Internet Public Library](#) and [Librarians' Index to the Internet](#).
- **Specialized databases** contain collections of hyperlinks in a particular subject area, or are self-contained, searchable indexes made available on the Web. [The InvisibleWeb](#) lists many specialized databases and directories.
- **Library catalogs** resources accessible on the World Wide Web are [webCATS: Library Catalogues on the World Wide...](#) and [Libweb - Library WWW Servers](#).
- **FTP archives**, which are collections of files in various formats available on the Internet. Several Web sites allow you to search FTP archives and make it relatively easy to retrieve files through FTP.
- **Email discussion groups:** services let you search for discussion groups. One is [Topica](#) (Liszt).
- **Usenet newsgroups**, which are collections of group discussions, questions, answers, and other information that have been shared through the Internet. [Google Groups](#) keeps a complete 20-year Usenet Archive with over 700 million messages.

If a tutorial on researching the net is desired, please try [Searching and Researching on the Internet and...](#) You can actually start with the page [Using the World Wide Web for Research](#).

Evaluating the Information

One of the most important functions of the researcher is to evaluate the data he has collected. Is the information trustworthy? How does one know it to be so? There are a number of guidelines that can be followed to help in the process. Who is the author and what is the institution — are they credible? How current is the information? Who is the intended audience — true believers or antimasons? Or academics? The principles governing evaluation of data are discussed at [Evaluating Information Found on the World Wide Web](#).

Copyright

As one collates information and writes his article, he should keep his references and footnotes organized and attached to his text. Nothing is more frustrating than completing an article and then having to go back and reconstruct all the referencing that was used. Most modern word processors allow footnotes to be attached to a paragraph and will reorder the list as the paragraph is moved around the article. Each idea and fact gleaned from other sources should be referenced.

Finally, a bibliography should also be provided. This can be a listing of all the works consulted (as in some academic theses) but more usually is a list of the references cited. There are several systems used to present these references, but they all have several pieces of information in common (but not necessarily the same order). Traditionally, this includes: author, title of article, name of publication, date of publication, and publisher.

Citing electronic sources, however, introduces several problems. First is the fact that not all sources are available on-line forever. As a result, most citation systems suggest the inclusion of not only the URL (Universal Resource Locator), but also the date on which the page was accessed. A good discussion of this can be found at [Citation - Guides - University of Alberta Library](#) and at [Columbia Guide to Online Style](#).

Once the paper is written, it is very easy to “publish” it by mounting it on a website. One thing to remember, however, is that much of the information you have accessed and used is copyrighted. It is someone’s intellectual property. For most of our purposes, copyright isn’t a big problem as we come under personal or academic use. This allows us to cite other authors or take illustrative quotes that are attributed. It does not allow us to quote extensive passages or to use such passages as if they were our own. Nor does it allow the use of these works in material for commercial purposes — such as in a book for publication and sale — without the permission of the author.

[Copyright Website](#) by Benedict O’Mahoney, is a good resource for information about copyright issues.

This was just a brief overview of the topic. It may have seemed mundane to start with, but I trust that the few examples included with this paper will serve to illustrate that not matter what the topic, there is a fascinating world out there in the world wide web.

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Endnotes

¹ WBro Cochran was Worshipful Master of Internet Lodge of Research at the time of presentation.

² Alberta, Grand Lodge of. *The Work: Ancient York Rite*. Calgary: Grand Lodge of Alberta, 1999.

³ For a discussion of why a Research Lodge see Juthner, Robert Eugene. “The Object of Meeting in a ... Research Lodge.” Inaugural address. *Vox Lucis* Vol 1: 3 (Spring 1982), Calgary: Fiat Lux Lodge of Research No. 1980, pp 71 – 95.

⁴ Coil, Henry Wilson. *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*. New York: Macoy Publishing, 1961, p 523

⁵ Ackermann, Ernest. Basic Search Strategy: The 10 Steps. [7 October 2001, 13:10:24] <http://www.webliminal.com/search/10steps.htm>. [14 February 2002].

⁶ Ackermann, Ernest. Intro to the Internet and the WWW. [7 October 2001, 13:10:24] <http://www.webliminal.com/search/search-web01.html> [14 February 2002].