

# The Library versus the Internet - 1

The library and the Internet each have strengths and limitations.

**Help.** In the library, the staff can help you find what you need quickly and efficiently. On the Internet, you are on your own, and it is easy to get caught in the Web.

**Reliability.** The books and periodicals in the library have gone through a screening process for accuracy and reliability. The publishers decided that the works were worth publishing, and the library decided that they were worth buying. On the Internet, anyone can publish anything. No one monitors the content for credibility or accuracy. You may find interesting nuggets on the Internet, but you are the one who has to decide whether a Web site is credible. Begin your basic research in the library; use the Internet to add details.

**Comprehensiveness versus convenience.** Relatively few books are available on the Internet; the full texts of most periodical articles are available online only for a fee or through a database such as Lexis-Nexis. On the other hand, the library may not own the particular book or periodical you need (although interlibrary loans may increase what is available), or someone may have checked it out. On the Internet, the information is always there. Moreover, you can access information from all around the world (for example, newspapers from every continent at <http://www.mediainfo.com/emedial>), and online reference documents may be updated more frequently than the ones on the library shelves. Use the library for basic information and the Internet for up-to-the-minute news or data.

**The medium.** The printed page is static; hypertext Web documents are interactive and searchable. Sometimes a book fits your needs, and

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sometimes the Internet is the answer. For example, searching for a particular word or phrase in an Internet document (say, in one of Shakespeare's plays at <http://www.psrg.cs.usyd.edu.au/~matty/Shakespeare>) is much faster and more efficient than searching through a book line by line. On the other hand, reading an entire book or play on screen is difficult. Use the Internet to locate a particular piece of information in a large document; use a book when you need to study an entire work.

In short, the Internet offers convenient, worldwide, current, and interactive material, and the library offers reliable comprehensive, and readable, sources. Use the Internet for the extras it can offer; don't let it replace the library for your research.