

# CLASSROOM



## Finding gold on the Internet

Tips and tricks for navigating your way to reliable, accurate resources

Type "Christopher Columbus" in the Google search engine, hit 'enter' and you get more than 3.5 million links. The first 20 results include educational and commercial sources, and even a link to a movie. So, how is an adolescent supposed to sort through this huge list to find reliable information for that social studies report?

The truth is that the Internet is a rich resource for students—if they know how to use it properly. Learning to navigate cyberspace, avoid its hazards, and sort through not-so-credible sites to find truly worthwhile information is a skill that will benefit students throughout school, college, and later in the work world. Although schools often take the lead in teaching students to properly use the Internet, parents can play an equally important role as they reinforce those lessons at home.

### WHAT'S CREDIBLE?

For less than \$50, anyone with a computer and Internet access can register a domain name and set up a Web site. Further, no unbiased party monitors or controls what is published on Web sites. As a consequence, individuals, companies, and organizations can publish inaccurate or even intentionally misleading content. It is critical for students to learn to be discerning researchers if they hope to find accurate information.

Parents can help their kids become better Internet researchers by teaching them to look carefully at the source of the information. Begin by explaining that not everything they find on the Web is reliable, but with a little effort, even the youngest

students can be confident of the information they find online. Here are a few hints to help find the more reliable sources:

**Start by looking at the domain name (Web address). Three letters in the domain name can tell you a great deal about the site.**

- .com** is a commercial site that might be trying to sell you something (caution)
- .gov** indicates a government site (generally reliable)
- .org** is an organization site (can be reliable, but can also attempt to sway opinion)
- .net** domains can belong to anyone (exercise caution)
- .mil** is a military site (generally reliable)
- .edu** is a school or university Web site (professors, teachers and students may be contributors, so check the author's qualifications)

**Look for clues that a Web site and its authors are legitimate. The more information a site offers about itself and its sources, the more likely it is a credible source. Ask some simple questions such as:**

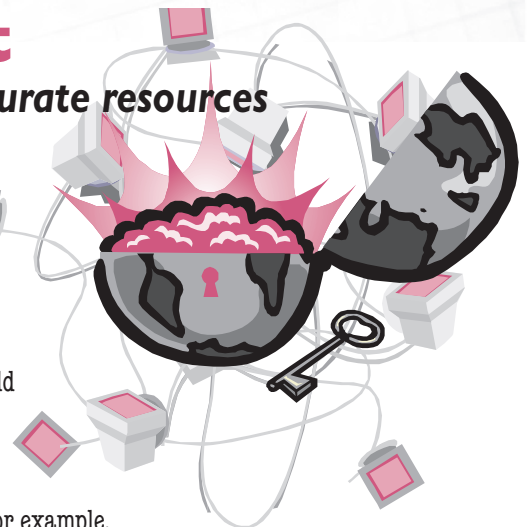
- Can you easily find the author's name and contact information?
- Do the author's title and credentials indicate that he/she is a credible source?
- Is the site politically or commercially motivated? Is the site's purpose to inform, sell, or influence?
- Is the information current and up to date?
- Is the site professional looking, attractive, and easy to navigate?

### REFINE THE SEARCH

Encourage your children to develop specific questions they would like to answer, and then use those questions to form their Web search. For example, enter a specific question such as, "Where was Christopher Columbus born?" This increases the chances of quickly finding the needed information. Experiment with the "advanced search" feature of most search engines. This allows users to more specifically select key words to include or exclude in a search. It also enables users to choose what domains (.edu, .gov, etc.) to search.

### USE SCHOOL-RECOMMENDED SITES

Rather than rely on commercial Web search sites, many schools now recommend sites they consider to be reliable and child-safe. Visit your school's Web site for a list of suggested sites. Although there are loads of great sites, here are a few places to start:



KidsClick Web search  
(<http://www.kidsclick.org/>)

Blue Web'N online library  
(<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/bluwebn/>)

Noodletools search strategies  
(<http://www.noodletools.com/noodlequest/>)

Librarians Internet Index  
(<http://lii.org/>)

### COMPARE INFORMATION

One of the best ways to ensure information is correct is to compare the information presented on two or more reputable sites. If all of the sites agree that Christopher Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy, then your child can comfortably include that information in his or her report.

## WATCH OUT for Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a peer-edited, online encyclopedia that allows any Web author to write and edit pages. Content is routinely updated and reviewed, unlike a traditional printed source that can become outdated as soon as it is printed. For example, medal winners at the recent Beijing Olympics were posted online within minutes after the events had concluded. Unfortunately, uninformed or misinformed authors can post information that is not necessarily accurate. As a result, most educators will not accept Wikipedia as a credible source for school papers.

# Going Online at Schalmont Middle School

The cornerstone of cybersafety for children is the presence of a responsible adult. At home, that might involve moving the family computer to a common space or checking on your children when they search the Internet. At Schalmont Middle School, it is up to people like computer network professionals, teachers, and librarians to keep your children safe online.

Several security measures are used to ensure that students in Schalmont schools are protected from inappropriate Internet content. One such measure is a content filter. It looks at Internet page requests and decides whether or not the category of the request is appropriate. Terri McCreadie is the network administrator for Schalmont Central School District, and as such, one of her goals is to make sure students are safe online while at school.

"We use a service with a fleet of people who look at Web sites all day long and put them into categories," said McCreadie. "The license for our content filter software is updated with this information every night, so it always knows what to avoid."

At Schalmont Middle School, teachers serve as another security measure for students. Nearly all MS teachers maintain a Web page, which can be found at [www.schalmont.org/District/teacherpages/teacherwebpages.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/District/teacherpages/teacherwebpages.htm). On many teacher Web pages, students and parents can find:

- A list of homework assignments,
- Photos of class activities,
- Extra information on lesson topics,
- Class projects, and
- Testing dates and study tips,
- More information about a teacher.

Several teachers also use their Web pages to list reliable online sources that students can use to research lesson-related topics. For example, sixth-grade math teacher Kelly Healy provides Web page

links for both students and parents. While a student might click through to "Fact Monster," a parent might click through to a Web site that explains New York State math testing standards.



Librarian Linda Fasano also provides Web page links for students on her teacher Web page and the MS Library Web page. When students need to do research for a class project, she helps them find what they need, whether it's on the shelves or the Internet.

Fasano often works with teachers who want to incorporate research in their curriculum for a multi-dimensional learning experience. MS health teacher Lauren Defayette teamed up with the librarian for the school's first Health Share Fair last spring. Fasano worked with Defayette to guide students' online and book research as they studied complex topics such as gambling, alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, bad influences, body image, and friendships.

The future ahead of today's students is very different from the past of their teachers and parents. That shouldn't prevent parents from staying involved in their children's online lives, though. Children may be immersed in a technology-saturated world at an early age, but middle school students still need responsible adults to provide guidance when it comes to staying safe online.

## MARK YOUR calendar



### SEPTEMBER

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 18 Back-to-School Night, 6:30 p.m.       | 17 MS Job Shadowing Sabre City, 7 p.m.      | 10 Board of Ed. Meeting @ Woestina, 7 p.m.      |
| 19 School Picture Day                    | 20 MS PTO Meeting, 6:30 p.m.                | 11 <b>NO SCHOOL - Veterans Day</b>              |
| 22 Board of Ed. Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m. | 24 <b>NO SCHOOL - Staff Development Day</b> | 14 MS/HS Report Cards Issued Sabre City, 7 p.m. |
| 26 Homecoming Sabre City, 7 p.m.         | 27 Board of Ed. Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.    | 17 MS PTO Meeting, 6:30 p.m.                    |
|  | 28 Picture Make-up Day                      | 24 Board of Ed. Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.        |

### OCTOBER

- 9 **NO SCHOOL - Yom Kippur**
- 10 MS/HS Interim Reports Issued
- 13 **NO SCHOOL - Columbus Day**
- 14 Board of Ed. Meeting @ Mariaville, 7 p.m.

### NOVEMBER

- 2 Daylight Savings Time Ends
- 3 Tri-M Music Honor Society Induction, 7 p.m.

26-28 **NO SCHOOL - Thanksgiving Recess**

Don't forget to sign up to receive the latest middle school news through Schalmont's School News Notifier at [www.schalmont.org!](http://www.schalmont.org!)



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