



Kathy Schrock's Tech Quest

Finding the best holiday resources on the Net

by Kathy Schrock

Contents ▼

- FEATURE: Kathy Schrock's Tech Quest

Searching for information on the Web is like walking into all the libraries in the world simultaneously and trying to find a book--except there aren't any librarians to assist you. To help you navigate the Net, I've created **Tech Quests**, frameworks for searching for information online. In each issue, I'll address a question posed by a reader, and together we'll go on a quest to find answers. Each letter in "quest" stands for a step we'll take. Plus, each quest is aligned with one of the standards from the International Society for Technology in Education's "ISTE Recommended Foundations in Technology for All Teachers" (<http://www.iste.org/standards/ncate/found.html>).

The Quest: Holiday Resources

Q Questioner: Who is going on the quest? In this case, it may be you, a student, parent, or administrator.

U Understanding: What is the purpose of the quest? What are the holiday resources for? A student project? lesson plans?

E Explanation: Exploring

Some good search engines include AltaVista (<http://www.altavista.com/>), Northern Light (<http://www.northernlight.com/>), and HotBot, (<http://www.hotbot.com/>). Many of the search engines allow advanced search strategies, called Boolean searches. Here's how: start on the advanced search page in a search engine to take advantage of Boolean strategies by listing some unique keywords and synonyms dealing with your topic, thus narrowing your search. For example, when looking for information about the history of traditional Christmas foods, I conducted a search using this query--foods and Christmas and tradition--and wound up with a great site dealing with the history of gingerbread (www.wiz.com/issue04/wiz_d04.html)

The best way to learn how to effectively use a search engine is to conduct multiple searches on topics of interest to you. With practice and effective use of advanced search strategies, you will

find that you can limit the number of results that you get and come up with more relevant sites.

S Sources: Choosing the best option These resources

options for finding an in-depth

answer Once you know what you want, you can determine which search strategies are best to try. In this case, there are two main types of Web tools you can use--subject directories and search engines. A **subject directory** is a categorized list of Web links prepared by an individual or organization. The directory "editor" examines Web sites and includes those that meet the criteria for that particular directory. These sites are usually organized by subject and you browse through subject headings to find the resources you need.

There are general subject directories such as Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com/>) and Magellan (magellan.excite.com) which may include links to Web sites about holidays. And holiday links can also be found in subject-specific directories, too.

Still, it would be useful to locate a highly subject-specific directory dedicated to holidays. Is there such a thing? Yes! Holidays on the Net (www.holidays.net) supplies teachers with tons of background information on traditional holidays, as well as links to other holiday-related Web sites. (When you come across helpful Web sites such as this, remember to write down the address--or bookmark it on your computer.)

Search engines, on the other hand, are a good place to start if you have a few keywords in mind. The search engine takes your keywords and quickly looks through a large database of information.

offer advice on searching for information online.

- <http://www.nueva.pvt.k12.ca.us/~debbie/library/research/adviceengine.html> Designed for school teachers, this excellent Web site uses a question-and-answer format to direct you to the most appropriate links for specific types of searches.
- www.cln.org/searching_faqs.html Created by the Community Learning Network, this site clearly explains the best strategies for hunting down resources on the Web.
- <http://home.sprintmail.com/~debflanagan/main.html> Here you'll find a tutorial on successful strategies for using search engines.

T **Thoughts: Afterward, reflect on your quest** Which do you feel most comfortable using--a search engine or a directory? Why? Might you create your own curriculum-specific subject directory?

MEETING THE STANDARDS

This month's Tech Quest addresses standard B.3: Use computer-based technologies, including telecommunications, to access information and enhance personal and professional decision making.

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