searching & evaluating the web
due by noon on Friday, January 21

PURPOSE OF THIS MODULE

Knowing the basics of browser software and, more importantly, knowing how to sift through and find reliable material on the web is a crucial skill for web authors. In this module, you’ll familiarize yourself with basic and advanced techniques for searching the web. You will also create a set of criteria you will use to evaluate the information you find on the web.

All of the web sites mentioned below are linked from the module 1 page linked from our class web site (www.msu.edu/~devossda/210/modules.html).

PRODUCT OF THIS MODULE

You do not have to write out and submit all of the answers to all of the questions below. But if you skip the initial steps below, you will struggle with the questions that do ask you to summarize and apply what you’ve learned in this module. Thus, you might want to skim through this entire module first, before you get started.

GETTING STARTED

1. Skim these online articles:

a. “Search Engines Not Transparent”  
   by Michael Liedtke  

b. “How Search Engines Work”  
   by Danny Sullivan  
   http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/article.php/2168031

c. “How Search Engines Rank Pages”  
   by Danny Sullivan  
   http://www.searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/article.php/2167961

d. “How Internet Search Engines Work”  
   by Curt Franklin  
   http://www.howstuffworks.com/search-engine.htm  
   (view the “printable version” to escape the annoying animated advertisements on the page)

e. “Search Engine Features Chart”  
   by Greg R. Notess  
   http://www.searchengineshowdown.com/features/
USING WEB BROWSERS

2. Click on the “Home” button in your browser.
   a. What is the title and URL of the web page you are defaulted to?
   b. Why did this appear? How can you change this default setting so that another web page automatically loads when you launch the web browser?

3. Can you change the appearance of web pages within your browser (e.g., the font face and size)? If so, how? Why would you want to?

4. What's the default search engine associated with your web browser? How do you get to it?

SEARCHING THE WEB

5. Head to AltaVista (http://www.altavista.com).
   a. In the search box, type in learning to make web pages and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?
   Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?
   b. Return to the front page of AltaVista. In the search box, type in "learning to make web pages" (with quotation marks) and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?
   Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?
   c. Can you explain the difference in the number of search results between search 5a and search 5b?
   Can you explain the difference in the content of search results between search 5a and search 5b?

Return to the front page of AltaVista. Head into the “Directory” area of the site. Find the AltaVista subdirectory on learning to make web pages (if you can!).

d. Where does the learning to create web pages subdirectory exist? Within what larger directory?

e. Take a look at some of the links and actually go to some of the sites listed within this area of AltaVista’s directory. What kinds of sites are listed here?

   a. In the search box, type in learning to make web pages and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?
   Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?
   b. Return to the front page of Google. In the search box, type in "learning to make web pages" (with quotation marks) and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?
   Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?

Return to the front page of Google. Head into the “Directory” area of the site. Find the Google subdirectory on learning to make web pages.

c. Where does the learning to make web pages subdirectory exist? Within what larger directory?
d. Take a look at some of the links and actually go to some of the sites listed within this area of Google’s directory. What kinds of sites are listed here? Why?

   a. In the search box, type in **learning to make web pages** and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?
      
      Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?
   b. Return to the front page of Teoma. In the search box, type in "**learning to make web pages**" (with quotation marks) and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?
      
      Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?

   a. In the search box, type in **learning to make web pages** and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?

   b. Look for the “RELATED SEARCHES” box. Would any of the related searches listed help you find information about learning to make web pages? How many entirely unrelated “related” searches are listed? Why are they listed?

   a. In the search box, type in **learning to make web pages** and click on the “Search” button. How many matches did you get?

   b. Try refining your search by using different search words or expressions.

10. Can you explain the difference(s) between AltaVista, Google, Teoma, BlowSearch, and Kartoo in the number of search results for searches 5 through 9?
    Can you explain the difference between AltaVista, Google, Teoma, BlowSearch, and Kartoo in the content of search results for searches 5 through 9?

**DOING ADVANCED SEARCHES**

   a. What different types of help and/or support does Yahoo! offer users?
   b. Look specifically for help searching Yahoo! What is one piece of advice Yahoo! offers to its users regarding searches?

12. Next, head to Ask Jeeves (http://www.askjeeves.com). Once you connect, look for a “Help” button on the Ask Jeeves front page. Click on it.
   a. What is one way Ask Jeeves is different from Yahoo? 
   b. What different types of help and/or support does Ask Jeeves offer users?
   c. Look specifically for help searching Ask Jeeves. What is one piece of advice Ask Jeeves offers to its users regarding searches?
USING METASEARCH SITES

   a. What is the main difference between a metasite and a regular search site?
   b. Do a search for learning to make web pages. How many matches did you get? How are the matches organized?
   c. Link to a couple of the sites in the search results list. Can you estimate how many of the searches actually relate to learning to make web pages?

   a. Do a search for learning to make web pages. How many matches did you get? How are the matches organized?
   b. How do the matches on Mamma differ from the matches you found in search 13?

FINDING MULTIMEDIA ELEMENTS

15. Either head to one of the search sites we’ve already used or head to one we haven’t yet used and explore the front page of the site.
   a. Is there a way to search specifically for multimedia?
   b. If yes, what specific elements can you search for? What are your options? (If not, try another site!)
   c. Do a search for a specific element (e.g., your favorite song, a picture of Britney Spears). How many matches do you get?
   d. Are there any warnings, disclaimers, or other information provided about using the results of your multimedia searches embedded in the search interface?

EVALUATING WEB SITES

16. a. Which of these two sites is the real web site of Mankato, Minnesota? How do you know?

   http://www.ci.mankato.mn.us/
   http://descy.50megs.com/mankato/Mankato.html

b. Which of these sites is the real web site of the United States White House? How do you know?

   http://www.whitehouse.net
   http://www.whitehouse.org
   http://www.whitehouse.gov
   http://www.whitehouse.com

c. Which of these two sites is a real report? How do you know?

   http://home.inreach.com/kumbach/velcro.html
   http://tinyurl.com/5w7tr

d. Which of these pages/sites is a real news story? How do you know?

   http://www.billgatesisdead.com/
   http://www.malepregnancy.com/
   http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1844648.stm
e. Which of these two sites is a real company/corporate site? How do you know?

http://www.d-b.net/dti/
http://www.identigen.com/

f. Which of these sites represents a real organization? How do you know?

http://www.dhmo.org/
http://www.ifoce.com/

17. What are three pieces of advice you have for people conducting research on the web and trying to assess the validity and credibility of web sites?

A COUPLE OF GENERAL QUESTIONS

18. What’s the difference between a search engine and a directory?

19. What does each of the following mean when you see it in a URL?

.edu .com
.gov .mil
.org .il
.jp .ca
.za

20. Perform the same search using two different search tools. You can search for whatever you like. You may do a basic or an advanced search.

a. Compare the names and URLs of the first 10 or 20 results on each search site. Do all of them directly relate to the key words you used? Did you get what you were looking for?

b. Compare the names and URLs of the first 10 or 20 results on each search site. How many are commercial sites? Educational sites? Government sites? If there is a difference between the search tools, can you explain it?

c. Which search tool do you think works best? Why? For what type of searches?

21. I argued earlier that it is important for web authors to know how search engines work. Do you agree? Why or why not?

TURNING IN YOUR WORK & GETTING CREDIT

Prepare a 2-page summary of your answers to questions 17 through 21. Name the document descriptively (e.g., devoss_module1.doc); upload the document to ANGEL.

Total points possible: 100.