

USING INTERNET RESEARCH IN COMPETITIVE DEBATE

by Jackie Massey

As a competitive debater, and now a coach, I was always under the impression that it was possible to find someone that makes almost any argument that might be needed in a debate. The challenge is to find where it was written, and make it usable for a debate format. The ability to utilize the globally connected Internet makes the possibility of finding any piece of evidence needed almost absolute. The Internet is a large place, but that just means it takes time to see it all. Your eyes may get itchy or screen burnt, but the results of a comprehensive search for "that" card will almost always be successful.

Material Evaluation for Evidence Use

The restriction on material that is available on the Internet is non-existent, which means you must be very careful when selecting evidence from the Internet. There are some criteria that you should take into consideration when looking for useful debate evidence. The two main issues are author and date of publication. Some of the issues concerning "what is good research" are very debatable. There are different opinions concerning the legitimacy of using research without posted dates or author(s). The best research material prevents you from having those debates. If you find material that you think is very important, but feel like more information is needed, you can e-mail the person responsible for the site. I have noticed extreme success with e-mail. Many times you can get more information than the material you ascertained on the Internet. Every attempt should be made to document as much information as possible concerning the author(s) and date of publication.

One important issue concerning Internet research is the distinction between when the research was actually produced and when it was put on the Internet site. It is important to look for research that provides a specific date, stating when it was published or produced. The date of publication should be found somewhere on the publication, or maybe on the previous page

that provided you the link to the article or publication. Whenever the date is not available, one alternative is to register the date in which you download the article. Some people in the debate community do not consider this method legitimate.

It is good to find documentation on the qualifications of the author(s). The beginning of the article may provide a brief description of the authors' qualifications, or the qualifications may be found at the end of the article. Sometimes the authors might be a research group, or the material of a specific organization.

The researcher should find as much information as possible about the author(s) on the web-site. Look around the site in the different links and connectors for possible descriptions of the author(s) or organization. A web-site that provides you with the author(s), their qualifications and the date of publication can be a good source for debate evidence.

Researching the World Wide Web

Whenever you sign-on and go online, you have an infinite number of research materials just a click away. There are numerous ways to find these materials. For better clarification, I have focused on three different methods.

The first method involves the use of search engines. The program that runs your web-browser usually has a place at the top of the screen where you click "SEARCH". After clicking the "SEARCH" button you should be taken to a page with a list of the different search engines. These search engines include Lycos, Yahoo, Goto, Netscape, Hotbot, Looksmart, Snap, About.com, and Google. If you do not have the "SEARCH" option, you can take the search engine above and follow with ".com" (I.E. Yahoo.com) and you should be taken to the search page of the engine. The search engines serve the purpose of looking through millions of Internet web-sites to find locations that meet the criteria or term you listed for your search. When using the search engines, you can use simple

search terms like "privacy", or you can use more complicated search terms like "privacy and medical records". The search engine will then list the web-sites in order of relevance to the topic entered. Some engines are more effective with the use of the complicated search than others. With the "and" search the first locations listed should be the sites that include both terms, then the sites will change over to only include one part of the search. The engine will provide you with a list of links that you can click-on to find information concerning your search. When clicking on the link, you may have to browse the site for a moment to find the information relevant to your search. The search engines do not always find the same links with the same search. Some search engines are better than others for finding certain types of material. The use of the search engines allows researchers to find unique ideas, perspectives, and publications.

The second method involves the use of Think Tanks or Research Organizations. There are many global organizations that are focused on providing research and information to the public concerning many global issues. The Internet has provided a unique opportunity for people to access this information. One way of finding these think tanks is to use the search engines listed above by typing in "think tanks". The engine will give you a list of links that connect you to these sites. There are some sites that attempt to have comprehensive links to these "think tanks", and from there you can choose the organization that is related to your research interest. These think tanks offer you numerous articles and publications that are available in full-text, so they can be downloaded and utilized immediately as debate evidence. The think tanks are also very effective in qualifying their research and the author(s) of the material.

The third method of finding information is the use of "other links". Whenever you read a book or magazine article, many times you will find a web address that is listed to help you find more information for

a related topic. This address could be the beginning in a chain of possible resources for debate evidence. Links are found at the bottom of magazine and newspaper articles or in the back of books. Many advertisements are making notice of a web-site so people may find out more information about the company or organization. There are a significant amount of web-sites that provide you links to other places of similar content. Some web-sites serve the purpose of providing articles or publications, while others serve the purpose of listing many links to these articles or publications. The use of the various links that can move you from one Internet site to another is a key part of the Internet experience. This is the fundamental notion of surfing.

Transferring From Web-Site to Evidence

There is a significant amount of material available on the Internet that could be utilized in competitive debate rounds. One basic criterion for turning the information into evidence is to accurately document the full citation for the material. This involves the (1) author, (2) date of publication, (3) web-site address, (4) date of download, (5) title of article or publication and (6) any qualifications about the author or organization. By documenting these six components, you have provided an adequate citation to allow others to find the information.

There are people who read and down-

load a significant amount of information, but never get the information assembled into useful evidence for debate. The possible useful information rests in an electronic file while they lose debates. There are also people who are very efficient at turning information into evidence briefs. These are the people who have something to say about everything. There are two basic methods that can be utilized for the purpose of making the research useful in debate rounds. Some people prefer to print the publication directly from the web-site. Then the material would be 'cut and taped' on evidence blocks as historically performed. This method is preferred by some, because they have no control over a disc going blank or a hard drive crashing. Those types of things do happen. Others view this process as slow, tedious, and involving more paper waste.

The use of word processing is the most efficient way to turn your Internet research into functional debate evidence. There are a couple of ways to use the word processor. The first method would be to download the article in html or text format, just as it exists on the Internet. Some have complications with this method because of the appearance of quigleys (&*!!^), or alien characters. People who have substantive knowledge of computer format and software are more capable of using this method. The second method is to use a word processing

program, like Microsoft-word, and use the copy/paste method. This would involve opening up a window for your word processing, and pasting the copied material from the web-site onto your word processing document. The material would be blocked and organized in the word processing document. The application of a full citation on each piece of evidence is now just a click away. It is also easy to erase the parts of the document you do not need, which saves a significant amount of paper in the long-term.

Through the use of the Internet, there are thousands of places that can help the competitive debater find the important and unique perspectives that are not published in the mainstream media. There are an infinite number of perspectives on different topics that the Internet can provide. Sometimes it may take hundreds or thousands of clicks to get to that perfect article. But when you read an article and picture yourself winning debates with the article, the time spent can be logged as educational and successful.

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