

CHAPTER 3

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF RESEARCH

Debaters are expected to support their positions with authoritative evidence. It is, therefore, no surprise that the best debaters are usually the most competent researchers. Mastery of research techniques is also one of the major educational benefits of participating in competitive debate. This chapter is, therefore, dedicated to helping beginning debaters become acquainted with the intricacies of research.

The best researchers are those who can uncover the most credible authoritative evidence to support their positions. This means it is important for debaters to explore the full range of sources, including books, newspapers, periodicals, government documents, law reviews, and the reports of advocacy groups and research think tanks.

Research tools have been revolutionized over the past decade as reliance on paper-based library resources has given way to online research tools. Only a few years ago, the best advice for beginning researchers was to begin by familiarizing themselves with the “traditional” library resources (using the old-fashioned card catalogs and bound volumes of the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*). But libraries are increasingly doing away with paper indexes in favor of computerized, Web-based search tools. Accordingly, this chapter begins by exploring the terms and methods involved in online research. Ironically, online research tools are now the best way to gain access to traditional resources such as books and periodicals.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN ONLINE RESEARCH

An understanding of online research requires the learning of a new vocabulary. Terms such as *Internet provider*, *browser*, and *search engine* have entered our language only in the past two decades.

Internet provider refers to the commercial service used to establish a connection to the Internet. Examples of a service provider are America Online, Sprint, AT&T, MSN, and Road Runner.

Internet browser refers to the software used to manipulate information on the Internet. The four major browsers in use are Netscape, Mozilla Firefox, Safari (the Apple product), and Internet Explorer (the Microsoft product). Each type of browser gives you access to the same group of search engines, which is the main thing you will care about.