

for balanced material on contemporary controversial issues. Because these are subscription services (the library pays significant fees to use them), you may have to access them through your library's computers. However, many library systems offer access to some of the most popular products through their Web sites.

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Government documents can be useful materials for general and specific knowledge and evidence. If a country publishes its official documents, you should examine what might be available on your topic. If a library has government document holdings, its reference section may list them in a separate catalog or electronic database. Retrieving information from these catalogs and databases is very similar to using the catalogs and databases to find books and periodicals. You can also find many U.S. government documents by searching the Internet sites of specific agencies. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau posts the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* as well as census data. You can find U.S. legislative information at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

RADIO AND TELEVISION TRANSCRIPTS

Rarely are radio and television transcripts located in a library. Sometimes radio and television transcripts are placed on the Internet. Some electronic databases, such as Lexis-Nexis, carry such transcripts. Most often, however, if a transcript from a mass media source is required, you will need to contact that mass media source directly to request and purchase the transcript.

THE INTERNET

The Internet has probably done more than any other tool to provide easy access to information around the world.⁵ Are you looking for contextual or historical information on your topic (general knowledge) or are you looking for evidence about a specific issue on the topic (specific knowledge)? Whatever the case, you can use the Internet to help. But the Web also has its drawbacks. Because the Net offers so much material, finding specifically what you need can be difficult, and often you cannot tell whether the information is up to date or accurate. Most Websites do not have editors or fact checkers to make sure the information is correct. Nevertheless, when used properly, the Internet is a smart, efficient way to research

To begin your Internet research, you need to first visit a search engine, a special Web site that permits you to type in search terms that the engine will use in reviewing millions of Web pages. The search engine then displays a list of "hits," sites that contain your search terms. Poorly constructed searches can generate far too many hits to be useful. Therefore, you should search on important phrases rather than simple keywords and use the advanced features of your search engine to limit your search. The most common Internet search engine is Google,⁶ but because each search engine gathers information differently and uses different formulas to determine relevance, you may want to try others as well. Search engines usually rank order the hits according to relevance. Thus, if you type in the phrase