



# RESOURCES FOR DOING WEB-BASED RESEARCH

When looking for research on a given topic, there are several sources to which you may turn. For example, you may find research in an academic journal, such as *Journal of Marriage and Family*. On the other hand, you may find research published on a website, such as the Urban Institute ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)). Each source of information has pros and cons.

## Journal articles:

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highly respected</li><li>• Influential</li><li>• Rigorous peer review process usually ensures that only highest quality work is published</li><li>• Very thorough description of data, methods, and results</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Takes a long time, often more than a year, between writing the article and having it published, so not as up to date</li><li>• Can be hard to read, highly technical</li><li>• Sometimes good articles get rejected and are not published</li></ul>

## Research published on the Web:

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can be published quickly, and therefore is more timely</li><li>• Easier to read, less technical</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quality varies greatly</li><li>• Often hasn't undergone thorough review</li><li>• Less information provided on exactly how the research was carried out</li><li>• Organization may be promoting a specific agenda</li></ul>

When doing research on a topic, it is recommended that you read both types of articles. **Relying solely on research published on the internet, rather than on journal articles, may leave out the most important**

**research in a given area.** Below we describe ways to search for journal articles and research briefs on the internet.

## HOW TO FIND JOURNAL ARTICLES

The best way to find articles published in academic journals is to go to a search engine that contains only journal articles, rather than a general search engine, such as Google. Below, we describe how to search for journal articles using a new web site developed by Google.

- 1) Go to [www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com)<sup>1</sup>
- 2) Type in the key words of the topic on which you are searching (Example: typing “cohabitation children” will search for articles on how cohabitation influences children). You will then see a list of citations for all of the articles on this topic. This list is sorted in order of relevance, with the most relevant ones (that is, the ones that are most closely focused on the topic you requested) first. You will typically only need to look through the first few pages of results to find the most important and relevant articles.
- 3) How to choose which articles to read:

\* A good way to sift through the results is to start with the articles that have the highest number of citations (that is, other researchers refer to these articles when doing their own work). These articles are the most well-known in the field and are typically the ones that have had the largest impact. These will often be listed first. For the example above, the article with the most citations (118 citations) is “Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children’s Family Contexts in the United States” by Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, published in the journal *Population Studies* in 2002.

<sup>1</sup>There are other search engines that can be used, such as the Cornell University Library System (<http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/>), however, we feel that Google provides the best information in a way that is easy to use.

\* It is also important to pay attention to the date that the article was written... try to find the most recent articles that are also widely cited.

\* Pay attention to whether certain authors' names appear repeatedly. For example, you will find that Larry Bumpass and Wendy Manning appear several times in the search on cohabitation and children. This indicates that they are experts in this area. You may want to then type their names into the search engine at [www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com) to find all of their written work.

\* When you are first getting started on a new topic, you may want to focus on large, review articles that describe the state of research on a topic, rather than smaller articles that focus on a more narrow research question. For example, "Cohabitation in the United States," by Pamela Smock, published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, gives a great overview of all of the facts and research on cohabitation in general. It is very broad and is a good place to start. Other articles are about more specific topics.

4) How to obtain the articles that you want to read:

\* When you have identified an article that looks interesting, click on it. In some cases, this will take you to a page where you can download the entire article. For example, when you click on "Cohabitation in the United States," by Pamela Smock, you will be taken to a page that gives you the entire article.

If you click on "Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children's Family Contexts in the United States" by Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu you will see that the article is not available for free. Instead, you will be asked to purchase the article. If you do not want to purchase it, you could visit the stacks of the Cornell library or your local library to see if they have the article (see [http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res\\_tools/find\\_articles\\_dbs/Tips\\_articles.html](http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res_tools/find_articles_dbs/Tips_articles.html) for information on how to search for articles in the Cornell Library System).

Finally, some of the articles do not allow you to click on the title. One example is "Parental Cohabitation and Children's Well-Being," by Manning and Lichter. In this case, you can tell from the citation that this article was published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* in 1996. You could then look in your local library or the Cornell library for this journal.

## HOW TO FIND RESEARCH PUBLISHED ON THE WEB

Other types of research are published on the internet rather than in journals. When looking for such research, the number of sites and resources can be overwhelming and it can be difficult to tell the quality of the research that you find. The best bet it is to visit websites that you feel confident about, rather than simply doing a Google search, which will give you anything ever written on a topic, regardless of quality. A good resource is the Child and Family Web Guide (<http://www.cfw.tufts.edu/>), which is a directory of websites that have been rated and judged to be of high quality. Under each topic area, a list of highly-rated websites appears.

In addition, below is a list of what we believe are good, reputable websites that have research information about child and family issues.

**The National Poverty Center:** [www.umich.npc.edu](http://www.umich.npc.edu)

The National Poverty Center is a non-partisan research center at the University of Michigan. It brings together scholars from throughout the U.S. who are doing research related to poverty. You can find some good summaries of recent research in their newsletter, here: <http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/newsletter/>

**The Joint Center for Policy Research:**  
[www.jcpr.org](http://www.jcpr.org)

The JCPR is an academic research center housed at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago. The goal of the center is to "advance our understanding of what it means to be poor in America." The JCPR has an extensive set of working papers available on its website, covering topics such as Welfare Reform, Child Care, and Food Insecurity. To access these working papers, click on Working Papers, and search by subject. The JCPR also has a series of policy briefs designed for policymakers and practitioners. These are available at: <http://www.jcpr.org/policybriefs/index.html>

**The Institute for Research on Poverty:**  
<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/>

The IRP is a "center for research into the causes and consequences of poverty and social inequality in the United States" and is based at the University of Wisconsin. Several reports and working papers can be found by clicking on "Publications" on the left-hand side of the page.

***Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation:***

<http://www.mdrc.org/>

MDRC is a non-profit research organization focused on programs and policies affecting low-income people. Their research areas include: Education, Children and Families, Workers & Communities, and Welfare & Barriers to Employment. Publications in each of these areas can be found by clicking the appropriate topic at the top of the webpage.

***Child Trends:*** <http://www.childtrends.org/>

Child Trends is “dedicated to improving the lives of children by conducting research and providing science-based information to improve the decisions, programs, and policies that affect children.” On the left side of the main page, you will find four boxes containing links to very useful information on child and youth development and the impact of public policies on children. Research Briefs are short summaries of research on a specific topic. The What Works series “summarizes the best available research and evaluations to determine what works, what doesn’t work and what are some ‘best bets’ for anyone who designs, administers, or funds services for children and youth.” The Child Trends Data Bank provides the national trends on over 70 indicators of child and youth well-being

***The Future of Children:***

<http://www.futureofchildren.org/>

This electronic journal is published every 6 months. Funded by the Packard Foundation, “the mission of the journal is to translate research into better policy and

practice for children.” Recent issues have focused on welfare reform, children and gun violence, and caring for infants and toddlers.

***The Urban Institute:*** [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

The Urban Institute is a “nonprofit nonpartisan policy research and educational organization established to examine the social, economic, and governance problems facing the nation.” Click on “Research,” and then choose from among a variety of topics related to U.S. social policy.

***CYFERNET:*** [www.cyfernet.org](http://www.cyfernet.org)

CYFERNET is a source for resources from land-grant universities across the U.S. After entering the website, you can click on the broad area of interest (for example, Parent/Family), and then can choose from sub-categories within that broad area (for example, child care). Once you have chosen a category, you will see a list of resources. Looking under the heading of “Research” you can find research briefs and articles.

## HOW TO EVALUATE WEB RESEARCH

Finally, here is a good website that helps web searchers evaluate the quality of the research they find on the web: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html?flushAccelerator=true>

Laura Colosi is an Extension Associate in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University. Rachel Dunifon is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University.

© 2005 Cornell Cooperative Extension



**Cornell University**  
College of  
Human Ecology