Hello everyone! I am Mr. Davies, and I am the Library Director here at UNM-Los Alamos. In this video, I will be talking about some fundamental concepts relating to searching, finding, and evaluating information in a variety of print and online formats.

When you need information for any purpose, it’s important to understand what the need is, how much information is required to meet that need, what the best sources of information are to meet that need, and where and how to find the information. And, perhaps most
importantly, you need to understand how to evaluate the information for reliability, accuracy, and credibility.

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So for example, if you need a recipe for tonight’s dinner, it’s simply a matter of deciding what you want to eat, knowing where to find a good recipe (either your own recipe file, a recipe book, or searching Google), and then choosing a recipe that looks good, and will work for how much time and effort you have or want to put into getting the ingredients and preparing the dish.

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More relevant to what you’re learning here, you will have to complete assignments of different lengths, for a
variety of purposes, meeting certain criteria as determined by your instructors. These will require varying amounts of information, using a variety of formats of information that may exist in a variety of places, and that are found in a variety of ways.

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For these assignments, evaluating the information will require more effort than what you would put out deciding on a recipe for tonight’s dinner. Additionally, you then have to assimilate the information you find to make it your own, and then properly give credit to the creators of the information by citing the sources.

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As you begin the process, it will probably be tempting to just go to Google and try to find everything you need on the Internet. And, that is understandable because a Google search of the Internet is easy and convenient. But Google and the Internet are just one tool, and not everything can be found on the Internet, and even more importantly, not all information found is reliable, credible, or even accurate.

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For some purposes, searching Google may be perfectly adequate and appropriate. However, for many other purposes, especially those associated with information needed for completing course assignments,
or for professional purposes, Google alone is probably not going to be adequate. As a result, you will need to know where and how to discover other sources of reliable and appropriate information.

And, to that end, I will be talking about available formats of information, both print and online.

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In today’s world of information, all of the things that have traditionally been published in a printed format have the POTENTIAL to be accessed online. However, the reality is that much of what is in print is NOT online, and in fact, a lot of new information is still being published only in print. Many sources that are now
available online certainly have their benefits, yet many others come with significant challenges.

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Books, of course, are perhaps the oldest most accessible information format, which continue to be published in print or online as eBooks. Some titles are published in both formats. Print books, of course can be found in bookstores, in libraries, and ordered from a variety of suppliers.

E-books can be purchased and downloaded onto a computer or tablet. Most academic eBooks that you may need to access for research purposes, are available in
libraries by searching the online catalog, Google Books, Google Scholar, and other databases.

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Reference sources, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases are great for finding quick answers to questions, or for gathering background information on a topic. These materials can be a good starting place in the research process. Reference sources are readily found in libraries in print and/or online. They can be located through the online catalog as well as online reference databases. Additionally, search engines like Google, allow you to find, to give one example,
definitions of words through open access online dictionaries.

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Newspapers, magazines, and journals, collectively called “periodicals” are available both in print and online. These formats of information are probably the most beneficial and usable as online documents. I will be talking more about these shortly.

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The Internet or “web” is familiar to all of you, and I will be talking about it in more depth later as well.
Media resources, such as audio recordings, video recordings, and photographs can also be found in both print and online. They are readily available for purchase, for downloading, and they are accessible through free online services, paid online services, and online library catalogs. These materials, especially audio recordings, are more and more, becoming available almost exclusively online.

A “periodical” is anything that is published regularly and periodically (meaning daily, weekly, monthly,
quarterly, and so forth), such as newspapers, magazines, and professional and academic journals.

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When using information in magazines and journals, it is important to understand the difference between the two types. Magazines are a format for providing information that generally appeals to a wide and diverse audience. Magazine articles, such as those found in *People, Rolling Stone, Sports Illustrated, or Time*, are typically written by journalists or free-lance writers who are not necessarily experts in the topics they write about. The writing style tends to be informal, informative and often entertaining. The publication process is “editorial,”
meaning that submitted articles go before one or more editors who work for the publication, before they are published.

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In academic and professional fields, information found in journals provides the most current and reliable information available. The process for publishing articles in journals is typically faster than it is for publishing a book. The science and medicine professions particularly rely on journal articles for current information almost exclusively.

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Academic and Professional journals are formats for providing information within a specific field or profession. These types of articles ARE written by experts in a particular field or profession, and the intended audience is individuals in that profession or individuals who are interested in or are learning about that profession. These articles are scholarly, formal, and often full of terminology used in the field. The publication process is “peer-reviewed” or “refereed,” meaning that before an article is published, it goes before a panel of other experts in the particular field, who review it for accuracy, logical methodology,
relevance, and whether or not it would be a worthy contribution to the field.

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There is a handout in your packet that provides more details about the differences between magazines and journals.

In most cases, you will need to use professional and academic journal articles for course assignments rather than magazine articles.

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The Internet or “web,” for our purposes here, can be divided into two broad categories: the “visible” web and the “invisible” web. The “visible” web consists of sites that are
generally available to anyone at no cost (except of course, for “paid” business sites that charge users to access the site content). “Visible” websites are generally found using a search engine such as Google.

The “invisible” web consists primarily of searchable databases to find information contained in those databases. Private companies, educational institutions, and libraries have paid subscriptions to the databases, which are then made available for use by employees, students, faculty, or the general public who visit those companies or institutions. These databases and the information in them, cannot be accessed through Google, and the web simply functions as a gateway to the databases. And, even though the databases have graphical user interfaces that make them look like “websites,” the
documents contained in them are not really considered web resources.

Information found through the “visible” web has a number of challenges that are not obvious. And, “visible” web information should be thoroughly evaluated before it is used for academic, professional, or life and death-related purposes.

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Why? The visible web is not refereed or monitored in any way, and as a result, anyone can put information up on the web. Just because it is there does not mean that it is accurate or reliable.

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Some points to consider when evaluating websites are:
• Who created the site?
  o Professor, expert in a field, reputable company?
  o What are the author’s credentials or experience?
    ▪ Education level, where does he or she work or teach?
• What is the site’s affiliation?
  o Reputable company or organization, government organization, educational institution?
• When was it created?
• When was it last updated?
• Is there a “works cited” list in the site?
• Is the information in the site biased?
• And, is the site relevant to your information needs?
Here are a few shortcuts to finding typically reliable websites:

- Check the domain name extension in the URLs, which are of course, .com, .net, .edu, .gov, .org.
  - Sites with .edu, .gov, and .org extensions are generally more trustworthy sites; however, they still require some degree of evaluation.

- Use links established on library and university websites, reputable company sites, and reputable non-profit organization sites.

- Use links to websites in online catalogs and other reputable online sources such as Encyclopaedia Britannica Online.
Here are some important points regarding the challenges in using information on the web that I mentioned earlier.

There is a common misconception that information on the web is a replacement for traditional (print) information sources. It is not. Not everything can be found on the web. Remember that the web and search engines such as Google are just one tool for finding information.

- The web is not well organized, and information on the web is not cataloged on the web.
- Search engines like Google, by default, function using full-text keyword searches, potentially resulting in a long list of results, and lots of irrelevant sites in the list of results.
• Information can be updated at any point in time, requiring that more detail be included when citing web resources.

• Web addresses (or URLs) can change at any time.

• And, pages or entire sites can be removed without warning.

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When evaluating resources and information, in most cases, you can assume that materials in academic library collections and that peer-reviewed academic and professional journal articles are reliable and authoritative; therefore, you probably only need to evaluate library materials for relevance, and in some
cases, how up-to-date they are, depending on the subject matter.

Web resources, however, must be thoroughly evaluated for authoritativeness and credibility, accuracy and reliability, relevance, and in many cases how up-to-date the site is.

If you have questions or concerns about a source during the evaluation process, check with your instructor or a librarian. They will be able to help you evaluate a source based on the focus of your topic.

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The following are demonstrations of evaluating two different websites. The URLs are also indicated in your
packet if you would like to examine the sites on your own.