

## Resource Review by Nic Groombridge, St Mary's University College

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Name of reviewed item:	Internet Detective free online tutorial on using internet for research
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Place, E., Kendall, M., Hiom, D., Booth, H., Ayres, P., Manuel, A., Smith, P. (2006) "Internet Detective: Wise up to the Web", 3rd edition,
Publisher / distributor details (see note below):	Intute Virtual Training Suite, [online]. Available from: <a href="http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective/">http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective/</a>
Publication / release date:	2006
ISBN number (if applicable):	n/a
Technical details: (if software – see note below)	
Price:	free

Internet Detective is – and I paraphrase freely from the site - a web based tutorial aimed at helping university and college students develop Internet research skills. It takes around an hour to complete the tutorial. It can be embedded into taught courses, Web pages and Virtual Learning Environments. There are also Internet Detective publications and references which are made freely available for use in course and publicity materials. Once students have managed the general skills they can move on to subject specific ones on Intute: Virtual Training Suite. Intute is a JISC service with support from ESRC and AHRC that provides information about web research and teaching for lecturers and librarians. Throughout this review further links have been placed so that it is a resource in itself.

In addition to doing the tutorial myself I tested it on my 12 year old son and a couple of students. Additionally I looked at the subject specific skills for ADM and sociology (my other subject). The tutorial can be done all in one go or broken down into sections understanding:

the Internet skills required for university and college work;

why information quality is an issue on the web, especially for academic research;

critical evaluation of information on the Internet; and

the legal and ethical issues.

All sections involve some interaction, such as quizzes; a more practical session testing all the skills learned comes between the critical evaluation and the legal/ethical sections. Some thoughts on each section are set out below.

The opening page assumes you're a student who has worked hard only to get a fail and your lecturer points out the low or non-academic standing and content of the sources, the lack of European ones and, through poor citation, potential issues of plagiarism.

The next section looks at academic publishing on the Internet and the potential for time wasted on hoaxes, scams and legends. Brief details of academic publishing are given but hyperlinks to some examples might have been nice. Searching beyond Google is suggested and a link to Metacrawler given. Good examples of spoof, parody and, even hate sites are given.

Even these sites might be cited in appropriate circumstances but all sites need to be critically interrogated and many clues are given about this. These are tested on the example of the website of the Journal of Chemical Education (genuine and only available to those with login privileges), eSharp a postgrad e-journal based at Glasgow available to all, searches on arthritis-related topics sorting the commercial from the out-of-date and amateurish. Where an alternative to Wikipedia is available they suggest taking it. I know colleagues who ban the use of Wikipedia, I only caution against its citation but suggests its use for an initial orientation before moving on to more detailed sites. The sites dedicated to parodying the official White House site are worth a look

The final section is, in many ways, the most informative with links on plagiarism, citation and copyright. On plagiarism they connect to an Indiana University, Bloomington online module on plagiarism for which their students can receive a certificate. It opens with the University's definition and takes you through well-known cases and offers the student the chance to spot examples themselves. That site uses the APA means of citation but makes it clear the module does not seek to teach citation. The site used for this by Internet Detective is Nottingham Trent's and it takes you through Harvard and numerical methods. We prefer Harvard in our school but I am used to numerical from psychologists and those with legal backgrounds (and was surprised this year when one student asked if it was OK to use MLA). The copyright information comes care of Staffordshire University and certainly helped me go beyond my knowledge of the subject based on training aimed at journalists.

Overall the tone of Internet Detective is cautionary – be careful and don't forget books and journals.

The subject specific sites for ADM and Sociology are more positive, showing students (and I've bookmarked some websites myself such as that for visual images) where to find good information. Both share a look and offer some of the same warnings as Internet Detective.

The issue of internet research and the related problem of cut and paste plagiarism are important and I will encourage students to use the site and the subject specific adjuncts. Indeed I've been inspired to create a VLE area for our School in which to place the links and breaking news about such issues from academic and popular sources. However, I'm dubious about the cod, film noir, hard-boiled detective look the site is given. Perhaps different versions or 'skins' might be made available. For many students it is pitched too low but all could benefit and I learned some things along the way.

The specialist sites don't try so hard for a style but are well-designed and allow the harvesting of useful websites as you proceed. Many students will find the level low, but not so irritating as Internet Detective. With so many more links I did find some were broken.

One problem for students will be the expectations of different disciplines, particularly those on joint or combined honours programmes, or between lecturers. Not all lecturers are as ICT-literate as others or some students. I know I place my notes online and put links in those documents and in module guides so hope my students have a head start but am still disappointed sometimes by the narrow range of sources used. I certainly find the continued citation of, what I think of as, A level texts as irritating as the sole use of Wikipedia.

As students and lecturers become more comfortable with these matters the need for such sites will diminish but at present they perform a useful service. However, they are only a passive device to which we can refer students. Lecturers need to be more active in pointing the way and despite the low tone and student-orientation many lecturers might benefit from looking at these sites and think how to avoid their students needing to do so by making it clearer what they want and where and how it might be found. It was never enough to tell students to 'just look in the library', nor should it be right to say 'just look on the net'.