SEARCHING THE INTERNET
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Objectives

✓ To learn how to use the Internet as a search tool for research
✓ How to cite Internet references in your work

What is a web page?

A web page is, at its simplest, a text file with HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) tags that define whether the portion of text between the tags is a heading, a paragraph, part of a table, etc. In short it defines the content of the page. Your web browser interprets the HTML tags and displays the text correctly formatted in the browser window.

Web page files are stored on a host web server. To access a page from your browser you need to type the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) address in the Address area of the Toolbar. The URL is often referred to as “the web address”. When you enter the address the browser sends a message to the host web server to ask for the HTML for the page. The host web server then sends this and your browser displays the results.

Of course it is really much more complex than this (how does your computer know where the Microsoft web site is kept [i.e., its host server] for example), but you should have a rough idea now of what happens when you “visit” a page.
The Firefox window

As you can see, Firefox is a standard Windows application (there a versions for Linux and Apple computers as well). It has a **Title bar** that tells you the title of the current web page, a **Menu bar**, a **Toolbar**, and on my computer a **Bookmarks Toolbar**. Below this is the space for the web page to be displayed, and finally, at the bottom of the window is the **Status bar**.
Menu bar
I am not going to tell you all the options available from the menus, merely some that you will probably need from time to time.

File menu
Save Page As... - You can save the current page in a number of formats, but the most useful is Web page, complete. If you choose this option, when you open the file later it will open in the web browser almost as you saw the original page (certain items may be missing, depending on the page that you have saved. You might do this if you want to look at the page without having an Internet connection.

Send Link... - Opens your e-mail program with the page address as the body of the e-mail so that you can send the link to someone else.

Page Setup... - Enables you to change the page orientation for printing, to adjust the page margins and the page header and footer.

Print Preview... - See what the page will look like when you send it to your printer.

Print... - Send the page to your printer.

Edit menu
Find In This Page... - Allows you to search the current page for a specific word or words (in Firefox, a special Toolbar opens above the Status bar) (Shortcut keys: Ctrl + F).

View menu
Text Size - Allows you to increase or reduce the size of the text on the page.

Character Encoding - If the web page looks a bit strange (see Figure 2) it probably means that the browser is using the wrong encoding system for the page (this is the fault of the web server, not your computer. Use this option to try different encodings to see if the page displays properly. Figure 2 shows a UTF-8 encoded page being displayed with the Greek (Windows 1253) encoding system.
Bookmarks menu

**Bookmark This Page** - Store the address of the current page so that you can get to it again quickly. You can save bookmarks in folders to keep bookmarks with a common theme (e.g., programming) together. You can also store a bookmark on the **Bookmarks Toolbar** and it will display as shown in Figure 1 above.

**Organize Bookmarks** - When you have a lot of bookmarks this option allows you to move them from one bookmark folder to another, delete them, copy them, etc. in much the same way that Windows Explorer allows you to organise files and folders.

Tools menu

**Options...** - A full description of this dialogue box would take far too long, however, a description of the **General** tab of the dialogue box is in order:
You can use this to specify which page (if any) will be displayed whenever you open Firefox (Startup section), how you want file downloads handled (Downloads section) and whether you want Firefox to check to see if it is your default browser (i.e., any time you open an HTML file, or click on a hypertext link in an e-mail, the resulting page will be displayed in Firefox, not any other browser that you may have installed.

The Toolbar
In Figure 4 you can see the various buttons that are available. I have an extra button on mine that I have not described.

Some of the buttons are currently unavailable in the current context; The Forward button only becomes active when you have gone Back one or more pages. The Reload button is important. Since all browsers store the pages you visit in a cache, the page that is displayed the next time you visit a site will be taken from the cache. This means it may not be up-to-date. Use the reload button to "override" the cache.

You can perform a search with your currently selected search engine (Google in Figure 4) by typing the search phrase and pressing Enter.

Some useful websites
- www.vakalis.edu.gr/gce/index_en.php - the Vakalis Foundation website. You will find all kinds of useful information concerning studies in the UK, links to UK travel websites, as well as a link to Webmail, our own on-line internet-based e-mail service.
- www.google.com - the Google search engine
- systran.otenet.gr – English-Greek, Greek-English (and many other translations)
- www.in.gr - Greek news site, including the Matzenta Greek-English, English-Greek dictionary
- www.howstuffworks.com - learn how almost anything works
- www.openoffice.org - the OpenOffice.org website from where you can download (legally) a full office application
Searching with Google

- At the top left you can select what type of result you require. The most common are **Web** (for web pages) and **Images** (for pictures).

- The object of the search is typed into the text box.

- On the right side of the text box is an additional search tools **Advanced Search** that may be useful to you.

A simple search for pages

- Enter the text **vakalis foundation** in the search text box and click the **Google Search** button or just press **Enter**. If Google finds anything it will be returned as a results page:
In Firefox, clicking on any of the hypertext result links with the wheel button of the mouse will open the link in a new tab:

This technique (clicking with the wheel button) works for most hypertext links that you see on a web page, but not all. In a search it gives you the opportunity of selecting all
links that seem interesting or useful and having them remain available even if you do other searches or move to another search result page.

- To see the page or pages you have selected, just click the appropriate tab. Your Google search results page still remains open so you can go back to it if you did not find what you were looking for. To close a tab, just click the tab's Close button.

- Since some web pages can be very long, you should consider also the use of Firefox's Find Toolbar. Just press $\text{Ctrl} + \text{F}$ and the Toolbar will open at the bottom of the screen. Type one of the search terms you are looking for and use the Toolbar buttons to navigate the page.

I didn’t find what I was looking for

No search engine can read your mind. You need to understand how the engine works and how to specify your search so that you get what you are looking for. Firstly, a search engine only searches its own database of web sites. If the best result for your search is in a site that Google has not yet indexed, it will not find it. Secondly, if you enter two keywords for your search most search engines will try to find pages that contain both search terms, or either search term, so for **vakalis foundation** (case does not normally matter) you might expect results for **vakalis foundation**, **vakalis** or **foundation**. The words may not necessarily be together in the results documents. Fortunately, the search performed above was sufficiently specific that the only results were for both search terms.

There is another problem with search engines; the result pages they give you do not always exist. If you try to visit the second (indented since it is a sub-site) you will find that the page does not exist and you see the 404 Not found message.

A third problem is that the structure of the target web site may not allow the search engine index to be properly constructed. This means that the term you are looking for exists somewhere in the site, but the search engine only directs you to the home page.

How to be more specific

Choose search terms that more accurately reflect what you are looking for. Let us suppose that you are a fan of The Doors and you want to know where the name of the band came from. So you enter the search term **doors**. You will not, I hope, be surprised by the fact that most of the search results have nothing to do with 60s rock bands. Changing the search term to **the doors** is better (you have reduced the number of results from
130,000,000 to about 85,000,000). You may even be able to find what you were looking for (i.e., how did they get the name?) eventually. However, by using the doors name origin, you reduce the number of results to 1,220,000 (much more manageable, I hear you say) and the very first result page answers the question. Or does it? How can you be sure that the information stated on a web page is correct? (See the next section for the answer to this.)

If you are still having problems finding what you want, try the Advanced Search (Figure 8).

- Use the top (light blue) area to be more specific. For example, I noticed that even with the doors name origin I was getting results from door and window companies. In this case I could enter the term window in the without the words area.
- Take a look at the other options that are available to you in the Advanced Search.

**How can I know if the information is correct?**

With the volume of information available on the Internet this is getting extremely difficult. Generally, if you are searching for a product or service and you are reading the manufacturer’s / provider’s web site then you can expect that information to be reasonably
reliable. If the result were from a site like Wikipedia, Encyclopaedia Britannica or Encarta, you would expect to find citations; in other words from where they acquired their information. Each of the sites mentioned here is edited by some kind of editorial committee. These types of web site can usually be trusted, just as you would trust, for example an article from “The British Medical Journal” or “The Harvard Business Review”.

When you are using the Internet for research on a university assignment you must be extremely careful with your sources.

**Citing web page references**

Citations to web pages are really the same as any other citations except that it is usual to provide some additional information. As different universities have different referencing systems I am not going to give you a format for the citation, merely what it should contain.

- The name(s) or the author(s) (if known) or the name of the organisation
- The title of the article or of the web page
- The date the article or page was written or last updated (if known)
- The URL of the page (e.g., http://www.microsoft.com)
- The date that you accessed the page (this is important since web sites are more fluid than books and journals and a page may subsequently be deleted or have moved to another part of the site)

**Downloading**

*Before discussing this topic, be aware that what you are downloading may contain viruses or other nasty things that can seriously upset the well being of your computer.*

**Pictures**

To download a picture, simply right-click somewhere in the picture and select **Save Image As...** from the context menu. The **Save As** dialogue box will appear and you can select where you want to save the picture and what name you want to use. **Do not change the filename extension (e.g., .jpg) if you change the name.**
Other files

PDF (Portable Document Format) files
Clicking a link to a PDF file normally causes Firefox to load the Adobe Reader plugin. This enables you to see the file as though you had downloaded it and opened it in Adobe Reader, but inside Firefox. To save the PDF file use the **Save A Copy** button of the Reader plugin.

Multimedia files (.avi, .mpg, .wav, etc.)
These files are mostly opened by a plugin in a similar way to PDF files, although the application may appear in its own window.

.exe (and similar) files
When you click on the download link you will see a message box similar to Figure 9:

- If you wish to continue with the download, click the **Save File** button.
- The file, by default, will be saved to your Desktop.

Other files
Links to other files may be “known” to Firefox or not. Clicking a link to a file not covered above generally gives you the following style of dialogue box (Figure 10):
• In Figure 10, the file type (in this case .xls) is known to Firefox (see Tools -> Options, Content tab, File Types area).

• Select either the Save to Disk or the Open with option buttons. If you select Open with, check that the application in the text box is the correct one. If you always want to do this, click in the Do this automatically... check box.

• Click the OK button.

Exercise: Notification of completion

1. Send a message to aks@vakalis.edu.gr with the subject Internet Searching and the message I have read and understood the notes.

End of exercise: Notification of completion