Using Electronic Resources Appropriately

**Evaluate all sources**
It’s important to be critical of all electronic sources located, especially those obtained using standard search engines. Learning how to evaluate sources, both in terms of relevancy to research topics, and also whether the information they offer is reliable and being aware of bias is a key skill to develop. Tutorials such as the Internet Detective http://www.vtstutorials.ac.uk/detective/ can help students to evaluate sources.

**Electronic journals**
Academic libraries will often subscribe to a wide range of peer-reviewed electronic journals. They present the latest research in various subject areas, are of a high standard and written by key researchers in the field. Many electronic journals are available in collections such as Ingenta, EBSCO, Science Direct etc. Access may require a password.

**Databases**
Databases such as Web of Knowledge http://wok.mimas.ac.uk/ contain work which is written and reviewed by experts and so materials are of a consistently high standard.

**Appropriate use of search engines**
By relying too heavily on search engines such as Google, students’ key research and evaluation skills can suffer as the resources returned by a standard search may not necessarily be of a high standard. Google Scholar however offers content which has been subject to the peer review process and is ranked not based on its popularity but on the number of citations it solicits. Search engines can also be valuable in presenting minority views which may not be found in other more scholarly sources.

**What about images?**
Images found on the web, just like text, may be subject to copyright restrictions. Clicking on the image can determine its owner i.e. the person who has the right to decide if it can be used elsewhere. Ensure students have the right to use an image. A useful guide can be found at: http://www.jiscdigitalmedia.ac.uk/guide/can-i-use-images-found-on-the-internet

**Wikipedia**
As a starting point for researching a topic, Wikipedia is certainly an excellent resource. However students should also note that entries can be edited by anyone and as a result, it’s important to question the accuracy and reliability of what they read. As with any encyclopedia students should use the resource as a way to find primary sources for their research.