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Short Take 1

I Swear My Computer Is Self-Aware:
The Research Habits of a Technophobic College Student

Technology hates me. But when my computer or Internet is
not making my life hellish, my cyber research is quite
productive. By chance, my Internet signal is strong, and thus I
begin my quest online.

Google.com, the search engine that became a verb, marks my
beginning. I search with the key words "William Blake." I click
on a link to quotation.about.com where I read the poem. This
site led me to webcrawler.com, and then Blake archive.org.
However, this site is the first of many dead ends to come. It
did not offer any scholarly criticism about Blake.

A few search engines and caffeinated drinks later, with
relatively no progress, I break down and go to jstor.com. Here I
find the bulk of my source material in an average of one hour by
"power browsing." I always print any article that seems remotely
useful, even if I only want to cite a few sentences. I detest
reading from a computer screen. By having my own copy of the
article I can make notations in the margin to remember relevant
quotations as I am writing my paper. My first key word search is
"William Blake." I then vertically scan a few pages of titles

for topics that seem relevant to "The Garden of Love." I select "William Blake and Popular Religious Imagery" because the poem mentions priests and seems to question, if not rebel against, religious doctrine. After skimming a few sentences on the first page, I decide to print it. I also select "Blake and Freud: Poetry and Depth Psychology." This article seems to offer a unique reading of Blake's symbolism by providing insight from a different perspective, that of psychology. Continuing to "power browse" I skim the first page of "Blake: A Crisis of Love and Jealousy." I decide to print it because it might apply to the poem's motif of desire.

I enter a more specific search term: "William Blake The Garden of Love." After vertically scanning the titles, within moments I select "Blake and the Natural World" since flowers and thistles seem symbolic. After assessing a few random sentences, I move on to "William Blake and the Human Abstract." This article, though not what I was looking for, led me to search for articles about Blake's poem "The Echoing Green." I then found an interesting article that discussed Blake's atypical paring of poetry and painting: "Blake's The Book of Urizen." This is useful to provide some background information, as well as, cultural and literary context in which to frame Blake's poem. After printing all of these articles, I snuggle with my cat and

coffee while reading each article through, annotating the margins and categorizing their relevance to my thesis.

Finally, I visit Dacus online to search for books. Using the key words "William Blake The Garden of Love," I search for books that provide general background or criticism about the poem. I write down the call numbers for several books. At the library, I locate the books and methodically scan each. I browse the table of contents, index, and preface. If the book seems relevant I check it out and read further at home. This process usually takes anywhere from half an hour to several hours. Because of the time constraints of college research, I rarely read the entire book. Rather, I read chapters or sections that seem relevant, marking passages with sticky notes. In this way, my book searching habits are almost identical with my Internet research habits. Though I "power browse" initially to find potential sources, I always return to the works to study them in depth. Having gathered sufficient material, I retool my thesis and plan how and where to use the support material I have found. This may mean altering my topic slightly.

As Nicholas Carr noted, I do "only read one to two pages of an article or book before" I "bounce" to the next source (Carr). But, even though I exhibit "power browsing" habits, I certainly do not browse to "avoid reading in the traditional sense" (Carr). I always return to the sources and read them fully and

analytically before citing them in my paper. However, there may still be negative implications from my research habits. "Power browsing" may result in my overlooking viable information. Moreover, since I tend to mold my paper in the shape of my research, the quality of my source material could determine the direction and conclusions of my research.