students are using the internet for research (http://tinyurl.com/3nhvv2u). Perhaps "misusing," would be a better term. It seems that this current generation, for whom the internet has existed for all of their lives, don't really know much about it. Or at least how it works and how to use it for research. (The part of me that admits to being middle-aged, or something like that, says "Hah!")

The study, conducted over two years at five universities in Illinois, was primarily focused on how students use campus libraries, but also produced significant insight into how they use search engines, which have become a primary research tool for most in academics and in the professional world.

Yet, as much as this wireless generation is tapped into all things digital, it appears that many deserve a D (if being generous), when it comes to understanding the why, what and how of performing a productive internet search. In particular, the study noted that, students exhibited "a lack of understanding of search logic," resulting in poor search results or other problems.

In short, it comes down to the old term: Garbage in, garbage out. That is, despite attempts by Google, Bing, Yahoo!, et al, to guess what you're looking for, they often do a poor job at it. The user has to at least know how to say what their looking for in a way the search engine can understand.

An example of one of the most common errors was students not using advanced search features and tools, such as "must have," phrases and keyword importance factors. Many didn't even understand the presence of sponsored search results that often appear at the top of search results. Instead, as a student told one of the researchers, they often just assume that the first returned links are the best ones... that they "trust Google to know."

The study, part of the ERIAL Project (Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic

they'd had time to deeply ingrain bad search habits that aren't rooted in the ideals of productivity or efficiency.

In my November 2011 column at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com, I'll offer some background on how and why search engines often produce completely irrelevant results (hint: user error), and some simple tricks for getting the most out of your searches.

-Isaac