404/File Not Found: Link Rot, Legal Citation and Projects to Preserve Precedent

Symposium sponsored by

GEORGETOWN LAW LIBRARY

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Symposium Agenda

9:00-9:30 – Registration and breakfast

9:30-9:45 – Welcome

Michelle Wu, Director, Georgetown Law Library

9:45-10:45 – Keynote

Jonathan Zittrain, George Bemis Professor of Law, Harvard Law School

10:45-11:45 – Whose Problem is This?

Karen Eltis, Professor of Law, University of Ottawa

David Walls, Preservation Librarian, U.S. Government Printing Office

Ed Walters, CEO, Fastcase

11:45-12:00 – Break

12:00-1:00 – Scoping the Problem – Analytical and Predictive

Raizel Liebler, Head of Faculty Scholarship Initiatives, The John Marshall Law School

Rod Wittenberg, Director of Sales, North America for Reed Technology and Information Services Inc.

1:00-2:00 – Lunch

1:30-2:00 – Webmaster’s View

Roger Skalbeck, Associate Law Librarian for Electronic Resources and Services, Georgetown Law Library

2:00-3:00 – Strategies I

Jefferson Bailey, Partner Specialist, Internet Archive

Herbert Van de Sompel, Digital Library Research & Prototyping Los Alamos National Laboratory

3:00-3:15 – Break

3:15-4:15 – Strategies II

Carolyn Cox, Digital Collections Librarian, Georgetown Law Library

Kim Dulin, Associate Director for Collection Development and Digitization, Harvard Law School

E. Dana Neacșu, Reference Librarian and Lecturer-in-Law at the Arthur W. Diamond Law Library, Columbia Law School

4:15-4:30 – Wrap-up and Q&A
Keynote Speaker:

Jonathan Zittrain

Jonathan Zittrain is the George Bemis Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Professor of Computer Science at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Vice Dean for Library and Information Resources at the Harvard Law School Library, and faculty director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society. His research interests include battles for control of digital property and content, cryptography, electronic privacy, the roles of intermediaries within Internet architecture, human computing, and the useful and unobtrusive deployment of technology in education.

Introductory Remarks and Symposium Kick-Off:

Michelle Wu, Director and Professor of Law, Georgetown Law Library

Before joining the law center faculty in 2010, Professor Wu served as associate dean for information services, director of the law library, and professor of law at Hofstra University School of Law. During her tenure there, she also served as interim senior vice dean for academic affairs. Prior to that, she worked at The George Washington University Law School and the University of Houston Law Center. While at Houston, she oversaw the disaster recovery process following Tropical Storm Allison, including projects to renovate the library, rebuild the collection, and restructure services. Her research interests include copyright, intellectual property licensing, and information management. She co-edited Beyond the Books: People, Politics, and Librarianship with Leslie Lee (Hein, 2007), and has published numerous chapters and articles.

Karen Eltis, Professor of Law, University of Ottawa

Karen Eltis is a Professor of Law at the University of Ottawa, where she is active in the areas of privacy law, Internet law, international arbitration and constitutional law. In 2012, Eltis published the book Courts, Litigants and the Digital Age, which explores questions of how courts should use Internet resources and social media and related concerns brought on by technology. One reviewer states that this is "a book no judge should be without."
**David Walls, Library Services and Content Management, U.S. Government Printing Office**

As preservation librarian, David Walls is responsible for developing strategies for the preservation and life-cycle management of both tangible and digital government information. While at GPO, he served as co-lead of the FDLP Forecast Study, a study to determine the future needs and direction of the Federal Depository Library Program. David has also developed initiatives to expand LSCM’s ability to harvest and archive Federal web-based information and initiated a collaborative effort between GPO, the Library of Congress, and NARA to coordinate their web harvesting programs. In response to the preservation findings of the Forecast Study, David is working on a comprehensive preservation plan for the tangible and digital collections of Federal Government information.

Prior to coming to GPO in 2010, David was the Preservation Librarian for the Sterling Library at Yale University for twelve years. He holds a Master’s Degree in Library and Information Science with an Endorsement of Specialization in Preservation and Conservation Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Ed Walters, CEO, Fastcase**

Ed Walters is the CEO, member of the board of directors, and co-founder of Fastcase, an online legal research software company based in Washington, D.C. Before founding Fastcase, Ed Walters worked at Covington & Burling. His practice focused on corporate advisory work for software companies and sports leagues, and intellectual property litigation.

Ed Walters earned an A.B. in government from Georgetown University and a J.D. from the University of Chicago. He served as the Editor-in-Chief and Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Hoya, Georgetown University’s college newspaper, and during law school, he served as an editor of The University of Chicago Law Review. From 1996-97, he served as a judicial clerk with the Hon. Emilio M. Garza on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

He serves on the boards of Pro Bono Net, Public.Resource.org, Friends of Telecom Without Borders, and Salsa Labs. He has served on the Visiting Committee for the University of Chicago Law School, and the Visiting Committee for the University of Chicago Main Campus Library System.
**Raizel Liebler, Head of Faculty Scholarship Initiatives, The John Marshall Law School**

Raizel Liebler is the Head of Faculty Scholarship Initiatives and Adjunct Professor at The John Marshall Law School in Chicago and an Affiliate Scholar with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. Raizel's scholarship focuses on the interaction between new, disruptive technologies and the law, concentrating on intellectual property, copyright, rights of publicity, and knowledge commons. She co-wrote the article *Something Rotten in the State of Legal Citation: The Life Span of a United States Supreme Court Citation Containing an Internet Link (1996-2010)*, 15 Yale J.L. & Tech. 273 (2013). Her research about link rot in Supreme Court cases was discussed in the New York Times – and is prominently cited on the Ninth Circuit's website. She is also the founding co-editor of The Learned Fangirl, a website about pop culture, technology and critical theory.

**Rod Wittenberg, Director of Sales, North America for Reed Technology and Information Services Inc.**

Mr. Wittenberg has worked in the Reed Elsevier organization for 20+ years, and has served in several organizational capacities with positions in sales, marketing, product development, and strategy. In his current role, Rod has been a major contributor in developing market strategy, sales strategy, alliance models, product development and managing other key business activities. He is experienced in defining sales strategy and executing action plans to achieve strong and sustainable revenue and profit growth in entrepreneurial and mature business organizations.

Mr. Wittenberg holds a Juris Doctorate, and an undergraduate degree in Political Science and Sociology. He has practiced law in the state of Massachusetts and is a Trustee Emeritus of the Philadelphia Bar Foundation.
Roger Skalbeck, Associate Law Librarian for Electronic Resources and Services, Georgetown Law Library

Roger V. Skalbeck is an Adjunct Professor of Law as well as the Associate Law Librarian for Electronic Resources & Services at the Georgetown Law Center. Roger has worked for more than two decades in the legal profession, focusing on technology management and implementation. He has built, managed and helped redesign many websites. He writes about intellectual property, web design, and technology tools, and has published an annual ranking of all U.S. law school home pages.

Jefferson Bailey, Program Manager and Partner Specialist, Internet Archive

Jefferson is Program Manager & Partner Specialist at Internet Archive where he works on Archive-It, archiving services, and other programs. Prior to joining Internet Archive, he was Strategic Initiatives Manager at Metropolitan New York Library Council, a consortium of libraries, archives, and museums in New York City, where he developed and managed collaborative programs to support digital initiatives in local cultural heritage institutions. He was also Principal Investigator on the IMLS-funded National Digital Stewardship Residency in New York program. He formerly worked as a Fellow in Digital Preservation in NDIIPP at Library of Congress and on digital collections at Brooklyn Public Library and Frick Art Reference Library and in the archives of National Archives and Records Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and Atlantic Records. He has taught Digital Preservation in the University of Pittsburgh MLIS program, is co-chair of the Innovation Working Group of the National Digital Stewardship Alliance, and is on the Steering Committee of the International Internet Preservation Consortium.
**Herbert Van de Sompel, Digital Library Research & Prototyping Los Alamos National Laboratory**

Herbert Van de Sompel graduated in Mathematics and Computer Science at Ghent University (Belgium), and in 2000 obtained a Ph.D. in Communication Science there. For many years, he headed Library Automation at Ghent University. After leaving Ghent in 2000, he was Visiting Professor in Computer Science at Cornell University, and Director of e-Strategy and Programmes at the British Library. Currently, he is the team leader of the Prototyping Team at the Research Library of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. The Team does research regarding various aspects of scholarly communication in the digital age, including information infrastructure, interoperability, digital preservation and indicators for the assessment of the quality of units of scholarly communication. Herbert has played a major role in creating the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH), the Open Archives Initiative Object Reuse & Exchange specifications (OAI-ORE), the OpenURL Framework for Context-Sensitive Services, the SFX linking server, the bX scholarly recommender service, and info URI. Currently, he works with his team on the Open Annotation, Memento (time travel for the Web), ResourceSync, and Hiberlink projects.

**Carolyn Cox, Digital Collections Librarian, Georgetown Law Library**

Carolyn Cox is the Digital Collections Librarian at Georgetown Law Library. She oversees the Chesapeake Digital Preservation Group, manages digital preservation projects and institutional repositories. She serves on the TS-SIS Preservation Standing Committee for 2014-2015, a subcommittee of the American Association of Law Libraries.

During her library career she has worked as a systems administrator for library management systems at both Santa Ana College and USIP (United States Institute for Peace). Since coming to Georgetown in 2011, she held the position of digital collections assistant before moving into her role as Digital Collections Librarian this year. Prior to her library career, she spent many years working as a systems programmer.

Carolyn received her Masters in Library and Information Science from San Jose State University in 2013, with an emphasis on digital preservation and management. She also holds a B.A.S. in System Analysis/Applications Development.
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Kim Dulin</strong>, Associate Director for Collection Development and Digitization, Harvard Law School</th>
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| Kim Dulin is the Co-Director of the Harvard Library Innovation Lab. The Harvard Library Innovation Lab develops innovative tools for the web designed to share the knowledge, expertise, and benefits that libraries have traditionally provided and imagines what libraries can and should be in the future.  

Kim has been Co-Director of the Lab (along with David Weinberger) for the past two years while also serving as Associate Director for Collection Development and Digital Initiatives at the Harvard Law Library. In addition to her experience as an academic law librarian, Kim has served as practicing attorney and an adjunct professor of law.  

Kim has a JD from the University of Iowa College of Law, an MS from the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and a BA from the University of Iowa. |

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<tr>
<td>Dana Neacșu is Reference Librarian and Lecturer-in-Law at Columbia Law School, Arthur W. Diamond Law Library, in New York City. She holds a PhD in Philosophy from Rutgers University, a library degree from CUNY, and various law degrees, including an LL.M from Harvard Law School. After she immigrated to the United States, Dana practiced law as a junior associate in a private law firm and then for the New York City Law Department, and since 2000, librarianship at Columbia Law School. Since 2003 she also co-teaches in the Barnard College-Environmental Studies Department as an adjunct faculty member. Dana wrote the introductory US legal research book for LL.M students (Transnational, 2005), in 2011, updated on Academic Commons, where her legal research wiki also resides. In her spare time Dana writes political satire for ThePotholeView.com.</td>
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Bibliography Covering Link Rot and Related Topics

General Resources


When Will the Internet Defeat Link Rot? MOTHERBOARD, http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/when-will-the-internet-defeat-link-rot

Legal Materials

Academic

*Articles covering difficulties faced by scholars, students, and other academic constituencies in working with, citing and relying on electronic resources.*


Nicholas Szydlowski, *A Dead Link or a Final Resting Place: Link Rot in Legal Citations*, 18 AALL SPECTRUM 7 (2014).


**Courts**

Articles address problems judges and litigants face in using citations to electronic materials.


Raizel Liebler & June Liebert, *Something Rotten in the State of Legal Citation: The Life Span of a United States Supreme Court Citation Containing an Internet Link (1996-2010)*, 15 YALE JOURNAL OF LAW & TECHNOLOGY 273 (2012).

Arturo Torres, *Is Link Rot Destroying Stare Decisis as We Know It: The Internet-Citation Practice of the Texas Appellate Courts*, 13 J. APP. PRAC. & PROCESS 269 (2012).


Influency and The US Supreme Court as Content Marketer, http://answerguy.com/2013/10/04/influency-links-supreme-court/


**Preservation**

Articles outline some potential ongoing and future preservation solutions.


Caroline Young, Oh My Blawg - Who Will Save the Legal Blogs, 105 LAW LIBR. J. 493 (2013).


Collateral

Articles that address the crucial nature of e-resources.


David Tennant & Laurie Seal, Judicial Ethics and the Internet: May Judges Search the Internet in Evaluating and Deciding a Case? 16 THE PROFESSIONAL LAWYER (2005).


Practical Tools and Tips

Hypertext Style: Cool URIs don’t change, http://www.w3.org/Provider/Style/URI

Make Any Dead URL Work Again | DeadURL.com, http://deadurl.com/

The growing problem of Internet “link rot” and best practices for media and online publishers, JOURNALIST’S RESOURCE, http://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/internet/website-linking-best-practices-media-online-publishers
The Internet is an endlessly rich world of sites, pages, and posts — until it all ends with a click and a “404 not found” error message. Everyone has experienced the 404 phenomenon – you click on a web link and the page is simply not there. Or you click on a link and a page comes up, but it does not contain the information you expect to be there.

Across the Web, the content, design, and infrastructure of millions of sites are constantly evolving, and while that is generally good for users and the Web ecosystem as a whole, it is bad for existing links. While the Web is fluid and mutable, it is increasingly called upon to act as an archive to support legal arguments and conclusions, as these source materials are either “born digital” and exist in electronic form only or are exceedingly difficult to obtain in hard copy. While static documents can be printed out to paper, ever more of the information we interact with is not static, such as dynamic web pages created on the fly, or not text based, such as video.

The hyperlink was conceived in the 1960s, but it came into its own with the HTML protocol in 1991, and there is no doubt that the first broken link soon followed. On its surface, the problem is simple: a once-live URL is now a dead link. The root cause can be any of a number of things: content could have been renamed, moved, or deleted. Alternatively, an entire site could have evaporated.

Like most technologies, the Web is a very literal-minded creature, and all it takes is a single character change in a URL to break a link. For example, many sites have stopped using “www,” and even if their content remains the same, the original links may no longer work. The rise of dynamic publishing platforms such as WordPress and Drupal have led to the fall of static HTML sites, and with each re-launch, untold thousands of links die.

Even if a core URL remains the same, many sites frequently append login information or search terms to URLs, and those are ephemeral. While some sites offer the option to retrieve a permanent link, this is a poorly understood mechanism for many users which leads to inconsistent usage and confusion. As the Web has grown, the problem has been complicated by Google and other search engines that crawl the Web and archive — briefly — URLs and pages. Many work, but their long-term stability is open to question.

This phenomenon has its own name, “link rot,” and it is far more than just an occasional annoyance to individual users. An associated phenomenon, known as “reference rot” is when the link still works but the material that it goes to is no longer the same.

**Context**

- The Chesapeake Digital Preservation Group has completed its [seventh annual investigation of link rot](http://example.com) and it has concluded that 51% (292 out of 579) of the links that it started testing in 2008 no longer work. This is consistent with other link rot studies and continues to emphasize the importance of finding ways to combat this problem for all domains, and for the legal domain in particular.

- A [2014 Harvard Law School study](http://example.com) looks at the legal implications of Internet link decay, and finds reasons for alarm. The authors, Jonathan Zittrain, Kendra Albert, and
Lawrence Lessig, determined that approximately 50% of the URLs in U.S. Supreme Court opinions no longer link to the original information. They also found that in a selection of legal journals published between 1999 and 2011, more than 70% of the links no longer functioned as intended. The scholars write:

> [As] websites evolve, not all third parties will have a sufficient interest in preserving the links that provide backwards compatibility to those who relied upon those links. The author of the cited source may decide the argument in the source was mistaken and take it down. The website owner may decide to abandon one mode of organizing material for another. Or the organization providing the source material may change its views and “update” the original source to reflect its evolving views. In each case, the citing paper is vulnerable to footnotes that no longer support its claims. This vulnerability threatens the integrity of the resulting scholarship.

- A 2013 study in *BMC Bioinformatics* looked at the lifespan of links in the scientific literature — a place where link persistence is crucial to public knowledge. The scholars, Jason Hennessey and Steven Xijin Ge of South Dakota State University, analyzed nearly 15,000 links in abstracts from Thomson Reuters’ Web of Science citation index. They found that the median lifespan of Web pages was 9.3 years, and just 62% were archived. Even the websites of major corporations that presumably should know better — including Adobe, IBM, and Intel — can be littered with broken links.

To address some of these issues, academic journals are adopting use of digital object identifiers (DOIs), which provide both persistence and traceability. But as Zittrain, Albert and Lessig point out, many people who produce content for the Web are likely to be “indifferent to the problems of posterity.” The scholars’ solution, supported by a broad coalition of university libraries, is perma.cc — the service takes a snapshot of a URL’s content and returns a permanent link (known as a permalink) that users reference rather than the original link.

Resources exist to preserve a comprehensive history of the Web, including the Internet Archive’s *WayBackMachine*. This service takes snapshots of entire websites over time, but the pages and data preserved are not always consistent and comprehensive, in part because many sites are dynamic — they are built on the fly, and thus do not exist in the way that classic HTML pages do — or because they block archiving.

The *Hiberlink* project, a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh, the Los Alamos National Laboratory and others, is working to measure “reference rot” in online academic articles, and also to what extent Web content has been archived. A related project, *Memento*, has established a technical standard for accessing online content as it existed in the past.

**Linking best practices**

It is recommended that publishers, web managers and content authors work to minimize stability problems hypertext links can have in published materials. This is relevant to courts, law processors and anybody who publishes online. Often the cost in time and resources is minimal to improve stability, and the long-term benefits for both organizations and users can be substantial.
As one example, as of September 2014, the Journalist’s Resource website had nearly 10,000 internal and external links. By using a WordPress extension to regularly check links, it is not uncommon for ten or more links to break every week. Many of these are PDFs that move, sites that update their design or infrastructure, press releases that expire, and so forth. While there’s nothing to be done about many of these changes, careful selection of when and how to link can minimize the odds later problems.

Below are suggested linking “best practices,” with an emphasis on stability and transparency rather than search-engine optimization and page ranking. The goal is to reduce the probability that outbound links will go bad, minimize work going forward and maximize a site’s long-term utility to users.

1. **Put in only essential links.**
   Every link has the potential to go bad over time, and the more you put in, the higher the chance that one will break. If something is not central to the subject at hand and the information can be easily found with a simple Web search — institutional websites, well-known individuals, and so forth — there is no point in linking. Doing so only increases your risk.

   For your users’ sake, do not link too much. If you have a forest of links in your writing, it can become difficult to know what to click on — what may be behind a link, or why it is even there. Choose your links carefully and strategically.

2. **Ensure that links are clearly visible, yet do not obscure your text.**
   Single words (“told,” “study,” “reasons”) are too easy to overlook, yet linking entire phrases can be distracting and come off as overly emphatic. Link text of two to five words works well.

   The link color and style should be distinct from unlinked text, but not overshadow it completely. Keep Web accessibility for all in mind.

3. **Choose linking text carefully.**
   The link text should let users know what they will find if they click. Options include nouns with some descriptive information (“2014 Yale study”), a person and an active verb (“Micah Sifry wrote”) or an interesting statistic (“97% of social scientists”). This also helps demonstrate accuracy and openness, as Oxford’s Reuters Institute put it in a 2014 report.

   Avoid structures such as “A new University of Pittsburgh study ([link here](#)) reveals the incidence of concussions among younger football players.” The insertion just slows down readers, and at this point in the Internet’s evolution, people know what a hyperlink looks like. That said, if this is a style you have long been committed to, be consistent.

   Avoid stacking links tightly in a sentence — for example, “Three new studies provide a research perspective on concussions in sports.” It may work for insider coverage of issues that have received extensive online attention, and you need to pack in a lot of links, but the chance for reader confusion is significant.

   To better indicate content, you can use hover text that appears when users mouse over a link. However, you should be thoughtful and consistent about this — go all in, or avoid hover text.

   A side-benefit of informative link and hover text is that if the URL goes bad later on, you have information that will simplify the search for the lost content — you know what to look for.
4. **URL and content stability is essential — except when its ephemerality is part of the story.**

Unless you are covering breaking news, try to avoid linking to anything that might go away — personal or short-term project websites that may disappear, draft versions of documents or press releases. Fast-moving stories may require linking to content that could be taken down or modified, however, and the solution is to use website tools that monitor link validity in real time.

Link to primary sources whenever possible, unless the secondary source is central to your coverage. For example, if you are writing about a new U.N. report, link directly to it. However, if you are dissecting how the report has been misinterpreted, you will want to link to both the primary document and what you see as faulty coverage.

Because of concerns about Wikipedia’s accuracy, reliability and potential for bias, link to the site only when it is the subject at hand. If you do choose to link to a page, click on “cite this page” and use the “permanent link” displayed. This will lead to a snapshot of that particular version of the Wikipedia page, unaffected by subsequent edits.

When you have a choice of sites to link to, chose stability. For example, at Journalist’s Resource they tend to favor PubMed, even if its user interface (UI) is not the best. Beyond their having 24 million citations and counting, they are part of the National Institutes of Health and are presumably going to be around for a good long time.

If you are linking to an academic paper with a DOI number, consider using that (the domain to use is “http://doi.org/”, followed by the DOI number). Persistent URLs (PURLs) also offer greater longevity, but there is some debate over the wisdom of using them for archival purposes.

For major reports that are regularly updated — say, the State Department’s work on human trafficking — link to the report landing page rather than specific documents (more on this below). In this way your link will continue to work even as documents and sub-pages change. On the other hand, if you are referencing a particular statistic or fact, don not link to a generic page with content that might change. Instead, find a source that is both specific and stable.

5. **Whenever possible, link to pages rather than PDFs.**

Many online resources are present in both Web page and PDF form — for example, the Reuters Institute paper, “Accuracy, Independence and Impartiality: How Legacy Media and Digital Natives Approach Standards in the Digital Age,” has a landing page and is also available in a full-text PDF. Given this choice, go for the landing page. This allows users to quickly assess the content without having to download it, and also offers the option of an executive summary.

Landing pages’ locations are generally more stable than PDFs. Because the latter are documents, they tend to be renamed or move around on websites.

PDF’s filenames are more likely to contain characters considered “unsafe” in URLs — commas, spaces, accented characters and so on. While these are automatically translated to Web-safe codes (more information below), they can impact link reliability.

If a PDF is large, the required download can cause browsers to time out. They also depend on specific software being installed on users’ computers. Yes, most people have Adobe Reader and compatibility is built into many browsers, but you cannot count on that.
PDFs can contain copyrighted material, and linking directly to them might raise legal issues (more on this below). They may also be behind paywalls.

If you do choose to link directly to a PDF, it can be helpful to signal this to users: “A new Scholars Strategy Network post on the immigration crisis (PDF) sheds light on some persistent myths,” for example. This is a matter of local style, however, and whatever approach you choose should be consistent.

6. Select normalized / canonical URLs whenever possible.

In selecting a URL to reference, try to remove all unnecessary information after the core of the URL. Instead of simply copying the full URL in a browser’s address bar, seek to simplify this whenever possible.

If a website promotes a simplified URL, use it. For instance, the Social Science Research Network provides a compact reference for articles in the system, such as: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1669401. This is both more elegant and more stable than a reference such as: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1669401 or http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID2039106_code450592.pdf?abstractid=1669401&mirid=1, which probably deliver the same content.

If a URL contains an ending file extension such as “.html”, in most cases anything trailing text can and should be removed. It is just dead weight and could, down the line, break a link that is actually good. Verify that the slimmed URL works and if so, use that for your hyperlink.

When there is a “?” character in a URL, check whether it and everything thereafter is mandatory for the link to function. For example, in http://journalistsresource.org/ballot-framing?utm_source=JR-email, everything from “?” on can and should be deleted. Note that the “?” sometimes precedes post or category information; that is fine, and you at least verified that this was required rather than, say, useless search terms or tracking codes.

With multiple “?” characters, you can often “peel back” the URL, progressively removing unnecessary elements from the end until you get down to the smallest and most stable link possible.

Exercise caution with URLs that have “%” in them — the symbol precedes codes that replace non-ASCII characters considered “unsafe.” For example, the URL of a Word document with the name “skating basics.doc” would be “skating%20basics.doc.” While such URLs may function, they can be unstable in the long run.

Watch out for URLs that contain references to resources that may not be universally accessible — Google Drive, for example, or login or session information. These could work perfectly well for you, but could fail for others. If you do see such information encoded in a URL, use Google or another search engine to find a direct path to the desired content.

Do some research before linking deeply into websites (this is called deep linking, but is distinct from the similarly named but completely different practice in mobile applications). Long URLs are intrinsically more vulnerable, and you could be inadvertently violating copyright or jumping over paywalls.
7. **Avoid link-shorteners, with two exceptions.**

Bitly, TinyURL and other such services are essential for Twitter and other contexts where URL length is tightly constrained. However, for text hyperlinks they should be avoided. While they produce a compact link, it is no more stable than the underlying URL it contains — garbage in, garbage out, as the coders say. You are also dependent on a third party’s maintaining your links, and that adds a layer of risk.

Perma.cc, as described in the introduction, both produces a permalink and archives the target content for at least two years; **vested organizations** such as law journals and courts have the authority to make links truly permanent.

WebCite, a project of the University of Toronto and other organizations, provides a similar service to perma.cc, but is open to all.

8. **Do not link in a way that violates copyright or breaks through paywalls. While there are a lot of gray areas, do your absolute best to respect all laws and regulations.**

For academic papers, link to abstract page rather than the full-text or PDF version. For paywalled sites, you are indicating to the user where content is, but respecting copyright.

Link to abstracts even with open journals, as they load quickly and allow users to judge whether to go for the full-text version. This also protects you down the line if a study that is initially free and accessible moves behind a paywall.

For media sites, respect paywalls, even if you can find the direct link to full content by using a search engine.

Exercise caution with links to YouTube and other media-sharing sites. Because videos are uploaded by users who may or may not have copyright, they can be taken down for infringement — do not assume such links are permanent.

Avoid linking to documents on sites such as Academia.edu where the users’ right to upload content is not always clear.

9. **Verify after publication and check your links at regular intervals.**

Check all your links after you publish. Some content-management systems can manipulate URLs during the production process, and the end results may not work.

If possible, use an application or service that regularly checks the validity of your site’s links.

When you do find broken links, fix them promptly. Also be aware that valid links can, in a sense, be “broken” when the content you were originally pointing to changes without notice.

10. **Don’t disable content other sites might reference.**

As you are building and maintaining your own blog or website, remember that other sites link to your content, and you want to keep those links alive whenever possible.

Create landing pages for all individual PDF documents, rather than just a page of links to a series of PDFs.
If you do post PDFs, ensure that file names contain safe URLs — in particular avoid commas, periods or spaces.

General-purpose pages can have generic URLs (http://journalistsresource.org/about, for example), but specific content — articles, blog posts, dated reports and so on — should have distinct, sustainable references.

When content is superseded, consider keeping the original material with a note at the top pointing users to the new content.

If you must change a page’s URL, a platform such as WordPress lets you set up a quick redirect to send users from the old URL to the new one. Other server tools will let you automatically redirect traffic from an old reference to an updated one.

When a redesign or infrastructure upgrade requires wholesale changes to your URL structure, build in ways that allow inbound links to the old URLs to connect to the right content.

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