

The Internet – Your Access to World Wide Yoga Expertise?

By Bridget Appleby

Searching the Internet can be a frustrating experience, but there is such a wealth of expertise and advice out there that it is worth spending time getting to grips with it. Here Bridget Appleby offers you some tips that should make your World Wide surfing more successful and enjoyable.

The Internet as a yoga tool?

My ‘other job’ makes great use of the Internet as a resource, finding information about legislation, guidance, codes of practice, as well as using it as a tool for exchange of information between and within organisations. So when I came across questions in my yoga classes I naturally turned to the Internet for answers.

I know some people have given up with the Internet, overwhelmed by the sheer size of it and by the irrelevance of much of what they find. However, understanding a little more about the way the Internet is organised and applying a few rules to your search can yield much better results. In the past you probably had access to advice from two or three yoga teachers you might see occasionally – now you can seek guidance from yoga experts the world over. In this article I would like to offer some ideas that can help yoga teachers (and keen students) make better use of the Internet. I am not providing an annotated list of useful websites – websites come and go - so although I have included some addresses by way of illustration, the idea is for you to learn how to identify sites which will be useful to you.

Look in the right place

You may know the joke about the man looking at night for his keys under a lamppost – someone stops to help him look, and after some minutes without finding them the helper asks if he is sure he lost the keys there. *‘No, I lost them down that alley, but it’s lighter here.’*

In some cases we use the Internet in this way – we use the default search engine provided by our browser to look up a very specific enquiry. We may be lucky and hit on what we want, but more likely we will be drowned by irrelevant finds. We don’t expect the local newsagent to carry Spectrum, so why expect Yahoo or MSN to answer a query about alternatives to the shoulder stand?

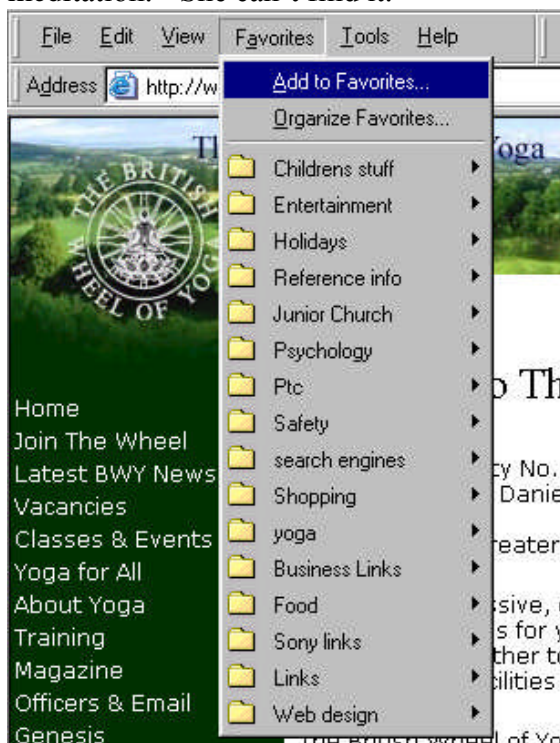
Jane’s Internet journey

Consider Jane, a typical yoga teacher planning a lesson. Jane’s class have been working on the shoulder stand over a period of weeks. She knows that not all of her class will be able to do it so she would like some inspiration for alternatives which will keep the less able interested and developing. She opens her Internet browser, and types ‘alternatives to shoulder stand’. She gets ‘about 116,000’ results including some exercises related to **shoulders**, where you **stand**, and even an interesting but irrelevant article which side tracks her for fifteen minutes on making a **stand** against vivisection by considering **alternatives** to experimenting on frogs, which mentions the frog’s **shoulder**. Jane runs out of time. On day two Jane takes a different approach. From her search engine she types ‘yoga asana’ and gets a list of yoga related sites. Jane selects www.yogabasics.com where she sees a menu option for ‘asanas’. She clicks, and finds a menu of seated, standing, supine, prone, balance and twisting postures. Underneath ‘supine’ the half shoulder stand is described (ardha sarvangasana) with modifications suggested, as well as

suggestions of postures leading up to this. She goes back to the list of yoga sites, and tries www.yogajournal.com. This time she finds a menu option 'poses' and from here sees that she can select postures by Sanskrit or English name. She finds 'supported shoulder stand' and checks the advice in the first article against the information here.

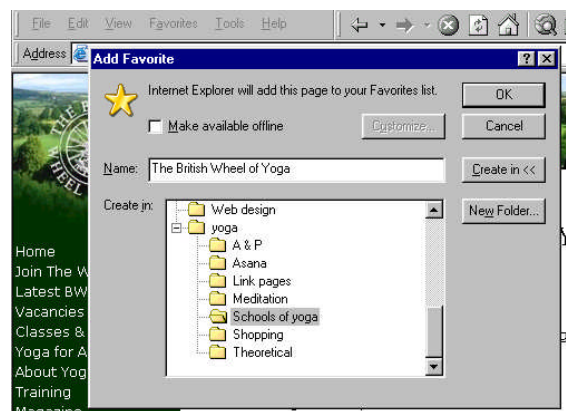
Organising your favourites

Once Jane has found some websites to help her with planning which postures to include in her lesson plan, she may look for other information. She may want to learn about an aspect of anatomy and physiology more generally, to find out about a specific medical condition, to get some ideas for visualisations. She may even start Internet shopping, ordering yoga equipment or books. A week later she returns to her PC and tries to find 'that site with the purple border which had some useful ideas on meditation.' She can't find it.



Organising your favourite websites

What Jane needs to do when she finds a useful site is to add it to her favourites list. From Internet Explorer, the most common browser in use, pull-down the 'favourites' menu and click on 'add to favourites'. You will be offered a choice of places to store the link. It is useful to store different links in separate topic folders - click on 'New Folder' to create a 'yoga' folder. This will be important if you share your computer with other people who don't want to look through a long list of your favourite links for theirs, or if you use the Internet for things other than yoga. When saving a link make sure that the label you give the link is sensible - a default name will be suggested by the website you are adding, but this may not be a suitable label to remember it by. For example, if you want to add the home page of Viniyoga at www.yogastudies.org to your favourites, the default label is 'aYs Index'. I re-wrote this label as 'Viniyoga'. If you are going to add lots of websites to your favourites list it is worth using sub-folders for different topics. In the illustration you can see a number of yoga topics for categorising each link. A similar concept will exist whichever browser you use - for example, with Netscape Navigator look for 'bookmarks.'



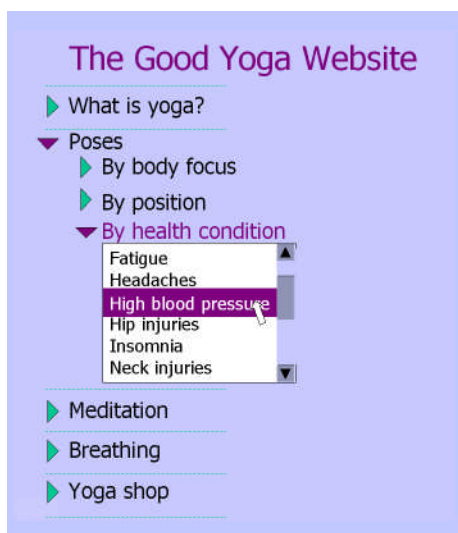
Subdivide your folders

Get to know how websites work

One advantage of using your favourites list is that you can get to know your favourite websites very well. Each website has a different menu structure – ie the options that you click to get to the page you want.

Getting to know this structure is like getting to know your local footpaths – you can get from A to B more quickly on a familiar journey than on a new trip where you may go down dead ends and need to back track often. On most sites you will have a choice of 'navigating' using the menu structure, or of typing a keyword for searching.

Keyword searches can be useful, but if you get to know the menu structure well you will often find relevant information more quickly by navigating. For example, Jane is now looking for postures suitable for someone with high blood pressure. She searches for 'high blood pressure' on the homepage search field of The Good Yoga website (a fictitious example) and is presented with a long list of items about high blood pressure, one of which may be a suggestion of suitable postures. If instead she clicked on the 'poses' menu on the home page, then 'by health condition' and selects 'high blood pressure', she will more quickly find a list of suitable asanas.



Example of using a site's navigation

Bridget Appleby originally qualified as a Chartered Psychologist, working in the field of Human Machine Interaction, initially in telecoms, and later in health and safety management. She has been a British Wheel of Yoga teacher since 1998, and writes a regular column in 'Health and Safety at Work' journal looking at software products and websites which can assist health and safety management.

The Internet – your access to world wide advice

So what conclusions can we draw from Jane's experience of using the Internet? First, if you don't already know of any suitable sites, find yoga sites using a general search engine. Once you have found some useful sites (and screened out those which aren't), add them to your favourites list so you can find them again. Use labels for the sites that help you to remember what they were called, and use folders to organise them. Once on a yoga website you will normally be more successful navigating through the site than using keyword searches.

Remember that any advice found on the Internet should be tested against your own experience. If a site recommends a posture for a medical condition, work it through yourself and be confident that it will be appropriate. As a final warning, note that any references given in this article may be out of date by the time you read them – the Internet is like that!

Useful sites for looking at medical conditions, anatomy & physiology

From www.medem.com select **medical library** for details of diseases and conditions, therapies and health strategies.

If you want an interactive way to test your knowledge of anatomy, try the tutorials and self-assessment tests at <http://anatome.ncl.ac.uk> - tutorials on the spine and the shoulder are particularly interesting.

The US National Library of medicine at www.medlineplus.gov includes a **medical encyclopaedia** for details and illustrations explaining medical conditions, and a **health topics** section providing links to other sources of information.

And of course, if you want people to know about your yoga classes, make sure the details are on www.bwy.org.uk