I recently received a pre-press copy of one of the most exciting book concepts that I have seen for some time. The book, Student’s Guide to Homework on the Internet, is the first in a series of guides on Internet usage that includes titles such as the “Parent’s Guide to the Internet” and the “Teacher’s Guide to the Internet.” What makes these Australian produced titles exciting is the immensely practical, workbook concept that takes the reader through a number of step by step examples in a simple, easily read format that uses language appropriate to both the intended age group (12-16 years) and for the novice user without extensive computer or Internet experience. The layout is very graphical utilising cartoons and screen grabs encouraging further reading by not having the pages crowded with text.

The Student’s Guide to Homework on the Internet, after introductory chapters involving getting online and setting up Netscape, covers extensive chapters on the use of the various Internet search engines and strategies for the finding of specific information. This is opposed to the usual, “Isn’t the World Wide Web great - let’s go for a cruise” philosophy of many publications. The book treats the World Wide Web as a tool for homework research not the miracle “cure!” It recommends using other resources (books etc) first - a very welcome and refreshing approach!

Later chapters in the book take the reader through a number of homework scenarios which illustrate the identification of keywords, their use in search engines and, upon finding relevant information, how to extract this information and place it in a word processor and utilise it for the user's own needs. The book does not advocate plagiarism of web-based materials, rather it shows how to utilise these as a resource with examples that demonstrate analysis and selective usage of the material retrieved. “Showing you have good research skills will always get you good marks, but simply pinching someone else’s work and making out it’s yours is really very uncool.” Some of the homework scenarios discussed include “Are Nuclear Reactors Safe?”, “History of Sydney” and “Eucalyptus Trees” illustrating three different types of assignments of varying depths of research and how best to approach the task.

The book is a useful tool in its own right but when combined with future titles that provide similar support to both parents and teachers this series should form a key resource on Internet use. While many schools are advocating the use of the Internet by their students, very few have provided their teachers, let alone their students with the skills to effectively do this. I feel that this book will fulfil that need.

The price has not yet been determined, however, the publishers assure me that the cost will be kept to a minimum.

I thoroughly recommend this book and look forward to seeing future titles from the same source.