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The Web is spawning a large mass of information of varying quality and value. From that huge, undifferentiated mass, librarians must sift carefully and assiduously to find material for their patrons that is valuable and trustworthy. Selecting published items for acquisition has presented many challenges over the years, but librarians have been trained to meet those challenges and to shape collections that best serve the needs of their users. What skills and practices will help them in the realm of electronic information?

As intellectual content migrates from print, film, and tape to electronic formats, it moves from a world characterized by the fixity and relative permanence of the medium into one in which the stability of the text is easily compromised, the permanence of the intellectual content hard to ensure, and the means of accessing the information controlled by the user, not the creator, publisher, or librarian. The new forms of electronic communication often have more in common with unpublished materials and gray literature than with the materials librarians usually see. Even electronic journals pose problems of version control and challenges to long-term accessibility that are unknown in the print world.