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Roberts, Jonathan C. (1998) *URLs in Print: To Cite or Not to Cite -- Considering the Sources*. *Computer*, 31 (2). pp. 115-117.

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I agree with Tim Wooller's comments. In reviewing a paper for another IEEE archival journal, I realised that 43 percent of the citations were solely URLs. The overuse of URL citations lowered my confidence in it, however good it was otherwise.

When I checked the cited URLs, 40 percent were erroneous, one bounced me to three further addresses, each time saying "Sorry, not here now." In many cases, I couldn't find the other URLs at the specified addresses, and had to look elsewhere. When I did find them, information regarding the subject was indeed on the site, but I asked myself whether this was the information I was supposed to read.

I understand --- and believe in --- the use and importance of the Web. In fact, when doing research, the first place I search is the Web. I use the Web, as many people do, as a world-wide encyclopedia. But I believe that I am only receiving about 30 percent of the total amount of information on the subject, because I feel that people are not adding their latest research to the Web.

The Web is a useful resource, but not a complete or accurate library. Thus, I cite URLs only tentatively. It is a question of amount: the more URLs in the reference list the less I trust the paper and the lower its archival relevance. It is useful (and unavoidable at times) to cite some URLs. I know, because I do cite them. But there needs to be a limit on the amount of changeable --- or in-the-future unavailable --- citations.

Referencing appropriate information is important when writing a scientific paper, as references support, develop, and validate the written argument. On my bookshelf I have a copy of David Lindsay's *A Guide to Scientific Writing* (Longman, 1995), which rightly warns against referencing too many university publications, personal communications, and sources that you cannot easily locate. URLs can be easily located, but, as Tim Wooller pointed out, the information may be easily altered or removed completely from the site.

Computers and the Web are rapidly changing. The printing press moved us from hand-copying manuscripts to mass-copying them. As publishing companies devote more resources to publishing on the Web, we will see (and need) more URL citations in our journals. Our confidence in citing URLs will increase. But for the moment we need to hold back on using too many URL citations.