

Guide for Online Searching

I. Choosing the best search tools:

A. Use internet sites or tools suggested by your teacher or the librarian.

B. Use subscription databases that are available from the library home page. These offer searchability of a wide range of resources such as magazines, newspapers, and reference books that are not available on the internet for free.

C. Go to juried sites that are previewed, selected, and organized by a reliable agency such as your school library or another library or educational source. They will usually provide you with many valuable links that are sometimes missed by search engines. These subject directories organize by category and some are searchable. On the Stevenson Library home page you can find the **SHS Library “Best of the Web” Directory** which is browsable by category. These sites have been evaluated and collected with the various departments’ curricula in mind. Another example is the Librarians’ Index to the Internet.

D. Use commercial ‘human compiled’ search directories that organize by category such as Digital Librarian or eiNet.

E. Use a commercial search engine such as Google or All the Web for searches when you need to search a large database of sites. Be sure to evaluate your results for accuracy and validity. (see Evaluating Web Sites) Using Google Scholar will get you to more academic sites.

F. Use metasearch engines or integrated search engines, such as Dogpile or Clusty that search several search engines at once and have clustering or ranking features to help you gather the best sites from a large number of retrieved documents.

G. For a good description of various search tools (engines, directories, metasearch engines, blogs, etc) and for information on searching these various engines, go to...

<http://www.searchenginewatch.com>.

II. Using your search tool:

A. What types of search methods are available? Look for:

1. keyword searching -- searching for documents containing a significant word or words. All search engines are designed for keyword searching and usually allow for boolean combining of keywords (see Boolean below) for more accuracy in results. Advance search screens help the user combine keywords with fill-in-the-blank search boxes.
2. subject or topic searching -- searching an index or browsing categories where sites have been organized by topic or category. Most search engines allow for both keyword or subject searching.
3. natural language searching -- searching for information by using a complete sentence query form e.g.. “Why is the sky blue?” Good for children or the inexperienced searcher.
4. phrase searching -- a search for documents containing an exact phrase or sentence specified by the user, usually framed within quotations, e.g.. “seven wonders of the world”

B. Find the best keywords to use in your query. Some tips for this....

1. Write down your topic.
2. Write down questions that you need to find out about your topic.
3. List any and all words that might be used as search terms based on your questions. These should be the significant words that might be found in a document about your topic. They should be as unique and as specific as possible.
4. List any synonyms for words that you could use if necessary, such as “death penalty” for “capital punishment”, or “Earvin Johnson” for “Magic Johnson”

C. Using Search Engines: Basic Search Syntax

1. Be as specific as possible. Use all necessary keywords to define your search as possible. Don't be afraid to try a natural language query or phrase to define your problem. It might work!
2. If you want to make sure a search engine finds all the words you enter into the search box, use a "+" (addition) symbol in front of the words you enter,
e.g. +women +cancer +prevention
3. To eliminate certain documents you might use the "-" (subtraction) symbol,
e.g. +python -Monty
4. Use quotations around words that you need to see next to each other,
e.g. "Grand Canyon" or "Human Genome Project" or "Guns and Roses"
5. Use symbols in combination
, e.g.. "Grand Canyon" +camping

D. Using boolean operation.

Boolean operation is a way of combining keywords to define your search by using connecting words such as AND, OR, NOT, NEAR, "+", "-", etc. . Search engines and online databases may vary in the operations they provide. Many search engines use a boolean operation (either AND or OR) as a default between entered keywords. Many require that you use capital letters for boolean words so always using caps for boolean commands will guarantee that you will not run into problems with case sensitivity.

1. Using the AND operator allows you to narrow your results by adding terms that must appear in the document, e.g...teenagers AND smoking
2. Using the OR operator expands your results by allowing for the possibility of more documents as terms will be searched simultaneously and independently of each other, e.g... capital punishment OR death penalty
3. Using the NOT operator will help you to filter out documents containing specific term, e.g....cardinals NOT baseball
4. Use parentheses to combine commands and define your search string...
e.g.. (women OR girls) AND sports
e.g.. (clothes OR fashion) AND history AND (United States OR America)

E. Some other common search syntax and features to look for:

1. Wild card symbols that allow variations on a word (*, ?, #, etc.)
e.g.. teen* for teen, teens, teenage, teenager, teenagers, teenaged
e.g.. wom#n for woman or women
2. Field Limiters that will allow you to search terms in a specific field or fields such as title, subject, or url. These are often available from advanced search screens.
3. Domain limiters allow you to limit by type of site such as .com, .edu., org., .gov., etc.
4. Language or type of document limiters (image, article, powerpoints, etc) are also available.
3. Date or number limiters to limit by date, date ranges or number of documents.
4. Sorting features which allow you to sort your result lists by date, relevance, alphabetical, etc.

III. Evaluating your search results

A. Always evaluate your result list. Some good questions to ask...Do you have too many hits (or not enough)? Are they relevant? Do you need to refine your search in some way (add, change or delete terms to narrow or expand)? This will give you the most accurate results to peruse.

B. Scan the list of sites or articles carefully to determine which might be most relevant to your topic. Don't just take the first items on the list. First does not always mean best!

C. Consider the source of the article (url or publication)

D. Read the first part of the document or the summary or abstract if available to determine if the site or the article will contain the appropriate information. Look for your keywords and read for context.

E. Closely evaluate any internet sites you decide to use. Determine the quality of the source and accuracy of the information before you decide to use. This is of vital importance! For more information on evaluation see Web Site Evaluation Sheet on the SHS Library Home Page.