Internet search strategies

Please watch the following video explaining how internet searches work:

<http://www.commoncraft.com/video/web-search-strategies>

The following are sites may be accessed to help you with search strategies:

<http://www.gcflearnfree.org/internet101/5>

[[Skip to Content]](http://library.rice.edu/services/dmc/guides/e-resources/internet-searching-strategies#mainContent)

[](http://library.rice.edu/)

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Mini YouTube[youtube.com/ricedmc](http://youtube.com/ricedmc)  Mini Facebook[facebook.com/ricedmc](http://facebook.com/ricedmc)  Mini Twitter[twitter.com/ricedmc](http://twitter.com/ricedmc)  Mini Pinterest[pinterest.com/ricedmc](http://pinterest.com/ricedmc) | [Share on facebookShare on twitterShare on emailShare on printMore Sharing Services0](http://library.rice.edu/services/dmc/guides/e-resources/internet-searching-strategies)  Info Internet Searching Strategies Nearly everyone who uses the Internet has had the frustrating experience of doing a web search and being flooded with hundreds of results. By choosing the appropriate search engine, controlling the terms that you search for, and using a few tricks, you can make Internet searching faster and more efficient. Agenda  1. *Understand your own search habits:* What do you typically search for? What search engines do you use? What search strategies have you experimented with? What frustrations--and successes--have you had and why? 2. *Understand the options:* What are the differences between a subject directory, search engine, and meta-search engine? Under which circumstances would you favor one over the other? What features do different search engines offer? How do different search engines work? Which is the all-around best? 3. *Understand how to perform pointed searches that yield useful results:* What vocabulary should you use in performing searches? How can you search for specific phrases? How can you tell the search engine to look for two related terms together, or to exclude certain terms? 4. *Understand how to keep track of what you've found and where you've been:* How can you keep from having to hit the back button dozens of times to get the original search results? How can you move to higher level information? How can you judge the credibility of an Internet source?  The Different Kinds of Search Tools  * A **subject directory** "offers a collection of links to Internet resources submitted by site creators or evaluators and organized into subject categories." Subject directories are useful when you are conducting general research or want to find resources recommended by experts and evaluators.   Examples include:   * + [Yahoo](http://www.yahoo.com) (http://www.yahoo.com)   + [Open Directory Project](http://www.dmoz.org/) (http://www.dmoz.org/)   + [About.com](http://www.about.com/) (http://www.about.com/) * In contrast, a **search engine** is "a searchable database of Internet files collected by a computer program." Use a search engine when you are looking for a particular web site, have a specific research question, or are looking for the most current information (see [Searching the Internet](http://www.albany.edu/library/internet/search.html)).   Examples include:   * + [Google](http://www.google.com) (http://www.google.com)   + [Northern Light](http://www.northernlight.com/) (http://www.northernlight.com)   + [Lycos](http://www.lycos.com/) (http://www.lycos.com)   + [Microsoft Networks](http://www.msn.com/) (http://www.msn.com/)   + [Altavista](http://www.altavista.com/) (http://www.altavista.com/) * **Meta-search engines** send searches to several search engines at once, then build the results into a coherent results pages.   Examples include:   * + [Dogpile](http://www.dogpile.com/index.gsp) (http://www.dogpile.com/index.gsp)   + [Metacrawler](http://www.metacrawler.com/index.html) (http://www.metacrawler.com/index.html) * **Natural Language Engines** allow you to ask questions in ordinary language: "What is a screech owl?" or "When did Hank Williams die?"   + [Ask Jeeves](http://www.askjeeves.com) (http://www.askjeeves.com) * **Specialized search engines** enable you to narrow your search to a particular discipline and profile web sites of particular interest. See an extensive listing of specialized search engines, see [Search Engine Colossus](http://www.searchenginecolossus.com/) (http://www.searchenginecolossus.com/).   + [FindLaw](http://findlaw.com/) focuses upon legal information (http://findlaw.com/).   + [ERIC (Educational Resources Center)](http://www.accesseric.org/) is a useful resource for anyone researching education (http://www.accesseric.org/).  Evaluating Search Engines Spend a little time testing how a few different search engines work. Which seems to return the most accurate results? Which has the most appealing features? If your search engine allows advanced as well as simple searches, what are the differences between the two?  Different search engines allow you to restrict your search by format (audio, video, image, etc), geographic location, date, language, and so forth. To figure out which search engine is best suited to what you are looking for, try Chris Sherman's [Interactive Search Wizard](http://websearch.about.com/internet/websearch/library/weekly/aa022900a.htm) (http://websearch.about.com/internet/websearch/library/weekly/aa022900a.htm). For a comprehensive list comparing the capabilities of various search engines, check out [How to Choose a Search Engine or Directory](http://www.albany.edu/library/internet/choose.html) by the University of Albany Library.  In general, the most recommended general search engines seem to be: [Google](http://www.google.com) , the emerging favorite among techies (http://www.google.com); [Microsoft Networks](http://www.msn.com/) (http://www.msn.com/); [Yahoo](http://www.yahoo.com) (http://www.yahoo.com); and [Hotbot](http://hotbot.lycos.com/) (http://hotbot.lycos.com/). See, for instance, the CNET rankings of the [Top Five Search Sites.](http://www.cnet.com/internet/0-3817-7-1922934.html?tag=st.int.3817-7-http://www.dis.strath.ac.uk/business/search.html#guide1922932.txt.3817-7-1922934) Useful Searching Techniques Let's try out some techniques that will allow us to tailor our searches. We'll use [altavista](http://www.altavista.com/) (http://www.altavista.com/).   * **Field searching:** You can restrict your search to particular fields within a web pages, which should narrow your results. For instance, say you want to find a web page that is about the Lone Ranger, and you suspect that you would get more accurate results by looking only within the title. Search for:   *Example*: title: lone ranger   * **Wildcard searches:** If you don't want to exclude terms that end with s, ing, etc, use a wildcard search by truncating the search term with a \*   *Example*: Tex\* gets Texas, Texan (but watch out: it will also get textile and text, and so forth)   * **Phrase searching:** To find exact terms, use quotation marks.   *Example*: "Blue Suede Shoes" Boolean Searches In the nineteenth century, the British mathematician [George Boole](http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Mathematicians/Boole.html) developed a new algebra of logic that has become fundamental to the design of digital circuits--and to sophisticated web searching. You can use Boolean logic and other strategies to perform more exact searches. Do keep in mind that not every search engine will support the features mentioned below; check [Search Engine Features for Searchers](http://searchenginewatch.com/facts/ataglance.html) for a quick overview of which search engine supports what.  For an explanation of Boolean logic, see the primer provided by [the University of Albany Library](http://library.albany.edu/internet/boolean.html). Note: On some search engines, Boolean terms (AND, OR, NOT) must be CAPITALIZED or they may be excluded from the search.  Let's try out Boolean searching on [HotBot](http://hotbot.lycos.com/) (http://hotbot.lycos.com/).   * **Match any (OR):** Retrieves records in which at least one search term is present. Use this search when several related terms are relevant to your research topic. Say that you want to find everything you can about dogs, but you know they are also called canines.   *Example*: dog OR canine   * **Match all (AND):** Retrieves records in which both search terms are present. Use this method when you want to examine the relationship between ideas. In many Boolean search engines, you can use + rather than AND. Say that you want to find out about George Bush in Texas   *Example*: Bush AND Texas or Bush + Texas   * **Exclude (NOT):** Excludes specified term from the search. For instance, you could search on "cowboy NOT football" if you wanted to exclude the Dallas Cowboys football team from your search. In many Boolean search engines, you can use - rather than NOT. Say that you want to find out about the Texas Rangers, but not the baseball team   *Example*: "Texas Rangers" NOT baseball or "Texas Rangers" -baseball   * **Combinations:** You can combine the search strategies. Say you're searching for information on Star Trek, but not those newer shows:   *Example*: "star trek" -voyager -"deep space nine" -"next generation"  **Advanced Search Engines**  If this Boolean business seems too complicated, try using the "advanced" option offered by many search engines.  Let's look at some features of advanced (or "Power") searches:   * The Advanced Search on [HotBot](http://hotbot.lycos.com/) (http://hotbot.lycos.com/) allows you to specify criteria such as:   + which words are included   + language   + date   + media type included   + location * The Advanced Search on [Google](http://www.google.com/advanced_search) (http://www.google.com/advanced\_search) allows you to search by:   + Which search terms are included (any, all, exact phrase, without)   + Language   + Date   + Where the terms occur (title or URL)   + Which domains you want to search (.com, .edu, .gov)   + Images (beta)   + Similar pages and URLs  General Hints:  * *Define what you are searching for.*   Before you rush into a complex search, it's not a bad idea to jot down what it is you are searching for. Draw key words from your notes as you set up your search.   * *Narrow down your search by using specific terms*   Perhaps the most important principle is **be specific.** If you want to look for information about the Love Bug computer virus, don't just search for "love" or "bug" or "virus": try out all of the terms. Nouns usually get better results than verbs; prepositions and articles are typically dropped out of searches altogether, unless you they are in a quoted phrase.   * *Word variations*   Internet searching rewards good spelling. If you're not sure how a word is spelled, or if it's spelled different ways in different cultures, try variants: "color" and "colour." Speaking of variations, try searching for synonyms: "blue" for a general term, "cyan" and "azure" to get more specific.   * *The Find Command:* To quickly judge the relevance of a page, jump to the key word for which you searched. Once you call up the page in the browser, go to the file menu, select find, and enter the term that you are looking for (alternatively, you can hit control f and follow the same process). * *Opening new windows:* Have you ever followed the long trail of links through a site, only to realize that you have to hit the "back" button a half million times to return to your search results? Avoid this annoyance by opening up a new window when you call up one of the links you discovered through your search. If you are using a PC, right click on the link, then choose "Open in a New Window"; if you are using a Mac, hold down the mouse button and pull over the "Open in a New Window" menu option. * *Finding top level pages:* If you land in the middle of a web site and want to find your way to the home page, chop off part of the web address. For instance, you can go from  http://library.rice.edu/folder/subfolder/file.html/    to  http://library.rice.edu/  to discover the top level Rice page. * *Follow the links.* Often sites will feature links to other useful sites. By following the links, you can discover resources that you didn't even know you were looking for... * *Learn from your searches.* Ask yourself how you can modify your search based upon what you learned from your initial results. If you don't get what you are looking for, try entering more or different terms. If you find a site that is relevant, try to cull some key words from it to use in new searches.   Do keep in mind that searching is not necessarily a science; embrace the uncertainty, and see what you find. Evaluating Internet Resources Note: This section of the document is taken directly from [Fondren Library's Internet Searching Strategies](http://library.rice.edu/Fondren/Netguides/strategies.html) (<http://library.rice.edu/research/find.../internet-searching-stategies>).   * Look at the URL to determine what type of organization produced the site.   + .com is a commercial site.   + .edu is an academic site.   + .gov is a government site.   + .org is usually a non-profit organization.   + .net is a networked service provider.   + .mil is a military site.   Country/Region-Specific Domain names:   * + A list of various domains such as .uk (United Kingdom) and .de (Germany) are available from [NORID](http://www.uninett.no/navn/domreg.html) (http://www.uninett.no/navn/domreg.html) Remember that a page's country/region of origin does not imply that the page is about that country/region or that it is written in the native language(s) of that country/region. * Look at the URL to determine who produced the site (or who posted it, at least).   + ~name is usually someone's name, or part of their name.   + You can try to look them up by partial name and institution in [WhoWhere?](http://www.whowhere.com/) (www.whowhere.com). * Consider the following questions.   + Is an author listed?   + What are the credentials of the author?   + Is there a bias or a commercial interest?   + Who is the intended audience of the page?   + How current is the information?   + Are references, citations, or links to other resources included?  The challenge: Ready to apply what we've learned? You've heard that Lycos compiles a list of the top fifty web searches conducted on its site. What is number 1 on this list?  *Hints:* Try the search out on a couple of different search engines. Start out just using a couple of terms, then experiment with adding more terms, using quotation marks, and employing Boolean logic. Does it matter if you use "50" instead of "fifty"?  *Hints II*: If you're having no luck, try adding a few more words. You recall sort of vaguely that the name of the person who compiles the listing of the top 50 is Aaron Schatz.  *Use one of the following search engines*:   * [Hotbot](http://hotbot.lycos.com/) (http://hotbot.lycos.com/) * [Google](http://www.google.com/) (http://www.google.com/) * [Northern Light](http://www.northernlight.com/) (http://www.northernlight.com/) * [Yahoo](http://www.yahoo.com/) (http://www.yahoo.com/) * [Dogpile](http://www.dogpile.com/) (http://www.dogpile.com/)   Know everything there is to know about web searching now? Play the [Who Wants to be a Super Searcher?](http://websearch.about.com/internet/websearch/library/weekly/aa081500a.htm) game (http://websearch.about.com/internet/websearch/library/weekly/aa081500a.htm). References Many of the strategies and examples in this lesson have been drawn from two sources:   * [Search Engine Watch](http://searchenginewatch.com/) (http://searchenginewatch.com/) * [Internet Tutorials](http://www.albany.edu/library/internet/) at the University of Albany Libraries (http://www.albany.edu/library/internet/) |