



How To Find What You Are Looking For On The Internet

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The World Wide Web is a huge global library with a wealth of information available for free. But unlike your neighborhood library, there is no central card catalog or friendly librarian available to help you search.

According to the website Bright Planet, the number two complaint of Internet users is frustration in finding information on the Web, which follows right behind that of slow response time. This is highlighted by the fact that two of the major search services are estimated to each cover less than a quarter of the information available on the Web—a number that drops as the volume of websites doubles each year.

Learning the tips and tricks of search services may save you time and frustration.

Start with a directory site, such as Yahoo, for broad searches. You can sift through the categories of topics and subtopics for data. If you have narrower search criteria, the “robots” and “spiders” of search engines, such as Google, may be more helpful. The new trend toward “hybrid” sites, which combine these two styles, may be a good alternative.

Search services differ from one another more than most people think. Each has a unique way of gathering and ranking websites. Therefore, you often get a very different result using the same query from site to site. Bright Planet estimated that by combing different search services, the odds that you will find what you are looking for increase more than three times. Meta search engines facilitate this by searching multiple search sites.

There are a variety of ways to refine and control searches. Some sites offer a menu of systems, while others require the use of special commands as part of a query. Here’s the bottom line: to get the right answer, you have to ask the right question.

The following basic search tips come from “Bare Bones 101” at the University of Southern California Beaufort Library (www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/lesson7.html).

Use the plus (+) and minus (-) signs in front of words to

force their inclusion and/or exclusion in searches. Example: “+meat -potatoes.”

Use quotation marks (“”) around phrases to ensure they are searched exactly as is with the words side by side in the same order. For example, “Bye Bye Miss American Pie.”

Put the most important key words first in the string. Example: “dog breed family pet choose.”

Type keywords and phrases in lower case to find both lower and upper case versions. Typing capital letters will usually return only an exact match. For example, “president” retrieves both “president” and “President.”

Use truncation (or stemming) and wildcards, such as the asterisk mark, to look for variations in spelling and word form. Example: `librar*` returns library, libraries, librarian, etc., and `colo*r` returns “color” and “colour.”

Combine phrases with keywords, using the quotes and the plus and/or minus signs. For example, “+cowboys +wild west” “-football -dallas.”

When searching within a document for the location of your keyword(s), use the “find” command on that page.

Know the default or basic settings your search service uses (“or” or “and”). This will affect how you configure your search statement because if you don’t use any signs (+, -, “”), the service will default to its own settings.

What’s the best search service? That depends on who or what you ask. One reference point is Search Engine Watch (www.searchenginewatch.com). Whichever service you use, turn to its “help” section for advice on how to maximize its capability and increase your odds of getting what you’re looking for. §



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