

Researching with the Internet

How skilled are you at using the Internet as a research tool? Many people use the Internet without really knowing how to use it effectively for research. The majority of people use the Internet as their first source with Google as their search engine. Without knowing what to do, this process could be very time consuming. Consider this:



Search Engine Results	2,690,000 hits	
If you could examine each site in 5 minutes, in order to complete this research (without stopping for food or rest) it would take you:	224,167	hours
-or-	9,340	days
-or-	1,334	weeks
-or-	25.6	years
Calculated by Fr. Don Highberger, Regis University School for Professional Studies, Communications Program		

Tips for Submitting a Search

- Use lowercase letters when you type your search statement unless you want your search to be case sensitive or when you are searching for proper names.
- Check your spelling. If you spell a word wrong, you may not get the results you expect from a search. Think of synonyms for your search term. For example, if you are searching for information about "cars", you may need to resubmit your search using "automobiles" or "autos."
- Remember that some words have more than one meaning. If you search for "stars," are you looking for "movie stars" or "stars in the sky"? You should use keywords when you do search.
- If you search for something specific and don't get enough responses, you may need to expand your search so it is not so specific. Example: Romance novels set in Miami vs. Romance novels set in Florida.
- If one of your search terms is a phrase, be sure to place quotations around the phrase. The quotation marks placed around a group of words (e.g. "global warming") tell the search tool that the words must appear as a phrase on a web page in order for that page to be included in the Search Results.
- Search engines usually process what is in parenthesis first, and the entire search statement is usually searched from left to right.
- Many search tools allow you to use to stem or the main part of a word when you do a search so you can search variations of a word at the same time. You can use a truncation symbol such as an asterisk (*), a question mark (?), or the pound sign (#) after the root of a word to search for alternate word endings. For example, you use "video*" for videotapes, videocassettes, videodiscs, videography, videos, etc.

Boolean Searches

Boolean search techniques are really quite simple to learn and can help you improve your searching of the Internet. Using concepts from Boolean algebra, Boolean searching helps to construct your search using logical operators and specified syntax:

- + or **AND**: The *plus sign* or the word "**AND**" placed before a word (e.g. "+swimming" or "AND swimming") tells the search tool that the word must be included on the web page in order to be included in the Search Results.
- or **NOT**: The *minus sign* or the word "**NOT**" placed before a word (e.g. "-billiards" or "NOT billiards") tells the search tool that the word must not be included on a web page in order to be included in the Search Results.
- OR**: The word "**OR**" placed between two or more words ("swimming or diving" AND pools) tells the search tool that either word must be included on the web page in order to be included in the Search Results.
- NEAR**: The word "**NEAR**" placed between two words ("beach or beaches" near erosion) tells the search tool that you want web pages that might include "beach erosion" or "erosion of beaches", etc. to be included in the Search Results.

Check the Source

- Look at the URL of the website. What is the domain name? The ending of the domain name is a clue to what kind of site it is:
 - .com for business and commercial websites (www.amazon.com)
 - .edu for educational websites for colleges or universities (www.harvard.edu)
 - .gov for governmental websites (www.nasa.gov)

.mil for U.S. military websites (www.navy.mil)
.net for network access provider websites (www.netscape.net)
.org for non-profit organizational websites (www.nassaulibrary.org)

In general, you can rely on websites with .edu, .gov, or .mil extensions. Websites with .net, .org and .com extensions may not be as reliable and need further evaluation.

- Check to see who created and posted the website.

The author's name and credentials should be clearly stated on the website. Are the credentials relevant to the information provided on the website? Or is the website someone's personal page? Or is the website really a commercial to sell something?

Check the Website's Publishing Information

- Check to see when the website was published.

If the website was published a while ago and is no longer current, factual or statistical information on the website may be inaccurate or misleading.

- Check to see when the website was last updated.

When was the page updated last? Look at the homepage of the website to see when the site was last updated.

Check individual pages to see if they have been updated at different times.

- Look for a Mail-to link for questions, comments, etc.

- Look for the name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the page owner.

If the page owner does not identify himself, what credentials or other information are provided to determine the reliability or authority of the website?

Check the Content of the Website

- Be a critical Internet user.

Don't accept everything that you read just because you find it on the Internet. Some websites are deliberate frauds and hoaxes.

- Check for bias and objectivity on the website.

Is the website created someone who has something to gain or sell? Usually websites published by government or non-profit agencies tend to be more objective than those sponsored by special interest groups or commercial organizations.

- Review the website for accuracy.

Does the information you find on the website seem accurate? There are fifty states in the United States, so if a website says there are fifty-one, try another website!!!

Does it match information you have found in other sources? After searching several websites on a topic, you will probably find that there is a lot of repetition of information.

- Review the website for currency.

A website might indicate the last date it was updated, but you really don't know what was updated. So you may need to evaluate the content of the website to determine its currency.

- Consider the quality and ease of use of the website.

Many websites are professionally designed with sound, animation, etc. Unfortunately, all the glitz on some websites may slow down the speed in which you can use the website, so you might want to use another website which is easier and faster, but not as pretty. In some cases, you need to download additional programs to get the plug-ins to work, and this can be nuisance.

Some websites that are sponsored by companies have advertisements throughout the website. Animated banners run across the top; pop-up windows appear whenever you roll your mouse over an image. All this can be distracting and interfere with your searching of the website.

Check the links on the website. If there are too many broken links, the website may not be up-to-date or just a waste of your time.

Additional Resources

Cohen, L. (2007, March 9). Internet Tutorials. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from University at Albany, SUNY Web site:
<http://www.internettutorials.net>