INTERNET SEARCH BASICS

Every search engine works a little bit differently and has its own rules. Taking a few minutes to check out their FAQ or Help page can help you take advantage of all the options available to you and search more effectively and efficiently.

Here are some links to guides for popular search engines:

- **Google**: [https://support.google.com/websearch/?hl=en&rd=2#topic=3081620](https://support.google.com/websearch/?hl=en&rd=2#topic=3081620)

The internet is HUGE, and finding exactly what you need can be very challenging. This guide uses the acronym S.E.A.R.C.H to help you improve your searching skills and get better results.

**S: Select your keywords**

Think about your research topic or question. What are the core components of it? Make sure each of these is represented in your search.

*Ex: search for “evolution of dogs” instead of just “dogs”.*

**E: Evaluate your results**

Chances are you probably got thousands (if not millions) of results. Take a quick look at your results and focus on the ones that will help you the most. Most search engines will promote certain websites or advertisements. Sometimes these are marked as “Ad”, sometimes they are not. Here are a few things to look at when quickly evaluating a site:

- **Language**: is it casual? Conversational? Professional? Opinionated? Offensive?
- **Images**: bright and colorful? Professional? Informative (graphs, charts)?
- **Intent**: is the website trying to explain/inform? Convince you to do/buy/believe something?

You may find exactly what you need at this point. If not, move onto the next steps.
A: Advance your search

There are many tips and tricks that can help you narrow your results. Each search engine has different rules (as explained in their guide or FAQ) but here are some common ways to refine your search:

**Quotation marks:** putting words in quotation marks tells the search engine to look for that EXACT term.
*Ex: “gray wolf” will return results about gray wolves (a specific species of wolf), without the quotation marks you will get results about any wolves that are gray.*

**Plus/Minus signs:** adding a plus sign to your search allows you to link ideas.
*Ex: if you are looking for information about gray wolves in Yellowstone National Park you can search for: “gray wolf” +Yellowstone
Adding a minus sign allows you to narrow your search by telling the search engine to eliminate certain words from your search.
*Ex: if you want information about gray wolves outside of Yellowstone National Park you can search for: “gray wolf” –Yellowstone*

**Boolean operators:** most databases and search engines allow you to utilize Boolean operators to narrow or expand your search. **NOTE:** you should always type your operators in all **capital letters**.
- **AND:** narrows your search by restricting your results to just those that include all your keywords. It is similar to the plus sign above.
  *Ex: “gray wolf” AND Yellowstone: returns just those results that include both keywords.*
- **OR:** broadens your search by allowing you to search for alternate keywords.
  *Ex: dog OR canine; “gray wolf” OR “timber wolf”; humans OR people: returns results that use either word.*
- **NOT:** narrows your search by excluding terms from your search similar to the minus sign above.
  *Ex: “gray wolf” NOT Yellowstone: returns results about gray wolves that do not mention Yellowstone.*

R: Refine

Still have too many results? Not getting the information you need? You can refine your results further by taking advantage of your search engine’s “advanced search” option if it has one.
*Ex: Google Advanced Search ([https://www.google.com/advanced_search](https://www.google.com/advanced_search)) allows you to limit your results by language, region, domain type (.edu, .org, .net, .com, etc.), file type, date updated and more.*
C: Check credentials

Anyone can publish anything on the Internet. So how do you make sure the information you find is legitimate, accurate, and useful? Here are a few tips:

**Domain:** this can tell you a lot about a site and help you choose sites best suited for the type of research you are doing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Creator/Type</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.com</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Originally intended for use by businesses, this is the most common type of domain name. It can be used by companies, businesses, individuals, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.org</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Originally intended for use by non-profit organizations, it is still used by them predominately, although anyone can register for an .org domain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.edu</td>
<td>Educational Institutions</td>
<td>Schools: primary, middle, high school, colleges and universities. Schools must be accredited institutions to have an .edu domain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.gov</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Local, regional, state and federal governments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.mil</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>United States military and Department of Defense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.biz</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Commercial enterprises and businesses selling products or services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Author:** is it clear who is responsible for the information on the website? Is there a named author? If so, is there any information about them such as educational background, job description, or official title?

**Date:** is there a date for when the information was first published? When it was updated?

**Intent:** Just like under “Evaluate”, what is the purpose of the website? Is it informative? Educational? Is it trying to sell you something? Convince you to believe something?

H: Help, get some

Still looking for what you need? Did you know that librarians are actually trained information seekers? And we’re here to help you! If you’re in the library you can find a friendly librarian at the Research Help Desk on the first floor. If you are off campus you can call, email, text, or chat with a librarian! ([http://www.arc.losrios.edu/arclibrary/Contact_Us.htm](http://www.arc.losrios.edu/arclibrary/Contact_Us.htm))