

Web Search Tools

The Information Age is upon us, and we have to figure out how to deal with finding what we want in very large amounts of information. Here are some hints for Google searches in particular. Before we start, be sure you understand Boolean operators.

Most Web search tools ("search engines"), such as Google, Bing, AltaVista and Yahoo, use + and - rather than the words AND, OR and NOT to limit or expand a search. You can put together some quite complex searches if you click on and follow the instructions in the "Advanced Searches."

Helpful Vocabulary

- A "query" is what you typed in the Search for: box--it's what you want to find.
- "hit" is something that was found that fits the criteria you gave for the search.
- An "entry" is the information you see about each "hit." Entries will be shown on the Results page of your search.
- A "search engine" is a program that follows certain rules to look through the World Wide Web and bring back information about places that fit what you've asked for.
- "Premium placement" is what advertisers pay for. This is an earlier place on the list of hits. With Google, "premium placement" is at the top of the page and labeled as premium.

General Tips

You don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to search more effectively. Here are some useful ideas for any Web search:

- Put the most important word first if you are using more than one keyword.
- You will see a "score" reported by each of the entries returned. This is how close the entry fits the criteria. Higher numbers are better.
- Your best hits are generally in the first 20 -- you're better off trying to refine a search than to look much further than that.

Google

If you use Google, it helps to read the hints. Google does not use the words AND and NOT as Boolean operators, but it does Boolean searches in its own way.

Here are some useful ideas for Google searches:

- Put the most important word first.
- Google treats words next to each other as "and" relationships first, then as "or" relationships.
- Search for a phrase by putting " " around the phrase, such as "peanut butter"

- Using a + sign in front of a required word (peanut +butter) means that you want only things with **both** peanut and butter somewhere in the document.
- You can make a NOT relation by putting a space then a hyphen in front of a word you don't want. For example,
star -wars
would eliminate documents about Star Wars. Notice that there must be a space before but not after the hyphen for this to work.
- Use a tilde (~) to get synonyms for the search terms. For example, ~peanut butter might return links to nut butter and cashew butter.
- If you want to search only within a certain site, you can. Type your search terms, then site: and the name of the site, such as "English program" site:oregonstate.edu

You can also avoid hits from that site by using -site: in front of the name of the site.

Practice:

- What is the weather today in Mexico City, Mexico? How about Kiev, Ukraine?
- How many miles is it to the Space Needle in Seattle from Chemeketa Community College? From Interstate 5 what exit would I take to get there?
- Who was the third President of the United States? Make a list of three important things he accomplished in his life.
- What is the Web site address for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. Now, go to that Web site and click "Plan Your Visit." On that page, what are the operating hours for most museums.
- What do the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) say about the availability of flu vaccine this year?

Try out your searches. Write down the number of titles that were correct (what you were looking for) and incorrect (not really what you wanted) in the first 20.

1. Search terms used:

Number correct/20 _____ Number incorrect/20 _____

2. Search terms used:

Number correct/20 _____ Number incorrect/20 _____

3. Search terms used:

Number correct/20 _____ Number incorrect/20 _____

4. Search terms used:

Number correct/20 _____ Number incorrect/20 _____

5. Search terms used:

Number correct/20 _____ Number incorrect/20 _____