

# 3 Easy Steps to Better Internet Searching



# Better Searching on the Internet

To become a web Jedi master, you need to become proficient with at least one search engine... so facile that doing an effective search becomes completely automatic. This state will come fairly quickly as long as you practice frequently.

The first step is to bookmark and become familiar with the interface and help pages associated with each search engine you use. The most comprehensive engine out there at the moment seems to be **Google**.

Most people use a search engine by simply typing a few words into the query box and then scrolling through whatever comes up. Sometimes their choice of words ends up narrowing the search unduly and causing them not to find what they're looking for. More often the end result of the search is a haystack of off-target web pages that must be combed through.

You can access the Google simple search by typing the URL **www.google.com**, and there is a simple search help page that you should look over now, before we start.

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## Step 1: Think About Your Topic

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What is the question you're trying to answer or the topic you are trying to find information regarding? Think about the

- \* people
- \* terms
- \* organizations
- \* places
- \* objects, etc.

that might be mentioned in any web page that might contain the answer to your question.

Jot these down on scrap paper as they occur to you.

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## Step 2: Use "Quotes" to Look for a Phrase

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If you type a sequence of words in as a query, Google will look for documents that contain any of those words. If you want the words to hang together as a phrase, you should put double quotes around them.

Google recently added a phrase-guessing element to its algorithms. If you type a few words in, and those words are commonly found hanging together in its index, it will assume that you're searching for them as a phrase even if you don't put quotes around them. If you're looking for a phrase that is not common, though, you'll need the quotes.

*The ability to search for phrases can be surprisingly useful. Do you suspect that something your student turned in was plagiarized, or at least heavily borrowed without attribution? Type in a phrase or two from the paper and see if it turns up elsewhere! You can also check to see if your own work is being copied without your permission.*

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### **Step 3: Include and Exclude (+ and -)**

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The first two basic tools to practice with the simple search are the use of + and - to include or exclude words. For example, if you wanted to find sites about Atlantis, the purported lost continent, and you wanted to eliminate all pages that were about Atlantis, the space shuttle.

Note: There's no space between the + or - and the word, but there is a space between words.

**You'd type**

+Atlantis -shuttle

**NOT**

+Atlantis-shuttle

Try each of the searches now, and record how many sites you find.

As you do each search, take note of what kinds of things turn up. Notice that the more specific the terms you include and exclude, the more focused your search.

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### **My Favorite Search Trick: +url:**

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Adding this delimiter at the end of a search word or phrase can help limit the types of websites that a search engine will return. For example, if I were looking for websites about dinosaurs that a public school has posted.

**You'd type**

Dinsoaur +url:k12

This would return sites that reference dinosaurs and have k12 somewhere in the web address.

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## Try these Searches .. Test your Skills

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1. Find a famous celebrity who has a birthday today
2. Find a map of the country in which Zagreb is located
3. Find a recipe for chocolate chip cookies
4. Find a picture of the state flag for Rhode Island
5. Find a periodic table of elements
6. Find tomorrow's weather forecast for Sydney, Australia
7. Find a list of books written by Mark Twain
8. Find a picture of the President and First Lady of the United States
9. Find an explanation of why people burp
10. Find driving directions from your house to the state capital.

# Google™ Tips and Tricks

- Download and install the **Google** toolbar. Not only does it put the Google search box into your browser full-time, but it also blocks pop-up ads and fills in forms for you. For Windows at <http://toolbar.google.com>. (Ad blocking, form-filling and **Google's** search box are already built into Apple's Web browser, Safari.)

- Phrase your question in the form of an answer. "After all, you're not looking for Web pages that ask your question," explains director of technology Craig Silverstein. "You're looking for pages that answer it."

So instead of typing, "What is the average rainfall in the Amazon basin?", you might get better results by typing "The average rainfall in the Amazon basin is."

- This is an old one, but very important: Put quotes around phrases that must be searched together. If you put quotes around "electric curtains," **Google** won't waste your time finding one set of Web pages containing the word "electric" and another set containing the word "curtains."

- Similarly, put a hyphen right before any word you want screened out. If you're looking up dolphins, for example, you'll have to wade through a million Miami Dolphins pages unless you search for "dolphins -Miami."

- **Google** is a global White Pages and Yellow Pages. Search for "phonebook:home depot norwalk, ct," **Google** instantly produces the address and phone number of the Norwalk Home Depot. This works with names ("phonebook:robert jones las vegas, NV") as well as businesses.

Don't put any space after "phonebook." And in all of the following examples, don't type the quotes I'm showing you here.

- **Google** is a package tracker. Type a FedEx or UPS package number (just the digits); when you click Search, Google offers a link to its tracking information.

- **Google** is a calculator. Type in an equation ("32+2345\*3-234="). Click Search to see the answer.

- **Google** is a units-of-measurement converter. Type "teaspoons in a gallon," for example, or "centimeters in a foot." Click Search to see the answer. (or "15 cm in inches" – it will convert it for you.)
- **Google** is a stock ticker. Type in AAPL or MSFT, for example, to see a link to the current Apple or Microsoft stock price, graphs, financial news and so on.
- **Google** is an atlas. Type in an area code, like 212, to see a Mapquest map of the area.
- **Google** is Wal-Mart's computer. Type in a UPC bar code number, such as "036000250015," to see the description of the product you've just "scanned in." (Thanks to the Google Blog, <http://google.blogspot.com>, for this tip and the next couple.)
- **Google** is an aviation buff. Type in a flight number like "United 22" for a link to a map of that flight's progress in the air. Or type in the tail number you see on an airplane for the full registration form for that plane.
- **Google** is the Department of Motor Vehicles. Type in a VIN (vehicle identification number, which is etched onto a plate, usually on the door frame, of every car), like "JH4NA1157MT001832," to find out the car's year, make and model.
- For hours of rainy-day entertainment, visit <http://labs.google.com>. Here, you'll find links to new, half-finished Google experiments-like Google Voice, in which you call (650) 623-6706, speak the words you want to search for and then open your browser to view the results. Disclaimer: It wasn't working when I tried it. (Ditto a lot of these experiments.)
- Poke around the "Services & Tools" link on the Google.com home page and you'll find some of the better-known lesser-known Google features, if that makes any sense.

For example, there's Froogle (product search), News, Groups (Internet discussion boards), Google Catalogs (hundreds of scanned-in product catalogs), Images (find graphics and photos from other people's Web sites), Blogger (publish your own online journal), Google language translation, Google Answers (pay a couple of bucks to have a professional researcher find the answers for you) and much more.