Internet Searching: Beyond the Basics

In this class, you will learn how to refine your internet searches to enable you to more easily find what you are looking for. We will go over some tips for spotting accurate and reliable information on the web. We'll look specifically at Google since it’s the most popular search engine at this time. But we’ll also look at some differences between search engines. We’ll investigate Google’s advanced search feature, and how to set your search settings on Google. And, we'll look at some safety and advertising issues, as well.

Quick Review

Browser

The library uses Internet Explorer as its browser. The browser window includes toolbars at the top of the screen and the taskbar at the bottom of the screen. The toolbars help you navigate through websites by using mostly the forward, backward, and home buttons.

The taskbar gives an indication of how many windows you have open at one time. On slower home connections, having more than one window open at a time can slow your computer’s response time.

Tabs

Tabbed browsing is a feature that enables you to open multiple websites in a single browser window. You can open webpages in new tabs, and switch between them by clicking the tabs you want to view. By using tabbed browsing, you potentially reduce the number of items that are displayed on the taskbar.
Window resizing and minimizing

Clicking on the double window symbol in the upper right hand corner of the title bar resizes the window (makes it smaller). When the window is smaller, the double window changes to a single window. Clicking on the single window brings the window back to its original size.

Clicking on the _ in the upper right hand corner of the title bar minimizes the window (collapses the window to an icon on the task bar. To restore the window, click on the icon on the task bar.

Web Addresses, Web Pages, and Websites

A Web Page is a unit of the World Wide Web and is comparable to a page in a book.

A Web Site is several web pages that share a common focus (similar to a book) and that have a home page.

Internet addresses never have any spaces in them. Web addresses (or URLs) have several parts: the protocol, the host name and the domain name. Let’s explore the library’s address or URL http://www.rclreads.org

- http:// identifies the document as a Web page
- www tells us that the document is on the World Wide Web. Not all web sites have this as part of their address.
- .rclreads identifies the host name.
- .org means “organization” and is the top-level domain which is like a category. Some additional top-level domain names you might encounter include .net (network), .com (commercial), .mil (military), .gov (government), .edu (education). Newer top-level domain names include .tv (television) and .biz (business).

You might also encounter domain names that indicate the country or state of origin. For example, the Ramsey County Library website can also be found at www.ramsey.lib.mn.us. .mn and .us are examples of state and country domains. Country domains can be a clue as to the relevancy of a website. A list of country domains is available at http://www.iana.org/cctld/cctld-whois.htm.

http://www.rclreads.org

Domains can tell relevancy of a website.
Search Engines

Search engines are software that let you search the Internet using the topic's main words (also known as *keywords*). Examples of search engines are Google, Yahoo!, Alta Vista, Ask, and Bing. Search engines search for websites that contain information about a topic when you do not know the exact address for a web site.

Only a few of the available search engines have links from the library's web site. To see this list of search engines, go to the library's website, www.rclreads.org, and click on “Research.” From the drop-down menu click on “search engines” to see the list of search engines to which the library has links. To use a search engine most effectively, first study its Help sections to become familiar with its search techniques.

There are many search engines on the Internet to help you find websites that contain the information you might be looking for. Each search engine has its own methods of searching and each will return different results. Although they all have different features to entice you to use their search tool, they all follow the same set of rules. They provide a search box allowing you to type keywords, and organize the results (listing of links to websites) by relevance.
Bing (www.bing.com)

Bing, a search engine designed by Microsoft, describes itself as the ‘decision making’ engine. Its colorful homepage is a deliberate attempt to distinguish itself from Google’s minimalist look.

Bing Versus Google

Want to compare Bing and Google results? Visit Bing vs.Google (www.bvsq.org) or Bing’s version of the Pepsi Challenge: Bing it On (www.bingiton.com). After typing your query in the search box, you’ll see results from both engines side by side.
Searching Google for information has become so common that some people use Google as a verb. They say “I’ll Google it” rather than “I’ll search on Google for it.” We need search engines like Google or Yahoo or Ask to help us find information on the web because, unlike the library, the Internet is not indexed.

Google (like all search engines) returns pages ranked by relevancy (or what they think are the best results based on the search terms you use). Google uses a complex algorithm to determine the relevancy that is as secret as Coca Cola’s recipe.

Search Settings

When using the Google search engine you have the ability to choose what and how answers will be supplied. Click the tool symbol in the upper right corner from a search results screen. Some areas you may control are: Google Instant predictions (see predicted searches and results as you type); Safe Search (used to block explicit sexual content from appearing in search results); the number of results displayed per page (the default is 10); and Results Window where you may choose to always have results open in a new window. From the menu on the left you can control the language interface (the language Google will use to communicate with you); language search (search for sites written in a certain language), and location (provides results based on detected location).

Use the language setting to find websites in a certain language or the Location setting to find websites in your area.

Click the tool symbol to change Google search settings.

Search Settings allow you to change settings like Google Instant, Safe Search filtering, and how many results appear per page.
Keywords

To search effectively on Google you need to think about what *keywords* you will use. *Keywords* are words that are most likely to provide the information you are looking for. They are the main (or *key*) words in your search. Another word for keyword is *subject or topic*.

Google searches are **NOT** case sensitive. All letters, regardless of how you type them, will be understood as lower case. For example, searches for *george washington*, *George Washington*, and *gEoRgE wAsHiNgToN* will all return the same results.

Choosing the right search terms is the key to finding the information you need.

Start with the obvious – if you're looking for general information on Colorado, try *Colorado*.

But it's often advisable to use multiple search terms; if you're planning a vacation to Colorado, you'll do better with *Colorado vacation* than with either *Colorado* or *vacation* by themselves. And *Colorado ski vacation* may produce even better results.

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Colorado ski vacation | Google Search
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Sometimes you'll only want results that include an exact phrase. In this case, simply put quotation marks around your search terms.

Phrase searches are particularly effective if you're searching for proper names (*"George Washington"*), lyrics (*"the long and winding road"*), or other famous phrases (*"one small step for man"*).

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"the long and winding road" | Google Search
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Note that quotation marks may also be used to include words in your search that you know Google doesn’t usually search for. Google ignores the following words: I, where, how, the, of, an, for, from, it, in, and is.
When using Google keep in mind that you may type only ten words in the Google search box. And:

- Be specific
- Put the most important keywords first when you type your search (company or product name)
- Surround phrases with quotation marks, when appropriate.
- Think how the page you are looking for is written – a search engine is not a human, it is a program that matches the words you provide to those on web pages on the internet.
- Describe what you need with as few terms as possible

Practice searching using keywords. Think about which keywords you will use in your search to answer the following questions. Then type your search into the Google search box.

1. What year did the movie Casablanca debut in theaters?
2. In what Shakespearian play is the leading lady Desdemona?
3. What is the capital city of Laos?
4. What school do Sasha and Malia Obama attend?
5. What does SARS stand for?
7. Where was water skiing invented?
8. What ancient civilization built Chichen-Itza?
9. Who was Johnny Cash’s first wife?
10. Who wrote “Crime and Punishment”?
Google Advanced Search

Once you know the basics of Google search, you might want to try Advanced Search, which offers numerous options for making your searches more precise and getting more useful results.

You can reach this page by clicking the tool symbol in the upper right on any Google results page.

You can do a lot more with Google search than just typing in search terms. With Advanced Search, you can search for pages:

- that contain ALL the search terms you type in
- that contain the exact phrase you type in
- that contain at least one of the words you type in
- that do NOT contain any of the words you type in
- written in a certain language
- that have been updated within a certain period of time
- within a certain domain, or website
Google Shortcuts:

Google has many special features to help you find exactly what you are looking for. Here is a sample of nifty, shortcut search features Google provides:

Movie Showtimes

To find reviews and showtimes for movies playing near you, type "movies" followed by your zip code, or the name of a current film into the Google search box.

Example: movies 94705

Stock Quotes

To see current market data for a given company or fund, type the ticker symbol into the search box. On the results page, you can click the link to see more data from Google Finance.

Example: CSCO

Weather

To see the weather for many U.S. and worldwide cities, type "weather" followed by the city and state, U.S. zip code, or city and country.

Example: weather San Francisco, CA

Calculator

To use Google's built-in calculator function, simply enter the calculation you'd like done into the search box.

Example: 30% of 55

Dictionary Definitions

To see a definition for a word or phrase, simply type the word "define" then a space, then the word(s) you want defined.

Example: Define philosophy
Some Internet Safety and Website Reliability Tips

The Better Business Bureau has put together a list of things to watch for when shopping online. These include:

1. **Protect your computer** – Update your computer system with the latest spam filters, anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and a secure firewall.

2. **Use trustworthy Web sites** – Always start with BBB to check on the seller’s reputation and record for customer satisfaction. Look for a “trustmark” from BBBOnLine and click on that seal to confirm that it’s valid.

3. **Protect your personal information** – Read the site’s privacy policy to understand what personal information is being requested and how it will be used. If there isn’t one posted, consider that a warning that your personal information may be sold to others without your permission.

4. **Trust your gut** – Offers on Web sites and in unsolicited e-mails can often sound too good to be true. Always go with your instincts and don’t be afraid to pass up a “deal” because it might cost you in the end.

5. **Beware of phishing** – Legitimate businesses do not send e-mails claiming problems with an order or an account to lure the “buyer” into revealing financial information. Pick up the phone and call the contact number on the Web site where you made the purchase to ask if there was a problem with your transaction.

6. **Confirm your online purchase is secure** – Look in the address box for the “s” in https:// and in the lower-right corner for the “lock” symbol before paying. If you have doubts about a site, right-click anywhere on the page and select “Properties.” This will let you see the real URL (Web site address) and the dialog box will reveal if the site is not encrypted.

7. **Pay with a credit card** – It’s best to use a credit card because under federal law you can dispute the charges if you don’t get what you were promised. You also have dispute rights if there are unauthorized charges on your credit card, and many card issuers have “zero liability” policies under which you pay nothing if someone steals your credit card number and uses it.

8. **Keep documentation of your order**. When you’ve completed the online order process, there may be a final
confirmation page or you might receive confirmation by email – don’t delete these, save them!

9. **Check your credit card statement often** – Don’t wait for a paper statement; check your credit card statements for suspicious activity by either calling the credit card company or by checking your statement online.

10. **Know your rights** – Federal law requires that orders made by mail, phone or online be shipped by the date promised or, if no delivery time was stated, within 30 days. If the goods aren’t shipped on time, you can cancel and demand a refund. There is no general three-day cancellation right, but you do have the right to reject merchandise if it’s defective or was misrepresented. Otherwise, it’s the company’s policies that determine if you can cancel the purchase and whether you can get a refund or credit.
Advertising

Making note of advertising on the web is important when you are looking for unbiased information. Some web sites have no advertising while other sites have an abundance of it. It is likely that information on a web site with a lot of advertising is influenced by those advertisers. You should also make note of hypertext links. Hypertext links have an effect on advertisers. They are motivated to advertise on pages where they can attract viewers to their home page. Some businesses lure viewers through the promise of entertainment.

As you look at web sites ask yourself: If the information is being provided for free, what seems to be the purpose of the information provider for making the information available? And, what are some of the possible influences on the objectivity of the site?

Hoax Sites

Remember, anyone can create a website and put erroneous information on the internet. It is important to realize who authored the site and who is providing the information. An excellent example:

http://descy.50megs.com/mankato/mankato.html

Be Aware of other options

Ramsey County Public Library purchases the rights to use several online databases. All of them are available to you for free when you use them in the library. In addition, some of them are also available from home—without charge—if you have a Ramsey County Library card and PIN (personal Identification Number). Go to our website, www.rclreads.org, and click “Online Resources.”

Also, remember, what you are looking for may not be on the internet or there may be a better source.

The internet has many great sources of information, but it is not the great repository of all knowledge. The information that you want may be available, but in some other format. You might find your information in a magazine article, a book, a video, or a fee-based database. Always feel free to ask any of the librarians for help with your search.

Information for this class has been taken primarily from:


Various Google “Help” screens.
One-to-One Computer Help

Do you need extra help on the computer, tablet or other piece of technology? Are you searching for a job or working on a resume? Let us answer your questions about surfing the Internet, setting up an email account, or working with documents. Registration not required.

Mondays 3-5  Wednesdays 5-7  Thursdays 1-3
RCL – Maplewood  RCL – Roseville  RCL – Roseville

One-to-One e-Reader Help

Have you purchased a new e-reader or tablet computer? Are you curious how to use your new device with the Library’s e-book services, Overdrive and 3M Cloud Library? Help is available for your questions. Bring your Nook, Kindle, iPad or other device for some hands-on instruction. Registration not required.

Tuesdays 2-4
RCL – Roseville