

Top Search Tips

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At the end of our internet search workshops participants are asked to come up with a collective list of top search tips. These can be search tools, individual web sites or search techniques. What follows is a compilation of the tips from several workshops.

1. **It isn't your fault!** Results can vary from one minute to the next. You run your search a second time in Google and you get a completely different set of results. Don't worry - it isn't you. Google results are rarely consistent and can change from one moment to the next. If you are having serious difficulties getting any sense out of Google, don't struggle. Try another search engine e.g. Yahoo (<http://search.yahoo.co.uk>) or Bing (<http://www.bing.com/>).
2. **Keep it Simple.** There is a plethora of advanced search options and Google alternatives but starting off with a simple search string is often the best approach. Looking for data on the UK rat population? You might be tempted to include a file format limitation in your search and/or a site:gov.uk command but simply typing in a search for uk rat population statistics may be quicker and came up with more relevant information. **Note:** the simple approach worked with this example at the time of the workshop because it was a "hot topic" in the UK news. It might not work now, which brings us to number 3...
3. **Be aware of personalisation and hot topics** The major search engines monitor what you search for, the links you click on and use this to "personalise" your results and sponsored links/ads accordingly. This information is stored in cookies on the computer you used for the search. They also try and work out your location from your IP address so that they can deliver local content (this sometimes goes horribly wrong!). What is currently hitting the headlines will also be a factor in determining the results that are displayed on the first page (increase your displayed results per page to more than the default 10 and ideally to at least 50). This means that you will see different results from one day to the next and if you use a computer other than your usual machine.
4. **Get to know Google** Get to know the advanced search features of Google both on the advanced search screen and in the menus on the left hand side of your results page.
5. Use **social media** search tools for the most up to date information. For example <http://search.twitter.com/> or <http://twazzup.com/> for Twitter, <http://blogsearch.google.com/> for blogs, Whos Talkin' (<http://www.whostalkin.com/>).
6. **Google Custom Search Engine** <http://www.google.com/cse/>. Create your own Google search engine that searches only the sites that you have specified. Great if you are always searching the same sites day after day, or want to provide your users with a search tool covering a specific topic.
7. **Tripleme** <http://www.tripleme.com/> to display results from Google, Yahoo and Bing side by side. There is also a deduplicate button.
8. **Docjax** (<http://www.docjax.com/>) for a quick and easy way to search Yahoo and Google for PowerPoint, Excel, PDF and Word files.
9. **Slidefinder** <http://www.slidefinder.net/> Ideal for locating single slides in a presentation that contain your search terms. There is an Advanced Search that enables you to search specific areas of a slide for example title, text, notes. You can also limit your search to a university. There are browsable lists at the bottom of the page but they do not list every institution, for example there are only 47 for the UK. One workshop participant had been given a paper copy of a complex slide and it had taken her "ages" to find an electronic version. She had had to wade through hundreds of slides in presentations that had been identified by using the advanced filetype: ppt search. Slidefinder found it straight away!

10. **Cached copies.** Look at the search engine's cached copy of a web page if you can't find your search terms in the document, or if the page is nothing like the description in the results list. You will see the version of the page that has been used by the search engine for indexing and with your terms highlighted.
11. **Repeat the most important term** or terms in your search one or more times. For example 'beer market share France Belgium Czech' and 'beer market share France Belgium Czech Czech Czech' give different results.
12. **Enter your search terms in a different order.** The search engines will rank and display your results differently and may even run a completely different search.
13. Remember that you are searching an **out of date index** of the web when you are using Google et al.
14. **Creative Commons and public domain images** If you are looking for an image for a presentation or promotional literature, search for images that have the appropriate Creative Commons (CC) license. There are several licenses with varying degrees of restrictions. Details are on the Creative Commons web site at <http://www.creativecommons.org/>. You can search Flickr photos that have a specific creative commons license at <http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/> or use Compfight (<http://www.compfight.com/>). Geograph (<http://www.geograph.org.uk/>) is a useful site if you are looking for landmarks, historic buildings or geographical features. It "aims to collect geographically representative photographs and information for every square kilometre of Great Britain and Ireland". All photos have a CC 2 license, which means that they can be used commercially with attribution.
15. Use the **Wayback Machine** (<http://www.archive.org/>) to see what was being said on a web site in the past or to track down "lost" documents and pages.
16. **Blogpulse** <http://www.blogpulse.com/>. Singled out in several of the workshops because of the "Trend this" option that displays graphically how often your term or terms have occurred in blog postings over time.
17. **Use alternatives to Google and specialist search tools.** Try **Browsys Finder** (<http://www.browsys.com/finder>) and **Zuula** (<http://www.zuula.com/>) for quick and easy access to a wide range of search tools covering different types of information. Enter your search once, click on the tab for the type of resource (video, images, reference, news etc.) and work your way through the list of search engines.
18. If your search involves numbers, distances, weights, prices or measurements of any sort use the **numeric range** search in Google. For example: toblerone 1 . . 5 kg to find online shops selling giant bars of toblerone.
19. Make use of **proximity searching**.
 - a) Double quote marks around your search terms to force a phrase search works in all of the search engines. For example "carbon emissions trading" (Note: Google sometimes ignores this)
 - b) In Google, use the asterisk to find your terms separated by one or more terms but close to one another.
 - c) Google AROUND command looks for words within a specified number of each other, for example firstword AROUND(n) secondword, where n is the number of words separating your terms
20. **Idée Labs** (<http://labs.ideeinc.com/>). This site has a number of image search experiments. Multicolr Search Lab (<http://labs.ideeinc.com/multicolr/>) searches 10 million Creative commons Flickr images by colour. You can specify more than one colour and click on a colour several times to increase its prominence within the image. You can easily click through to the original Flickr image to double check the license. TinEye Reverse Image Search (<http://www.tineye.com/>) lets you type in the URL of an image or upload one of your own and TinEye will find similar images, how it is being used, if modified versions of the image exist, or if there is a higher resolution version.