

Info skills

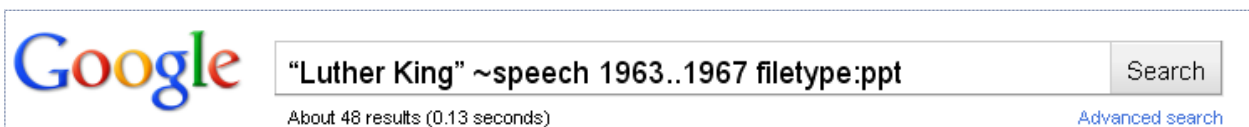
Making the most of Google



Introduction

Google is the best known and most popular internet search engine. Perhaps the main reason it is so popular is because it is so easy to use. However, the quality of the results and the relevance of the results to your needs will depend hugely on what you typed in the search box. Knowing how to enter your search in order to get the most relevant results is quite a skill.

For tips on choosing keyword please visit the 'Search strategies' section or the 'Understand assignment title' guide.



Types of search engine

There are many different types of search engine. They all return different results. Some specialise in returning certain types of result. Here are just a few examples:

- **Web search engines** - For general web searching, e.g. Google (www.google.co.uk), Bing (www.bing.co.uk), Yahoo! (www.yahoo.co.uk), Ask Jeeves (www.ask.co.uk).
- **Tabbed search engines** - Display results from several search engines at once, allowing you to flick between the different results. e.g. www.zuula.com, www.search.io.
- **Gateways and portals** - Searchable directories of websites. See the section on 'Subject gateways' for more information. e.g. www.intute.ac.uk, www.dmoz.org, www.vlib.org, directory.google.com.
- **Human web search engines** - Search blogs and discussion boards, e.g. www.boardreader.com, www.blogpulse.com, www.icerocket.com.
- **Web archives** - Search web pages which no longer exist and see websites as they were at certain points in the past, eg www.archive.org.

Beginners tips for improving your search results

Unless you specify otherwise, Google automatically searches for all the words you type in, to appear somewhere in the webpage or document, not necessarily next to each other.

- **Search a phrase** - Use speech marks ("") to search for words as a phrase, e.g. *"Tony Blair" 2005 election*.
- **Search for alternative words** - Add OR to search for alternative words e.g. *university OR college OR "higher education"*.
- **Remove words from a search** - Use a minus (-) symbol before the word to remove them from a search e.g. *Europe -EU* will find anything mentioning Europe which does not refer to the EU.

- **Fill in blanks** - Use an asterisk (*) to replace a whole word or number e.g. “*Top * destinations in Spain*” will return hits including “top 10 destinations in Spain” and “top holiday destinations in Spain”.

Advanced Google searching and internet search strings

If you are confident with the basics of Google searching, the next level of search skills is using ‘search strings’. These are what advanced Internet searchers use to find exactly what they are looking for. A search string is comprised of a number of search commands which are typed in together.

For a comprehensive guide to Google search commands, see: www.googleguide.com. As an introduction, here are some of the main search commands you can use:

Command	Details
site:[website domain]	Limits results to that web domain e.g. <i>headache site:nhs.uk</i> will search for the word ‘headache’ on the NHS webpages, while “ <i>international aid</i> ” <i>site:gov.*</i> will search for the phrase ‘international aid’ appearing on any government website (including gov.uk, gov.au, gov.ru, etc.).
filetype:[file extension]	Limits results to documents with certain file extensions e.g. <i>filetype:pdf</i> will return only pdfs, while <i>filetype:ppt</i> will return only PowerPoint presentations. Useful file extensions to know include: doc (Word), xls (Excel), ppt (PowerPoint), pdf (Adobe Acrobat), swf (Flash), mp3 and wma (music), mpg and wmv (video).
[number]..[number]	Searches for all numbers in that range. It can be particularly effective for date searching e.g. “ <i>Luther King</i> ” <i>1963..1968</i> will find anything referring to Martin Luther King between those dates.
related:[web address]	Finds similar pages to the web address you type in e.g. <i>related:google.com</i> finds other search engines.
link:[web address]	Returns web pages which link to that web address – often these will be pages on a similar topic.
~[word]	Instructs Google to search for that word and any synonyms e.g. <i>~university</i> will find any result which includes the word university or similar words such as college.

Tip: Search commands work in reverse if you use a minus symbol. For example, to cut out all results from government websites, you might include *-site:gov.** in your search, or to cut out Word documents from your results you might include: *-filetype:doc*.

Example Search String

For example, here is a search string you might use to find PowerPoint presentations about Martin Luther King’s speeches given between 1963 and 1967: “***Luther King***” ***~speech 1963..1967 filetype:ppt***.

This example consists of four components:

- 1) The phrase “Luther King”.
- 2) The thesaurus word ‘speech’.
- 3) The date range 1963 to 1967.
- 4) The file type ‘ppt’.