



Searching the Web

How to best utilize your time while online

Searching the Web

The Web, with all its glitter, can be unproductive, nothing but a big waste of time; a black hole.

It was rolled out initially to provide entertainment. Then companies found they could share information with other companies and their consumers. E-commerce showed up. The bubble grew, popped (more like exploded), and now the Web is back to entertainment and information.

Oh, sure, e-commerce continues on, but nothing like many dreamed it would be. Company information, likewise, is still available. And entertainment? The value is being debated, and there's the occasional new rollout of "something substantial" that seems to last about a year before disappearing.

Navigating the Web, looking for useful information (useful being used very subjectively here), can be a daunting task. Chances are very good that what you are looking for is out there. You just need to know where to look. And if you don't know where to look, then it is absolutely essential that you know how to look. And that's where this paper comes in.

Take this scenario:

While reading your favorite book (which you bought online), you come across a phrase that you just don't quite understand. You figure, "hey, I'm a resourceful, tech-kinda person, why not jump on the web and see if I can find a different interpretation of it!"

Grab a lounge chair, start a pot of coffee and say your goodbyes to the family, you're in for a treat.

Before you realize it, two hours have passed and you're no closer to finding your answer than when you had started your journey.

But...

You found a beautiful towel rack for the bathroom downstairs, ordered some storage boxes you've been unable to find at the local Target, and won a five dollar gift certificate for signing up for that yoga class being held at Wal-Mart.

Oh yeah...

And you sent your brother an electronic greeting card for his birthday.

As you can see, in the above scenario, you were quite productive, just not for what you had set out to accomplish.

Finding what you want on the Web starts with the search tools available to you and the words you use to describe what you want.

Here are your tools:

Dedicated search sites

<http://www.google.com>
<http://www.alltheweb.com>
<http://www.altavista.com>
<http://www.hotbot.com>
<http://www.webcrawler.com>

Search sites with other content (news, for example)

<http://www.excite.com>
<http://www.lycos.com>
<http://www.yahoo.com>

There are many, many more search sites, but the ones listed above, especially the dedicated sites, offer the best results.

Now that you know what tools to use, and that's the easy part, we'll now venture into describing how to search. And by the way, entering your text in upper case letters, lower case or a combination of upper and lower makes no difference in search engines: the end result will be the same no matter how you enter your text.

When you visit a search site (search engine), it appears pretty straight forward. You place the cursor in the textbox, enter your word or words and click on a button to find the Web pages (they show up as links) that contain what you have entered. Click the appropriate link, and there's your information!

Let's go shopping. And let's use Google as our search engine.

We're looking to buy a new couch. So enter the word *couch* in the textbox and click on the Google Search button.

What did you find?

A couple furniture sites, some personal sites, and a whole lot of results (over 2.5 million!) that you hope you won't have to visit to find the couch you want.

Most search sites offer a "search within these results" option. Let's try that.

On Google, click the Search within Results link at the bottom of the page. You'll be taken to another page where you can enter text in another textbox. Enter the word *red* and click the Search within results button.

You'll see we're still looking at over 430,000 sites where *couch* and *red* appear on the same page.

Let's refine our search further by including *sleep* in our search terms.

Again, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the Search within results link. Enter the word *sleep* and click the button.

That will still give us over 188,000 possible links to our red sleeper couch.*

But let's refine our search still further.

Again, let's search within results. Enter *antique*, and the results are now down to just over 15,000 pages. It's getting better, but still too many links for the time we have. And if you take a look at the first few links, you'd see that they really don't pertain to what you want.

Another way...

There's another way to enter your search words. Instead of entering one word, then searching within those results with another single word, you can use quotation marks ("") around multiple words. (It would be redundant to use quotation marks on a single word.)

For example, entering "*red couch*" tells the search engine that you want pages with those two words in exactly that position to one another.

The point about entering multiple words within quotation marks is that you want to try to duplicate parts of a sentence where certain key words would appear.

Entering "*couch red*" means that you want those two words exactly as shown. Think of how a sentence would be constructed to yield your words. "Don't spill on my couch, red wine" would be one possible find (punctuation is typically ignored during a search).

But entering "*red couch*" might better yield "this beautiful, red couch is only \$599!" Something more to what you are looking for.

Refinement...

Use a combination of words within quotation marks and a single word outside the quotation marks. For example, "*red couch* *antique*" (placing antique outside the quoted words) tells the search engine to find all pages that have the words *red* and *couch* next to each other (in that order, not couch red) and the word *antique* anywhere on the page.

* Sleep versus Sleeper. When using words in your search term, avoid plurals or any variation on a "root" word. I suggested earlier to use "sleep." This will result in the search engine displaying combinations of this word: sleep, sleeping, sleeper, sleeps, etc. If we had entered sleeper (instead of sleep), we would not see pages with sleep, sleeping, sleeps, etc. If you use definitive words like this (plurals, etc.), be sure that is what you want to do.

Let's look at another example.

Say you're looking for a phrase from the bible, *the first will be last and the last will be first*. Again, you want to read a different interpretation of it, so you jump on the web.

Let's take it one word at a time. If you search for just the word *first* (I know, it's senseless to do this, but you'll see where it goes), without quotation marks (because it is just one word), you'll see over 200 million pages that contain the word *first*.

Now try "*first will*" and see what you get (use the quotation marks).

You'll find that Google lists the word *will* as a common word and will not include it in your search terms. Therefore, "*first will*" will result in the same matches for *first*.

Common words...

Try to avoid using common words, like *will* above. The word *the* is another one to avoid (though Google allows this). When in doubt, though, go ahead and use them.

Let's further refine our search by adding another word. Try "*first will be*" and see what you get. I ended up with just over 68 thousand links.

Go further still by entering "*first will be last*" in the textbox and searching on this.

I got just over four thousand links this time, and the first link was to a CFO site. But you should start to see a lot of bible links at this point.

Try one more search. This time, place the word *matthew* outside the quoted words, like this "*first will be last*" *matthew*.

Most, if not all of the links you'll see (just over twenty-three hundred) will be religious links.

Another variation of this search would be to place the word bible outside the quoted words: "*first will be last*" *bible*.

This last search is actually better than using the word *matthew* outside the quoted words and all the links from the search are religious.

Summary...

What you can gather from these examples is that you have to think like a thesaurus when searching for information on the web. Keep your mind open to variations on how to word your search terms. The more flexible you can be, the more definitive the results. And the faster you'll find what you want.

Happy surfing!