

## Ten Tips for Smarter Google Searches

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Most people use Google in a very inefficient and often ineffective manner. If all you do is enter a few keywords and click the search button, you're one of those users who don't get as much out of Google as you could. In this article, Google expert Michael Miller shows you how to search smarter — and more effectively.

Google is a very sophisticated search engine, but most users don't use its full power. The average user enters a keyword or two into Google's search box, clicks the Search button, and waits for Google to display the first page of search results. This is a rather brute-force method of searching, unfortunately, and typically generates a ton of mostly unwanted results.

There is a better way to search—one that generates a smaller, more targeted list of results. All you have to do is implement a few simple tips, and you'll soon be generating more and better Google search results.

### Tip #1: Use the Correct Methodology

Whether you're conducting a basic or advanced Google search, there is a certain methodology you should employ. Follow the proper method and you'll get very targeted results; ignore this advice and you'll either get a ton of irrelevant results or a dearth of relevant ones.

While there are many different (and equally valid) approaches to web searching, I guarantee that this particular approach will generate excellent results. It's a six-step process that looks like this:

1. Start by thinking about what you want to find. What words best describe the information or concept you're looking for? What alternate words might you use instead? Are there any words that can be excluded from your search to better define your query?
2. Construct your query. Use as many keywords as you need; the more the better. If at all possible, try to refine your search with the appropriate search operators—or, if you prefer, with the Advanced Search page.
3. Click the Search button to perform the search.
4. Evaluate the matches on the Search Results page. If the initial results are not to your liking, refine your query and search again—or refine your search by switching to a more appropriate search site.
5. Select those matching pages that you wish to view and begin clicking through to those pages.
6. Save the information that best meets your needs.

In other words, it pays to think before you search—and to continue to refine your search after you obtain the initial results. The extra effort is slight, and well worth it.

### Tip #2: Conduct an "Either/Or" Search

Most users aren't aware that Google automatically assumes the word "and" between all the words in a query. That is, if you enter two words, it assumes you're looking for pages that include both those words—word one *and* word two. It doesn't return pages that include only one or the other of the words

The upshot is that you don't have to enter the word "and" in your query. If you're searching for Bob and Ted, all you have to enter is **bob ted**. Google assumes the "and," and automatically includes it in its internal index search.

This is different from assuming the word "or" between the words in your query. As an example, compare the query **bob ted** (which is really **bob AND ted**, remember) with **bob OR ted**. In the first query, the results include pages that mention both Bob and Ted. In the second query, the results include pages that mention Bob alone, as

well as pages that mention Ted alone, as well as pages that mentioned both Bob and Ted. It's a subtle difference, but an important one.

So if you want to conduct an "either/or" search—to search for pages that include one word or another word, but not necessarily both—you have to insert the **OR** operator between the two keywords. And when you use the **OR** operator, make sure to insert it in all uppercase, or Google will ignore it as a stop word—which we'll discuss next.

### Tip #3: Include or Exclude Words in Your Search

Speaking of the words "and" and "or," Google automatically ignores these and other small, common words in your queries. These are called *stop words*, and include "and," "the," "where," "how," "what," "or" (in all lowercase), and other similar words—along with certain single digits and single letters (such as "a").

Including a stop word in a search normally does nothing but slow the search down, which is why Google excises them. As an example, Google takes the query **how a toaster works**, removes the words "how" and "a," and creates the new, shorter query **toaster works**.

If you want these common words included in your query, you can override the stop word exclusion by telling Google that it *must* include specific words in the query. You do this with the **+** operator, in front of the otherwise excluded word. For example, to include the word "how" in your query, you'd enter **+how**. Be sure to include a space before the **+** sign, but not after it.

On the other hand, sometimes you want to refine your results by excluding pages that include a specific word. You can exclude words from your search by using the **-** operator; any word in your query preceded by the **-** sign is automatically excluded from the search results. Remember to always include a space before the **-** sign, and none after.

For example, if you search for **bass**, you could get pages about the type of male singer or about the type of fish. If you want to search for the type of singer only, enter a query that looks like this: **bass -fish**.

### Tip #4: Search for Similar Words

Not sure you're thinking of the right word for a query? Do you worry that some web pages might use alternate words to describe what you're thinking of?

Fortunately, Google lets you search for similar words—called *synonyms*—by using the **~** operator. Just include the **~** character before the word in question, and Google will search for all pages that include that word and all appropriate synonyms.

For example, to search for words that are like the word "elderly," enter the query **~elderly**. This will find pages that include not just the word "elderly," but also the words "senior," "older," "aged," and so on.

And here's a bonus tip: To list *only* synonyms, without returning a ton of matches for the original word, combine the **~** operator with the **-** operator, like this: **~keyword -keyword**. This excludes the original word from the synonymous results. Using the previous example, to list only synonyms for the word "elderly," enter **~elderly -elderly**.

### Tip #5: Search for an Exact Phrase

When you're searching for an exact phrase, you won't get the best results simply by entering all the words in the phrase as your query. Google *might* return results including the phrase, but it will also return results that include all those words—but not necessarily in that exact order.

When you want to search for an exact phrase, you should enclose the entire phrase in quotation marks. This tells Google to search for the precise keywords in the prescribed order.

For example, if you're searching for Monty Python, you *could* enter **monty python** as your query, and you'd get acceptable results; the results will include pages that include both the words "monty" and "python." But these results will include not only pages about the British comedy troupe, but also pages about snakes named Monty, and guys named Monty who have snakes for pets, and any other pages where the words "monty" and "python" occur—anywhere in the page, even if they don't appear adjacent to one another.

To limit the results just to pages about the Monty Python troupe, you want to search for pages that include the two words in that precise order as a phrase. So you should enter the query "**monty python**"—making sure to surround the phrase with quotation marks. This way, if the word "monty" occurs at the top of a page and "python" occurs at the bottom, it won't be listed in the search results.

### Tip #6: List Similar Pages

Have you ever found a web page you really like, and then wondered if there were any more like it? Wonder no more; you can use Google's **related:** operator to display pages that are in some way similar to the specified page. For example, if you really like the articles at [InformIT](http://www.informIT.com), you can find similar pages by entering **related:**<http://www.informit.com>.

### Tip #7: Fine-Tune Your Search with Other Operators

The **related:** operator is just one of several operators you can use to fine-tune your Google search result. All these operators work the same way; enter the operator as part of your query, followed by the parameter for the operator directly after the colon (no spaces), like this: **operator:parameter**.

What search operators are available for your use? Here's a short list:

Operator	Use	Usage
<b>allinanchor:</b>	Restricts search to words in the link text on web pages (with multiple keywords)	<b>allinanchor:keyword1 keyword2</b>
<b>allintext:</b>	Restricts search to the body text of web pages (with multiple keywords)	<b>allintext:keyword1 keyword2</b>
<b>allintitle:</b>	Restricts search to the titles only of web pages (with multiple keywords)	<b>allintitle:keyword1 keyword2</b>
<b>allinurl:</b>	Restricts search to web page addresses (with multiple keywords)	<b>inurl:keyword1 keyword2</b>
<b>filetype:</b>	Restricts search to files of a specified type	<b>filetype:extension</b>
<b>inanchor:</b>	Restricts search to words in the link text on web pages	<b>inanchor:keyword</b>
<b>intext:</b>	Restricts search to the body text of web pages	<b>intext:keyword</b>
<b>intitle:</b>	Restricts search to the titles only of web pages	<b>intitle:keyword</b>
<b>inurl:</b>	Restricts search to web page addresses	<b>inurl:keyword</b>
<b>site:</b>	Restricts search to a specific domain or website	<b>site:domain</b>

### Tip #8: Search for Specific Facts

When you're looking for hard facts, Google might be able to help. Yes, Google will always return a list of sites that match your specific query, but if you phrase your query correctly—and are searching for a fact that Google has pre-identified—you can get the precise information you need at the top of the search results page.

What types of information are we talking about here? Fact-based information, such as birthdates, birthplaces, population, and so on. All you have to do is enter a query that states the fact you want to know. For example:

- To find the population of San Francisco, enter **population san Francisco**.

- To find where Mark Twain was born, enter **birthplace mark twain**.
- To find when President Bill Clinton was born, enter **birthday bill clinton**.
- To find when Raymond Chandler died, enter **die raymond chandler**.
- To find who is the president of Germany, enter **president germany**.

The answers to these questions are displayed at the top of your search results page. You get the precise answer to your question, according to the referenced website. Click the associated link to learn more from this source.

### Tip #9: Search the Google Directory

Google indexes billions and billions of web pages in its search database—which more often than not produces an overwhelming number of search results. The quantity is there, but sometimes you'd rather have a few quality results.

When quality matters more than quantity, bypass the main Google search engine and use the Google Directory instead. The [Google Directory](#) is a relatively small database of web page listings, each of which is handpicked by a team of human editors. The listings in the Google Directory are then annotated and organized into relevant topic categories. You can browse the directory via category, or search for specific terms.

The Google Directory is a useful alternative to searching the massive Google web page index. Google Directory results are more focused and of uniformly higher quality than what you find in the larger search index, and also help you to get a feel of what's available in any given category. Plus, you get the advantage of browsing by category instead of searching, if that's your style.

To access the Google Directory, click the More link on the Google home page and then select Directory on the following page. Alternately, you can go directly to the Google Directory by entering `directory.google.com` in your web browser.

### Tip #10: Use Google's Other Specialized Searches

The Google Directory isn't the only alternative Google offers to its main search engine. Depending on the type of search you're doing, you may get better results by using one of Google's more specialized search sites. These include:

- [Froogle](#) searches online shopping sites for the lowest prices on specific products.
- [Google Answers](#) is a paid service that directs your queries to a team of professional researchers—great for when you have more involved questions that you can't answer with a simple search query.
- [Google Apple Macintosh Search](#) searches the main <http://www.apple.com> domain and other Apple-related sites.
- [Google Blog Search](#) searches blogs and blog postings.
- [Google Book Search](#) searches the full text of hundreds of thousands of fiction and non-fiction books.
- [Google BSD UNIX Search](#) searches a variety of sites that specialize in the BSD version of the UNIX operating system.
- [Google Groups](#) searches the UseNet archives for relevant articles and postings.
- [Google Linux Search](#) searches a variety of Linux-related sites.
- [Google Microsoft Search](#) searches the main <http://www.microsoft.com> domain and other Microsoft-related sites.
- [Google News](#) searches a variety of news sites for up-to-the-minute news headlines—as well as historical newspaper archives dating back two centuries.
- [Google Scholar](#) searches a database of scholarly journals, articles, papers, theses, and books, as well as select university and research libraries.
- [Google U.S. Government Search](#) searches a variety of U.S. government websites—which makes it the best place to search for official government forms, information, reports, and the like.
- [Google University Search](#) searches a database of more than 600 university websites—great for finding course schedules, admission information, and the like.

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