

Tips for Using Search Engines

One of the things that will make you a better web searcher is understanding what you need to type in order to tell the search engine exactly what you are looking for.

There are two categories of search operators: Boolean and *non-Boolean* operators. An operator is a word or symbol that you type in that gives the search engine directions to help it know what to search for.

Using these operators can narrow or widen your search, helping you find web sites that may be useful to you.

You will have to check out the individual search engines to find out which operators work.

Boolean Searching:

AND means the search results must have both terms – often it is typed in UPPER CASE, but not always

AND decreases the number of web sites that will be found, narrowing in on specific topics.

Example: pollution AND water will look for web sites about both pollution and water

OR means the search results can have just one of the terms

OR increases the number of web sites that will be found, broadening your search

Example: pollution OR water will look for web sites that mention **either** pollution or water

NOT means any result containing the second term will be excluded

NOT decreases the number of web sites that will be found, narrowing your search.

Example: pollution NOT water will look for web sites about pollution that do not involve water

Warning: Be very careful about using **NOT**. If the web site mentions water even once, it may be left out. This could rule out some very useful web sites. Likewise, you must be careful when using **OR**. You can end up with a huge number of sites to sort through.

Non-Boolean Searching:

+ works like AND, making the term required in the search results
the + should be placed directly in front of the search term without any spaces

Example: pollution +water will look for web sites about pollution that also mention water.

- works like NOT and means to exclude the term
the - should be placed directly in front of the search term without any spaces

Example: pollution -water will also look for web sites about pollution that do not involve water.

" " placed around terms means the search engine will look for the exact phrase

Example: "water pollution" will look for that exact phrase. This can make your search very specific.

Warning: Just as with the Boolean terms, you must be careful when using - that you do not eliminate web sites that might mention the term you do not want, but are not really about that term. - water may eliminate web sites that are about air pollution but mention water pollution as well.

How to find out which search operators to use:

Different web sites and search engines use different systems, and you will need to learn which search terms work best with your particular search engine.

Many web sites and search engines will tell you which to use if you click on buttons such as HELP or ADVANCED SEARCH or POWER SEARCH or SEARCH TIPS. They may also offer other search limit options such as letting you pick dates or languages. Explore your favorite search engines to find out what they can do!