

Tips on Conducting Searches

1. **Choose the right tool.** Would you choose a screwdriver to pound in a nail? Of course not! By the same token, search engines, metasearch engines, and directories work differently and each one has its own merits and faults. Better choices mean faster results that better match your query.
2. **Read the directions at each search site.** The technique for formulating a search depends on the search engine one is using. There are a wide variety of options available among the different search engines.
3. **Learn how to use a few of the best search tools well.** Meta-search engines often eliminate advanced search features and don't search subject directories. It is more effective to know how to use a few of the best subject directories and search engines than by using a meta-search engine.
4. **Take time to formulate a search strategy.** Are you looking for a distinct phrase? Are there synonyms, spelling variations or foreign spellings in you terms? Do you need to include the word "AND" in your search query? Formulating a search strategy increases your ability to search successfully.
5. **Check spelling, check spelling, check spelling!**
6. **Many search engines are case sensitive.** Do not capitalize any words in your search.
7. **If the results are not satisfactory, repeat the search using alternative terms or experiment with different search engines.** No two search engines work from the same database or have exactly the same way of going about a search.
8. **If there are too many results, or results that are not relevant:**
 - Add concept words
 - Use vocabulary that is more specific to the topic
 - Narrow the search to an individual field in a record or parts of the Web page such as Title, Summary, First Heading, etc.
 - Use the Boolean NOT to keep out records containing terms not wanted
9. **If there are too few results:**
 - If possible, drop off the least important concept(s) to broaden the subject. For example, if looking for **hives AND strawberries AND treatment** and nothing is found, decide whether the source of the hives is more important, in which case one would choose **hives AND strawberries** or if the cure is more important, in which case one would choose **hives AND treatment**.
 - Use more vocabulary which is more general, for example: allergy instead of hives.
 - Add alternate terms or spellings for individual concepts and connect with **OR**
10. **If you have tried and can't find what you need or don't know where to start, ask a librarian.** Librarians can provide tips for Internet searching, direct you to subject related sites or databases, or locate a print resource that may provide you with the information you need.

