

The World Wide Web is a vast source of information, growing rapidly on a daily basis with content being submitted by individuals, groups and organisations from all over the world. It's easy for students & researchers to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information on offer. It's also easy to waste valuable time trawling through results only to find information which may or may not be relevant. While we recommend that you firstly visit the CIT Library website with its large range of quality peer reviewed online content, the internet shouldn't be completely dismissed when carrying out research since it can frequently be a useful source of open access scholarly journals, current news, e-magazines & other general information.

The internet is searched via a Search Engine & there are a number of these available. The most commonly used include **Google, Yahoo, Bing, Ask.com, WebCrawler** and **Info space**. All Search Engines have a different interface and function slightly differently. For example **Google & Ask.com** are link ranking engines which means that they consider the relevance and importance of the results found. Other Search Engines such as Yahoo rank by general content. Consequently Search Engines will often find different search results, so it's a good idea not to rely solely on just one Search Engine.

Search the internet more efficiently by using the following tips.

1. Use the Advanced Search Option

Always use the advanced search feature associated with your search engine, this will give you a far greater level of control over your search and will allow you to refine results according to your own requirements.

2. Use Specific Search Terms

By entering a vague or extremely broad ranging search term, you will usually be faced with an overwhelming number of results. However by entering something more specific or even a unique term you can significantly reduce the number of results found e.g. *'Architectural Acoustics'*.

3. Use quotation marks for exact phrases

Using quotation marks around a phrase or term will ensure that only that specific term is found in your search results e.g. *"Blood borne Pathogens"*.

4. Do not include common words when constructing your search phrase.

When entering your search term or terms you should usually ignore 'stop words' such as *'A', 'of' and 'The'*. You should also omit all types of punctuation when constructing your search phrase.

5. Do not use Capitalisation

Most search engines do not distinguish between uppercase and lowercase, as a result it's not necessary to use capitalisation when searching the internet.

6. The use of Wildcards

You can use "wildcard" characters to broaden search results in most search engines. These wildcard characters include *, #, and ?, with the asterisk being the most common. Typing *educat** will ask the database to look for all possible endings to that root. Results found will include all of the following *educate, educated, education, and educational*

7. Be aware of Spelling and use Synonyms

Use all variations of the spelling of the word to make your search as comprehensive as possible. Vary your search phrase using synonyms to expand your search e.g. *Clinical Trials*, *Scientific Trials*, *Analytical Trials*.

Examples:

- *anaesthesia* (UK Spelling), *anesthesia* (US Spelling)
- *foetus* (UK Spelling), *fetus* (US Spelling)
- *haematology* (UK Spelling), *hematology* (US Spelling)

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8. The use of Browser History

The use of the browser history option can in some cases be useful to revisit a website that you initially dismissed. By entering a general date and time of the original search, you can re-track your steps and revisit sites previously visited.

Issues to be aware of when searching the Internet:

In some subject areas, there may be bogus or incorrect information posted on the internet. How will you know this? What are the clues to point you to more valuable sources of information?

When assessing web pages and the information they contain, you should always consider the following points.

1. **Authority & Reputation:** Which organisation developed the site? Who wrote the document/page? Are they an authority in this field? Do they have a good reputation? Check the credentials of any source you use – Look for an 'About Us' section. If peer reviewed literature is available, give it priority. If pages are anonymous, you should treat them cautiously. If claims are made, is the methodology of the research/study given?
2. **Open Authoring:** Who is responsible for composing the article? Can anybody edit this information? For example *Wikipedia* is a source of information that is edited frequently and not always correctly. Does the information seem to change noticeably from time to time? Is it peer reviewed and checked? Be careful of open authored sites like *Wikipedia* that have no obvious author and can be easily edited by third parties.
3. **Preferred Domain:** Anybody can obtain a .com site and set up a webpage so caution is advised but a .ie site must prove a connection with the domain name and so will have more credibility. .Org or .Net are usually organisations and these may have their own agendas so it pays to scrutinize content from these types of sites.

4. **Purpose:** What is the purpose of the site? Is the site promoting or selling something? If so, you need to be cautious since the information may lack independent objectivity. Does the website have an obvious agenda? If so, be careful as claims may be unproven. You are probably looking for academic information, not baseless opinions. Check everything.
5. **Accessibility & currency:** Is the site and its information up to date? Check this. Does the page give a 'last updated date'? Does it show copyright? Is it easily and always accessible?
6. **Presentation & appropriateness:** Does the site look good or 'home made'? Be careful here as the best looking site may still give bogus or unproven information.