



The Savvy Researcher

Self-guided
Term Paper Exercises

#8: Searching the Web: Key Strategies

Library Website: <http://library.clackamas.edu>

Reference Assistance: (503)657-6958 x2290

This guided exercise covers the following techniques for finding quality information on the Web:

- Choosing a search engine (commercial or academic)
- Using search engine directories
- Writing precision search statements

(See also our Research Guides *Web Searching for College Students* and *Evaluating Web Resources*.)

Your topic: _____

A. Comparing and Selecting Search Engines

1. Open the Library's website; click "Research Gateway" and choose "Search the Web."

View the list of **commercial** search engines and the list of **academically-oriented** search engines.

- Go to the **Overture** search engine, www.overture.com (not on our list); search *stem cells*.
Notice the first 5 items retrieved. Try the search in *Yahoo!* Where are those same 5 items listed?
- Try the same search in *Google*. Do any of the 5 sites appear on the first page? If so, where?
- Try it in the *Librarians' Index to the Internet*. Do any of the same 5 sites appear? If so, where?

Explanation: *Overture* drives *Yahoo!*, *MSN*, *AltaVista*, *Dogpile*, and many other commercial search engines; it ranks result sites by the amount *paid* to be listed. "Sponsored" sites may appear in the main listing or in top or side bars. Though *Google* lists its own paid sites to the side, its main result list is often quite good, with rank based on links from other "high-quality" sites. *Librarians' Index to the Internet* searches only websites hand-picked by the *LII* editors as academically useful, and does not accept sponsored sites.

When searching for academically useful information, your best starting point is usually either

- *Google* - if you need or wish to search millions of websites
- *LII* or another of the smaller, academic search engines - if you just need a few good-quality sites

2. Write a keyword search (one or two words) for your topic: _____

Try your search in *Google* # hits: _____ Examine the first page of results.
Try your search in *Librarians' Index to the Internet* # hits: _____ Examine the first page of results.

Compare your results; which search engine returned the best websites for this topic?

B. Using Search Engine Directories

A search engine's directory will often take you more efficiently to its best sites than a keyword search.

1. Google's Directory – selecting categories

Open *Google*. Select: **More >> Directory >> Society >> Issues**

Select an issue of your choice: _____ View the resulting list.

These are *Google's* top-ranked sites for this category. How many sites are in this category? _____

Does it look like a useful set?

2. Using Google's main Directory to identify categories

Sometimes it is difficult to determine a good starting category for a topic – Dracula, for example.

Try this: at the main Directory screen, search for “Dracula.”

List 3 different *Google* categories (not websites) which give information about Dracula:

Give the pathways: _____

Click on one of these and view the results. How many sites are in this category? Is it a useful set?

3. Search for your own topic in Google's Directory, either by selecting categories or by searching from the main Directory screen. Give the pathways for two Google Directory categories related to your topic.

Click on one of these and view the results. How many sites are in this category? Is it a useful set?

4. Try using the directory in the Librarians' Index to the Internet to find websites on your topic.

Compare your results to the *Google* directory. Which was best for your topic?

C. Precision Search Statements in Google

Find *Google's* **Advanced Search Tips** page. (Not just the Advanced Search screen, but the *tips* page).

1. Scan the tips page, then go back to the main Google search screen and try these searches:

Keyword search	#hits	notes
rap music		defaults to AND search, finds items with both <i>rap</i> and <i>music</i>
“rap music”		use “ “ to find items with your <i>exact phrase</i>
“rap music” +violence		+ tells <i>Google</i> the result sites <i>must</i> have the word <i>violence</i>
“rap music” ~censor		~ fetches “related” terms (e.g., <i>cancel</i> , <i>canceling</i> , <i>cancelled</i>)
“rap music” -gangsta		- tells <i>Google</i> the result sites <i>must not</i> have the word <i>gangsta</i>
“rap music” site:.org		site: lets you specify a <i>domain</i> (.gov, .org, .edu, etc.)
“rap music” (children OR teenagers OR youth)		OR (must be capitalized) - fetches items with <i>any</i> of the terms. Parentheses are not necessary but help keep your search clear

2. Try some of these features (+, ~, -, OR, site:, phrase) as appropriate with your own topic.

Keyword search	#hits