The 8-fold Path to Web Searching Power*

* more of what you want, less of what you don’t

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Power Searching on the Web: Tips

- Quotation marks
- OR
- Parentheses
- Limit by site
- Limit by filetype
- + (plus sign)
- - (minus sign)
- ~ (tilde sign)

Tip 1: Quotation marks for Phrase Searching

This is most useful when the words to be searched are not very specific, have different meanings in various subject areas, when having the words adjacent to each other changes the meaning, or when it is important that the same word is repeated.

- “baby bottle tooth decay”
- “curve of monson”
- “head and neck cancers”

Tip 2: OR

Use this when you want any of the terms, not all of the terms. Be sure to capitalize the word “or” so Google does not ignore it.

- “baby bottle tooth decay” OR “early childhood caries” OR “nursing caries” OR “milk caries” OR bbtd
- Child OR children OR youth OR teen OR kids
Tip 2: Boolean OR

- Results have fewer false negatives.

Tip 3: Concept group searching with parentheses

- Note: This is most useful with complex questions, questions with many separate concepts, for which initial simple searches provide erratic quality results.
- EXAMPLE:
  - Question: Do sports drinks erode the teeth?
    - Concept 1 Terms = “sports drinks” OR gatorade OR “isotonic solutions”
    - Concept 2 Terms = dental OR dentistry OR tooth OR teeth
    - Concept 3 = erode OR erosion OR erosive OR “tooth wear” OR caries

  - Can you put all those terms on one line like this?
    - “sports drinks” OR gatorade OR “isotonic solutions” dental OR dentistry OR tooth OR teeth erode OR erosion OR erosive OR “tooth wear” OR caries
  - NO!!! There are three different ideas here. If you try this, you will get strange (& probably useless) results because Google won’t be able to tell them apart.
  - Can you search each group separately, and then tell Google to mix and match the results of the 3 searches?
    - I wish, but not yet.

- So what can you do? This -- collect each group of terms by placing parentheses around them to show the beginning and end of a single concept group.
- Question: Do sports drinks erode the teeth?
  - Concept 1 Terms = (“sports drinks” OR gatorade OR “isotonic solutions”)
  - Concept 2 Terms = (dental OR dentistry OR tooth OR teeth)
  - Concept 3 = (erode OR erosion OR erosive OR “tooth wear” OR caries)

  - Becomes this:
    - (“sports drinks” OR gatorade OR “isotonic solutions”) (erosion OR erosive OR “tooth wear”) (dental OR dentistry OR tooth OR teeth)
Tip 3: Concept group searching with parentheses

- **Note:** You can use parentheses embedded within parentheses to describe complex concepts or streamline the use of repeated terms.
  - "baby bottle tooth decay" OR ("tooth decay" OR "caries") ("baby bottle" OR "early childhood" OR nursing OR milk OR bbd OR ecc OR toddler)

Tip 4: Limit by site

- **Note:** This is useful when you want to control the quality of the search results, when you know a site that is likely to have what you need, and also when you want to find again a known document.
  - Want government reports on oral health?
    - "oral health" site:gov
  - Want board review resources from the ADA, but without using their site search engine?
    - ("national boards" OR "board review") site:ada.org
  - Remember a patient guide but not what organization released it?
    - (mouthguards OR "mouth guards") site:.org

Tip 5: Limit by filetype

- **Note:** Especially useful when you have reason to suspect that the answer you need will be in a certain format, such as white papers, presentations, and technical standards.
  - ("osteonecrosis of the jaw" OR onj) (jaw OR maxilla OR mandible) filetype:pdf
  - ("oral hygiene" OR "oral prophylaxis") filetype:ppt

Tip 6: + (plus sign) = stopword search

- Use the **plus sign** to force the inclusion of stop words.
  - Angle class +I malocclusion
- Use this to search foreign words with diacritics exactly as spelled.
  - Émail fragile compared to +émail fragile
Tip 6: + (plus sign) = stopword search

Tip 7: - (minus sign)
- Use the minus sign to exclude terms from results when there is a clustering of irrelevant results. This is most useful when you are new to searching a topic.
  - tongue cancer -xxx -porn -pornography -paid
  - craniofacial support -teens -youth -parents -child
  - find dentist -site:.com

Tip 7: - (minus sign)

Tip 8: ~ (tilde sign)
- Searches the selected term in thesaurus-mode (Google only). Results include a variety of related terms.

More Search Strategy Tips
- Compare results from multiple search engines
- Use advanced search features
- Use concept and term suggestions
- Use reviewed search results/links
- Use special search engine features