

SEARCH STRATEGY: HOW DO I MAKE THE MOST OUT OF A GOOGLE SEARCH?

Simply typing in your search term will bring back thousands, sometimes millions, of 'hits'. Be smart and reduce this number to get exactly what you want from your search.



You can use the modifiers below to make your searching more precise. Add one at the end of your search or between two different terms.



Search term
site:edu

hits limited to educational websites, or site:ac.uk for uk websites only



Search term
filetype:ppt

hits limited to Powerpoint presentations



Search term
OR synonym

hits include results with either search term

You can use speech marks "" as a modifier. This keeps the phrases you want together and stops Google from looking at each word separately. For example:



Search term
regenerative animals

50.8 million hits
Mixed selection based on each word



a regenerative animals

11.8K hits
all deal with your subject

Remember, the internet changes every day therefore the number of results may vary.

Google has many advanced search options, for example excluding certain words from your search, finding results with your words in the title, or looking for results in other languages. To access the advanced search:

1. Go to Google's homepage
2. Click on "Settings" in the bottom right
3. Select "Advanced search"

A search engine will not just search for the words that you put in. Google in particular will look for different spellings and similar words automatically. Choose your search words carefully and use alternative ones if the first ones are not bringing back enough useful results.

Remember: Google has lots more features; ask your librarian or teacher if you need support or guidance with your search strategy.

Use ctrl+F (Mac - cmd+F) to search for a particular word in the web page or document that you have found so that you can spot them in the text.

Google's "Featured Snippets" are brief excerpts from web pages that appear at the top of Google's search results, aiming to answer your query quickly. To use them effectively:

- Look for the boxed text at the top of search results
- Use them for quick facts, definitions, or overviews
- Always verify the information by clicking through to the source
- Use them to refine your search terms if needed
- Remember, these aren't always 100% accurate, so cross-check important information

Example: Try searching "What is photosynthesis?" You'll likely see a Featured Snippet with a concise explanation.

Be Aware: Google also has an "AI overview" at the top of the search results page, summarising the topic you have searched for. These can be inaccurate so always double-check the details!

Mobile Searching: Tips for Effective Searching on Smartphones and Tablets



As mobile devices become increasingly prevalent in education, it's important to know how to conduct effective searches on these platforms.

- **Use mobile-friendly search engines:** Google and Bing automatically optimise for mobile and try DuckDuckGo for privacy-focused mobile searches
- **Use mobile-specific features:** Use the camera icon in the search bar for visual searches • Try Google Lens to search what you see through your camera
- **Use mobile apps:** Download educational apps like Khan Academy or Wolfram Alpha for subject-specific searches • Use your device's built-in dictionary for quick definitions
- **Optimise your mobile browser:** Use reading mode to declutter web pages • Save important pages for offline access
- **Use mobile shortcuts:** Long-press the full stop key to quickly enter ".com", ".co.uk", etc. • Use the share button to quickly send search results to your notes app or email
- **Manage your tabs:** Close unnecessary tabs to improve performance
- **Voice search on mobile:** Use the microphone icon in the search bar for hands-free searching • Speak clearly and use natural language
- **Use mobile-friendly search operators:** Use "site:" to search within a specific website • Use quotation marks for exact phrase searches
- **Save battery life:** Lower screen brightness when searching for extended periods • Close background apps to improve search speed and save power
- **Stay safe:** Be cautious when using public Wi-Fi for research • Check that websites are secure (look for "https") before entering any personal information

Voice Search: Formulating Questions for Voice Assistants

Voice search is becoming increasingly popular and can be a useful tool for research, especially when you're multitasking or need hands-free options.

- **Use natural language:** Speak as if you're asking a real person a question • Instead of "weather London," try "What's the weather like in London today?"
- **Be specific:** Provide context in your question • "Who was the Prime Minister in 1990?" is better than just "Prime Minister 1990"
- **Use clear pronunciation:** Speak slowly and clearly • spell out proper nouns such as names carefully
- **Ask follow-up questions:** Most voice assistants can maintain context • After asking about a topic, you can say "Tell me more about that" for additional information
- **Use voice assistant skills:** Learn about specific "skills" or "actions" your voice assistant offers • For example, "Alexa, ask Quizlet to give me a science quiz"
- **Know the limitations:** Complex or very specific academic queries might not work well • Use voice search for broader questions or to get started on a topic
- **Take advantage of voice assistant features:** Ask for spellings: "How do you spell 'photosynthesis'?" • Request definitions: "What does 'enigmatic' mean?"
- **Use commands for research tasks:** "Set a timer for 30 minutes of study" • "Add 'check library for biology books' to my to-do list"
- **Verify information:** Always double-check important information from voice searches • Use the voice search as a starting point, then dig deeper
- **Practice and experiment:** The more you use voice search, the better you'll get at formulating effective queries



Remember: While voice search can be convenient, it's not always the best method for in-depth academic research. Use it as a complementary tool to your regular search strategies, especially for quick facts or to generate ideas for further investigation.