COMPUTING AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Search Engine Skills

Difficulty level: Easy

Computing and Digital Literacy

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Overview of the concept

This is how you find a trustworthy answer online fast, by choosing the right search words and checking whether the result is actually reliable before you use it. A student researching an essay can tell a university source from a random blog by checking who wrote it and when. A shopper checking a product review looks for a source that tested it, not one that is trying to sell it. Knowing search engine skills tells you how to search with the right words and judge what comes back, so you use good sources and skip the rest.



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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q You want to find out how bees make honey. What search words would find pages that answer that question?

SOLUTION

Weak: animals

Strong: how do bees make honey

Result: pages that answer the real question.

Start from the question you actually want answered, not a single vague word.

Type the key words of that question, such as 'how do bees make honey'.

Scan the results and open the one whose title and snippet match your question.

EXAMPLE 2

Q You want pages with the exact phrase 'life cycle of a frog' from education sites only. How would you narrow your search?

SOLUTION

Search: "life cycle of a frog" site:.edu

Quotes mean: those exact words, in that order.

site:.edu means: only education sites.

Put exact phrases in quotation marks so results must contain those words together.

Add site: followed by a domain type, such as site:.edu, to limit where results come from.

Compare two or three results before trusting one answer.

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Practice questions

1

Which search is better: 'science' or 'how does photosynthesis work'?

A 'science'

B 'how does photosynthesis work'

C 'photosynthesis'

D 'how photosynthesis works'

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2

You want to know why the moon changes shape, and you only want pages from education sites. Which search is best?

A 'why does the moon change shape' site:.edu

B 'why does the moon change shape'

C 'moon' site:.edu

D 'why does the moon change shape' site:.com

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3 **You search 'why do the seasons change' and the results are mostly shopping pages. What should you add to get education pages?**

- **A** site:.edu
- **B** Quotation marks around the whole search
- **C** More key words
- **D** site:.com

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4 **You search 'sport' and get millions of results. What should you change?**

- **A** Use the key words of the real question
- **B** Search for just 'sport' again
- **C** Use fewer key words
- **D** Click the first result

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5 What do quotation marks do in a search?

- A They require those exact words in that order
- B They make the search faster
- C They limit results to one website
- D They remove the words from the search

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6 Write a search for the exact phrase 'how do vaccines work' on education sites only.

- A "how do vaccines work" site:.edu
- B "how do vaccines work" site:.gov
- C how do vaccines work site:.edu
- D "how do vaccines work" site:.com

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7 **Your search 'how volcanoes erupt' gives millions of results, including many that only mention the word 'volcano' once. What is the best next step?**

- **A** Put the exact phrase in quotation marks
- **B** Search for just 'volcano'
- **C** Click the first result
- **D** Use fewer key words

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8 **What does site:.gov limit results to?**

- **A** Government sites
- **B** Education sites
- **C** Shopping sites
- **D** All websites

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9 Why read the snippet under a result before clicking?

- A To check whether the page matches your question
- B To count the words on the page
- C To find the fastest page
- D To skip reading the title

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10 True or false: the top result is always the most reliable.

- A True
- B False

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ANSWER KEY

1. 'how does photosynthesis work'
2. 'why does the moon change shape' site:.edu
3. site:.edu
4. Use the key words of the real question
5. They require those exact words in that order
6. "how do vaccines work" site:.edu
7. Put the exact phrase in quotation marks
8. Government sites
9. To check whether the page matches your question
10. False

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