

Good Internet Search Practices

A Student Computing Center Tutorial for
South Puget Sound Community College
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Internet searching is more of an art than a science. It is an art based in context, and it takes tinkering around with the search string in different contexts to get proficient at quickly finding what you want. This means practicing and being open to adopting, modifying, or dropping the following guideline as the context of the search requires.

Selecting Search Terms

➤ Avoid full sentences

The excess words in a full sentence (if they are not ignored by the search engine) can generate lots of unwanted results. It's usually best to discard generic words when possible, and use interrogatives sparingly.

➤ Use subject specific terms

If you are looking for an answer to an Excel® issue, it is usually better to use the term *Excel* and NOT the term *office* or *spreadsheet*.

Using the scientific name for a plant will return very specific results, but the websites returned may be too scientific in nature. Using the common name for a plant will present more results, but they may be more in line with your needs.

➤ Quote exact terms

If two or more of your search terms are going to be found next to one another as exact phrasing, put them together in quotes. For example, if you are searching for information on a 1969 VW or the MS Word paragraph formatting dialogue box, it might be useful to quote the words sets which would be commonly used together. For these examples here, you might try the following search phrases:

"69 VW"

"MS Word" paragraph formatting "dialogue box".

The reason *paragraph formatting* was not quoted is that these word could easily be separated, were as *dialogue box* is the name of the item, and so will be commonly used together.

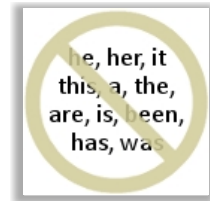
➤ Hyphenated words will act as both compound and separate

Searching *clock-works* (using google) will return results for *clockworks*, *clock works*, and *clock-works*.

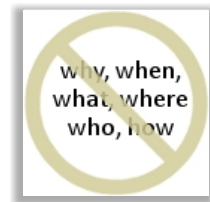
➤ Terms for common types of searches

There are a number of common types of searches which have accompanying common search terms:

<i>example</i>	For sites with examples of the subject
<i>how-to</i>	For sites with "how to" articles (i.e. tutorials)
<i>tutorial</i>	For sites with tutorials
<i>diy</i>	For sites with do-it-yourself articles



Avoid generic words



Use interrogatives sparingly

Refining and Choosing

➤ Use the auto complete as a guide

Some search engines will provide terms commonly related to what you are typing into the search. These supplied terms, called "search suggestions," pop up below the text box and can often be a great tool for discovering the specific terms for your search.

<p>VW Type 2 Manual</p> <p>vw type 2 manual</p> <p>vw type 2 manual pdf</p> <p>vw type 2 repair manual</p> <p>vw type 2 workshop manual</p> <p>vw type 2 parts manual</p> <p>vw type 2 bentley manual</p> <p>volkswagen type 2 service manual</p> <p>volkswagen type 2 repair manual</p> <p>tamiya volkswagen type 2 manual</p> <p>1978 vw type 2 owners manual</p>	<p>These are common searches, and so they can often be a good source of search terms.</p>
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- Scan the context of the your highlighted key words in the short description.

Scanning the short extracts of the sites presented in the search results can save you a lot of time wading through different results as well as giving you other potential search terms.

<p>TheSamba.com :: VW Manuals - Bus/Type 2 www.thesamba.com/vw/archives/manuals/type2.php 120+ items - Type 2/Bus Owner's Manuals. Contributions to the Manuals ...</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Description</th> <th>Contributor</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>February 1950 Owner's Manual</td> <td>Max Cheuk.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>November 1950 Owner's Manual</td> <td>Wouter Duijndam.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Volkswagen Station Wagon, Bus (Type 2) Official Service ... www.amazon.com/Volkswagen...Manual/dp/0837616352 This Volkswagen Station Wagon / Bus Repair Manual Type 2 1968-1979 offers air cooled Volkswagen Bus and Van enthusiasts comprehensive repair ...</p> <p>VW Bus Manual eBay www.ebay.com/bhp/vw-bus-manual 25+ items - Find great deals on eBay for VW Bus Manual in . Shop with ... VW Van Bus Shop Manual 1961 1962 1963 1964 1965 1966 Official Service Manual VW type 2 Station Wagon Bus 1968-1979 Robert ...</p>	Description	Contributor	February 1950 Owner's Manual	Max Cheuk.	November 1950 Owner's Manual	Wouter Duijndam.	<p>The first return is an owner's manual. The next return is a repara manual. The final return is a shop manual.</p> <p>Note that the manual in each return is for a differnt year.</p>
Description	Contributor						
February 1950 Owner's Manual	Max Cheuk.						
November 1950 Owner's Manual	Wouter Duijndam.						

- Add and remove context terms to control search results

Searching a business name returns a lot of results.
 Searching a business name in a particular city refines the results somewhat.
 Searching a business name in a particular city of a particular state focuses results.

- Pre-Search & Re-Search

If the subject of the search is very new to you, then the first search is often a search for better fitting terms. Again, this initial search may simply involve scanning the short descriptions of the sites returned in the search.

Examples

Not So Good

How do you get excel to do a vlookup

The words "do," "you," "get," "to," and "a" get pretty much ignored and not emphasized in any of the search returns. The term "how" turns up a fair amount of "how to" sites.

Better

excel 2013 vlookup example

Adding "2013" is a good specific context term, because different version of Excel[®] may have different capabilities or the same capabilities may be accessed in different ways.

The term "example" will turn up sites with examples of how to perform a vlookup in Excel[®] 2013

Not So Good

What is a bad Internet search

This returns mostly sites regarding slow Internet connections. The likely reason is that the phrase "bad Internet" is most often used in context of slow Internet speeds.

Better

good internet search practices

By reversing the focus from bad Internet to good Internet, we return more applicable sites. This is due, in part, to the fact that "good practices" and "best practices" are common terms for Internet industries.

Not So Good

time zones

This is simply too generic. It has no context -- unless you are looking for nothing more than a description of time zones.

Better

show two time zones in outlook 2013

By adding the context of *show two* and *in outlook 2013* we narrow in on what exactly we want.

Examples: Quoted Terms

different

access 2013 create autolookup query

access 2013 create "autolookup query"

Although the search results are very similar, the quoted terms move some of the perhaps less applicable results a few positions towards the top

different

internet searches best practices

internet searches "best practices"

Here the terms "best practices" in quotes tends, slightly, to turn up more technical results which pertain to the web page design.