How to Find Anything Online With Advanced Search Techniques

by Bob Flisser  9 Jun 2014  Difficulty:Intermediate  Length:Medium

Search engines do a lot more than immediately meets the eye. If you’re getting results that aren’t relevant, if you're getting too many results, if you want to find something on a particular web site, or if you just want to do a quick calculation or measurement conversion, there are some pretty cool tricks that you can do.

Some of these techniques will work in any search engine, but the coolest features work only on Google. Also, please keep in mind that since web content changes frequently, the results you get from running the sample searches in this tutorial may be different from what I show.

Screencast

https://youtu.be/FMGHfBUiksQ

Choose Your Default Browser Based on Your Preferred Search Engine

If you prefer Google, install Chrome and if you prefer Bing, use the latest version of Internet Explorer on your PC. The reason is that you can type search terms directly in the Address bar (Chrome calls this the Omni Box). In Chrome, this defaults to searching Google, and in IE, this defaults to searching Bing. You can switch the default search engine, but you get the best integration with these search engines with these respective browsers.
Type your search terms into the Address bar in Chrome and Internet Explorer. Otherwise, in Safari or Firefox, just pick your favorite search engine so you can use it automatically from the address or search box, respectively.

## Using Punctuation and Boolean Operators

Quotation marks mean that you’re looking for a specific phrase. Over the years, search engines have gotten so good at guessing what we want, quotation marks aren’t as necessary as they used to be. But they can still be helpful. For example:

```
“bow ties are cool”
```

will be far more likely to find that exact phrase, where searching without the quote would lead to pages talking about cool bow ties, but not necessarily that exact phrase.

### OR and parenthesis

By default, if you search for several words, most search engines will show results where both or all of the words are found. This is known as an AND search – as though you wanted *this* and *this*. But if you want results with either (or any) of your words, use the OR keyword. It means that either (or any) of your search terms were found. For example:
“Doctor Who” OR “Sherlock Holmes”

This will find pages containing either the phrase “Doctor Who” or the phrase “Sherlock Holmes”. Some page results will contain both.

When you place search terms in a set of parenthesis, they are treated as a single unit. So…

(“Doctor Who” OR “Sherlock Holmes”) (“Matt Smith” “Steven Moffat”)

This will find pages containing either the phrase “Doctor Who” or the phrase “Sherlock Holmes”, and also the name of either actor Matt Smith or producer Steven Moffat.

Are you familiar with the Boolean NOT operator (or a minus sign)? Google still lists it in the documentation, but Google, Bing and Yahoo ignore it and it no longer works.

**Searching Within a Specific Site**

One of my favorite search features is the *site* keyword, which limits a search to a specific web site. This is great if a site doesn’t have its own search form, or if it isn’t working. For example:

“Peter Capaldi” site:bbcamerica.com

This will find references to actor Peter Capaldi, but only on [www.BBCAmerica.com](http://www.BBCAmerica.com).

You can also use the *site* attribute to limit searches to a particular top-level domain, like .org, .gov and so on. For example:

“fishing license” site:.gov

This will show you government sites that contain the phrase “fishing license”.

Wildcard Searches
Sometimes you know part of a phrase you’re looking for, but aren’t sure of all the words or maybe how the words will be spelled. That’s when an asterisk comes to the rescue, as a wildcard. It’s especially handy if there are several ways of expressing what you want. For example:

the three *

…will show results for The Three Stooges, The Three Doctors, The Three Musketeers, The Three Tenors, and more.

You can also search for numbers in a range, by using two periods as a wildcard. For example, if you’re shopping for an Android tablet and have a budget of $300 to $600, do this search:

android tablet $300..$600

Connectivity Searches
Two great keywords that show connectivity are the link and related keywords. The link keyword will show what pages link to a particular page. For example:

link:amazon.com

The related keyword will show what sites are similar to the one you specify. Who is to say what qualifies as being similar? Who knows! The algorithms are proprietary. For example:

related:amazon.com

If you visit a page that doesn’t have content that you’re expecting to see – for example, a news item is no longer on the front page – Google might have it cached. So try the cache operator to see what the site looked like the last time Google crawled it:
An Operator That Combines All of the Above

Rather than remember all the above operators, you can remember just one, instead: *info*. When you run *info* against a web address, you’ll get a menu of operators that you can click to get the results. For example:

```
info:computers.tutsplus.com
```

The *info* keyword combines several other keywords

Filtering Results

Sometimes, you might want to see only recent results, or results from a specific time period. After running a search in Google, click the **Search Tools** link just below the Search bar, then from the submenu that appears, click **Any Time** and make a choice. In Bing, **Any Time** is always visible just below the Search bar, and Yahoo has timings in the left column.
Also from Google’s submenu, you can choose a reading level from All Results, and choose a location on the right. Google will try to detect your location automatically, but it doesn’t always guess correctly. It tends to use the location where your Internet provider’s equipment is. If you want to change the location, click the Down Arrow and enter the location you want. Entering a Zip or Postal code usually works.

Google has very detailed filtering. Bing and Yahoo only have time filters.

Undocumented Google Keywords

Page Title, Content and URL

If you want to search for words specifically in a page title, and ignore page content, use the intitle keyword. For example, if you’re looking for articles that compare Android with iOS, try this:

intitle:android AND iOS
If you’re searching for multiple words and want results where *all* of the words are in the title, not just some of them, use `allintitle` instead.

The opposite of searching titles is searching page content and ignoring the title. For that, use the `intext` keyword, as follows:

```
intext:android AND iOS
```

Keep in mind that many pages will have the same phrases in the titles and content, so many of the results from the previous two searches will be the same.

You can also search for a word that appears in a page’s URL, with the `inurl` keyword, like this:

```
inurl:photoshop
```

When searching for multiple words, you can also use `allinurl` to make sure that all the words or phrases are in the URL.

Google also has similar keywords specifically to search blogs. They are:

- `Inblogtitle`
- `Inposttitle`
- `Inpostauthor`
- `Blogurl`

**Finding Files of a Specific Type**

With the `filetype` keyword, you can restrict search results to display a particular type of file, like image or archive files, or Adobe and Microsoft documents. For example, if you want a sample expense sheet in Excel and don’t like Excel’s built-in templates, this search will find some for you:

```
expense sheet filetype:xlsx
```
Weather

Need a quick weather forecast? Use the *weather* keyword and Zip or Postal code to get current conditions and a graph for the next several hours:

```
Weather 08822
```

Definitions

You can also get a quick dictionary definition, using the *define* keyword. It isn’t as extensive as using dictionary.com, but it’s a lot faster. For example:

```
define:solenoid
```

Math, Measurement and Language Conversions

If you need to do some quick calculations or convert measurements from one unit to another, Google and Bing have you covered.

**Basic Arithmetic Searches in Google and Bing**

Examples:

- 1035 + 698
- 317537 – 1517
- 256 * 768
- 105/39

When you enter a calculation into the Search/Address bar, both Google and Bing will display a handy calculator. You can click the buttons or use the numbers on your keyboard. If your keyboard has a number pad, this is especially nice.
Keep your calculator in the drawer. Google and Bing have them on the screen.

**Converting Between Imperial and Metric Units**

If you’re converting a recipe from Imperial to Metric measurements (or vice-versa) or converting distance, temperature, weight and more, you can do this with a simple search in Google or Bing. Most units you can abbreviate (like g instead of grams or oz instead of ounces).

Examples:

- 2 cups in ml
- 500g in oz
- 200 miles in km
- 80F in C

Similar to doing arithmetic, when you search for a unit conversion, Google and Bing will display a conversion calculator, with your search displayed in it. Click the top drop-down list to choose different types of conversions (temperature, length, etc.) and click the lower drop-downs to choose different units.
Google and Bing also have unit conversion calculators

**Language Translation**

Google can translate in and out of approximately a dozen languages. How do you say “wind” in Spanish or what does the French word "suivant" mean? Run these searches:

wind in Spanish

suivant in English

**Other Cool Features**

Here are some great tips that don’t fit into other categories.

**Flight Status**

Want to check the status of a flight? Just search for the airline and flight number. Google will show the flight status, and if the flight is currently in the air, you’ll see its relative position, as in the screen capture below. Bing will show basic departure and arrival information. For example:

United flight 1
For up-to-the-minute flight information, just search for the airline and flight number.

**Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon**

If you want to know how many degrees of separation there are between almost any actor and actor Kevin Bacon, do a *bacon number* search in Google, like this:

```
Harrison Ford bacon number
```

The answer to that particular query is 2.

**Tracking Packages and Searching Other Numbers**

Google has information on package deliveries from the United States Postal Service, UPS and FedEx. The tracking numbers for these services use different formats, so you don’t have to specify which one you want; just enter the number like this:

```
1Z1234X12345678
```
Doing a patent search? Use the *patent* keyword followed by the patent number:

```
patent 5889566
```

Google does several other alphanumeric searches that don’t require a keyword. Just enter the numbers to search for:

- Zip code
- ISBN
- VIN (Vehicle ID number)
- FAA airplane registration number
- Phone number

**Search Mars and Beyond**

This isn’t a search as much as it’s an undocumented feature, courtesy of NASA as well as Google. Just go to:

```
www.google.com/mars
```

…and have a look around! The default view is a false-color elevation map, and you can also choose infrared and real-life visible surface. There’s also an option to explore Mars using Google Earth.

Explore Mars from the comfort of your chair
Once you’ve conquered Mars, try your hand – or bat’leth – in Klingon. Yes, Google has a Klingon language version at:

www.google.com/?hl=xx-klingon

You might find a good recipe for gakh. Ka’plah!

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Bob Flisser has authored many videos and books about Microsoft and Adobe products, and has been a computer trainer since the 1980s. He is also a web and multimedia developer. Bob is a graduate of The George Washington University with a degree in financial economics.