



How to Choose Effective Google Search Terms

The search terms you enter and the order in which you enter them affect both the results themselves, and the order in which the results appear.

NOTE: The words included in the search terms are enclosed with single quotes (') for illustration only. Do not type the single quotes when you type the words into Google's search box.

1. Use words likely to appear on the web pages you want.

movies denver colorado

alternative medicine

buy laptop computers

2. Use double quotes (") around a phrase (words that must go together).

Without quotes around words, Google will search for each word separately. Example: a search for George Washington (without quotes) will result in web pages that contain both words, but not necessarily placed together (some instances of George, some instances of Washington). With the double quotes, Google will search for those web pages that contain George Washington as a phrase.

NOTE: When you search for well-known people, events or places, you will be less likely to see a difference in the results between using and not using double quotes.

3. Avoid using a question as a query (search terms).

For example, typing where can I buy a computer in Colorado into the Google search box instructs Google to find pages containing all of the typed words. Such a query won't necessarily find pages answering your question. A better query might be:

"buy computer" retail colorado

4. Do not include certain words in your search.

Google ignores very common words such as where, do, I, for, of and a to give you more relevant results. If you are looking for results that include

one of these words, for example, as in how the west was won, use double quotes ("") around the phrase.

Avoid using words that you might think are related to your topic, but you wouldn't expect to find on the web page(s). For example, queries that include articles about, discussion of, documentation on, and pages about are likely to give you fewer results since information on the web is rarely labeled with such terms. More successful searches:

open heart surgery rather than articles about open heart surgery
organic farming rather than discussion about organic farming

5. Be specific: Use more query terms to get better (narrower) results.

For example, a search using the word java. Java can refer to: an island in Indonesia; a beverage made from ground coffee beans; a computer programming language developed by Sun Microsystems. Which do you want?

Your successful search query might be:

"java indonesia" or java coffee or "java programming language"

6. Use synonyms separated by the word OR.

latino OR hispanic dance

This improves the search by returning results with references to Hispanic or Latino dance. If you just search for Hispanic dance, you will not get results that refer to Latino dance. NOTE: Type the word OR in capital letters.

7. Use words that will find acceptable or desired results separated by the word OR.

red OR blue roses

This results in web pages that contain the words red roses (but not blue roses), blue roses (but not red roses), and pages with references to both red and blue roses.

8. How can you come up with more specific search terms?

Think about what you know about the topic. Try to answer the questions, who?, what?, where?, when?, why?, and how?

For example, if you are looking for information about John Smith, who helped establish the colony in Jamestown, Virginia, you want to include a word or term that distinguishes him from all of the other John Smiths that may exist. Your successful search query might be:

"John Smith" Jamestown

9. Be brief.

For best results, use a few precise words. For example, a web page with information about programs on quitting smoking is more likely to include the terms quit smoking program than the words program on quitting tobacco cigarette smoking addiction.

Some of the ideas in this handout were suggested by Nancy Blackman's Google Guide.