

The **WRITING** CENTER

**Elftmann Student
Success Center**

A Guide On How To:

Keyword Searches

- What's a keyword search?
- How to refine my search
- What else...?



Keyword Searches

Knowing how to navigate a search for your research can ensure you get the best formation in the least amount of time.



What is a keyword search?

A keyword search takes a phrase you type into a search engine and uses a specific algorithm to find WebPages containing it in a specific order. Knowing how to use the best keywords for your searches will avoid results that are too general or irrelevant.

Why do I need to refine my search?

Let's say you were assigned to write a 5-paragraph research essay on energy. If you were to search for just "energy" on Google's search engine, you'd get *829 million results* to sift through! Narrow your search phrase so your results will fit better.

| Step | Search For | # of Results |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Assignment | "energy" | 829,000,000 |
| Pre-Writing – Round 1 | "nuclear energy" | 6,710,000 |
| Pre-Writing – Round 2 | "advantages of nuclear energy" | 811,000 |

What else can I do to get the most out of my Internet search?

Many search engines have more advanced features that allow you to look for an exact phrase, search within a website, or even answer a question. Note that most search engines automatically look for synonyms of a term, and will order results by how many times each mentions that term.



| Feature (Symbol) | Description | Example |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| AND | <p>will locate records with both terms</p> <p>AND must be typed in all capital letters</p> <p>engines will often assume AND</p> | <p><i>nuclear energy AND advantages will return anything containing both terms</i></p> <p><i>nuclear energy advantages will return anything containing both terms</i></p> |
| OR () | <p>will locate records with either term</p> <p>OR must be typed in call capital letters</p> | <p><i>nuclear energy OR atomic energy will return anything containing either term</i></p> |
| NOT (-) | <p>will exclude given terms</p> <p>no space should be used between the minus sign and the excluded term</p> <p>NOT must be typed in call capital letters</p> | <p><i>nuclear energy -Japan will return anything on nuclear energy but does not mention Japan</i></p> <p><i>nuclear energy -Japan -Chernobyl will return anything on nuclear energy but does not mention Japan or Chernobyl</i></p> |
| Phrase Search (" " or +) | <p>will look for the exact phrase you typed (no synonyms)</p> <p>no space is used after +</p> | <p><i>"nuclear energy" or +nuclear energy will only return that which uses the exact phrase</i></p> |
| Wildcard (*) | <p>will fill in the blank for any unknown term</p> <p>use a space between the term and *</p> | <p><i>nuclear * will return anything that uses the phrase plus another term (power, energy, plants, meltdown, etc.)</i></p> |
| Query ([]) | <p>will return the answer a question typed inside</p> | <p><i>[benefits of nuclear power] will return the answer to "what are the benefits of nuclear power?"</i></p> |
| Search within a site (site:) | <p>will return only results from the given website or domain (.gov, .edu., .org, etc.)</p> | <p><i>nuclear energy site:nytimes.com will only return articles the New York Times has published online about nuclear energy</i></p> <p><i>nuclear energy site:.gov will only return matches from Websites from a .gov domain</i></p> |

Other useful hints:

Common words like **the**, **a**, and **for** are usually ignored by search engines.

One exception: Engines like Google will not ignore the **the** in a search. For example, searching for **the who** will probably find Pages about the band of the late 1960s; however, searching for **who** will likely return results mentioning the World Health Organization.

Prepositions like **of**, **at**, **to**, or **in** will limit your search when you might not mean to.

For example, a search on **power plants** in the United States would look for that phrase only. Changing the search to **power plants AND United States** will return more specific information.

Search engines use other symbols, too.

For example, a search on **Nikon 400** will likely result in a Nikon model numbered as close to 400 as possible. A search for **Nikon \$400** will result in a Nikon camera costing \$400.

References

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