

# 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.



<b>Feature (Symbol)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>AND</b>	<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>
<b>OR ( )</b>	<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>
<b>NOT (-)</b>	<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>
<b>Phrase Search (" " or +)</b>	<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>
<b>Wildcard (*)</b>	<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>
<b>Query ([ ])</b>	<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>
<b>Search within a site (site:)</b>	<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

- Google search basics: more search help. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=136861>
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