

Why Search?

Concerning the Use and Abuse of Web Search Engines

Why do you search?

Seems like such a simple question, doesn't it? You search because...

- you want to find something
- you do not know where that something is
- you need specific information
- you need to find a website, a person, or a place

So you search. You visit any of the popular search engines on the Web.

Once there, you type your keywords, you click "go" or "search" and what do you get? Search results – a list of websites provided by the search engine that are said to be connected with the words you typed into the search engine. The order and quality of the search results differ with every search engine.

What do you do next? You glance at the search results. The results contain mostly fragments of words and phrases. You see words, titles of websites at times, even images or news headlines. You glance again at the list, perhaps advancing to the second or third page or further. You also see advertisements.

Then what? You click. You decide, "I'll try this website." You click on it. Best case scenario: it's the website you need, providing the information you wanted.

Worst case? It's not only the wrong site, but now you have some *undesirable information* or, worse yet, offensive images on your screen, perhaps with some difficult-to-close pop-up windows appearing.

Alarmed, amused, or mildly inconvenienced, you retreat.

You click the BACK button of the web browser. You try to close any pop-up windows. You return to the list of search results. Perhaps you clicked a "sponsored link" (an ad) or simply reached "the wrong site."

You continue sifting through the results. Perhaps you alter your keywords, develop a new search strategy, or use another search engine entirely. If that works, then that's wonderful! Well done!

But what if it *doesn't*? What if, after several honest attempts, your search *continues to fail*?

You want to find something but you aren't finding it. Let's assume you already understand that *not all information is on the Internet*. We will also assume you have a fair amount of experience with search engines in general. You have found websites in the past with minimal effort, but not this time around.

That the Internet grows and changes every second, that search engines generally can "see" only a relatively small percentage of that information, that you do not have time to search indefinitely – these factors converge at one simple fact: you could use a little help.

That's where libraries come in, and we're happy to tell you there are *better ways to find what you need!*

continue reading on to the next page...

Reconsidering Your Search Strategy

Let's reconsider *why* you searched the Web instead of checking somewhere else. Here are some possibilities, among others which might have prompted you to search online:

- You thought it would be easy.
- You thought it would be fast.
- You believed you could find all the information you needed online.
- You could not get to your local library.
- You *could* get to your local library but did not know or believe they could assist you.

Here are some basic yet important questions worth considering:

- What are you looking for, really?
- What kind of information do you need, and can it actually be found online?
- How much information do you hope to find? How complete and comprehensive does it need to be?
- How much do you value or question the authority behind the information you encounter?
- Would it matter if “just anyone” provided the information you seek, or would you prefer an expert or qualified person to tell you what you want to know?
- How current should the information be? Is it acceptable for it to be months to years old?
- Does your life or future depend, in some way, on the information you are looking for?
- Why would you waste time looking for something that was already found?

Already found? That's right! Middletown Thrall Library has, for many years now, conducted *tens of thousands* of web / database / newspaper / real-world searches for information of *all kinds*.

We know searching. We know how difficult it can be, even when we know where exactly to look! And we completely empathize with you as a researcher in this modern age of information overload.

And we know you would likely prefer to spend your research time working *with the information you want* to use with rather than sifting through irrelevant search results. Search engines *can* be used more effectively (see our handout *Search Smarter, Better*), but they are *just one of many tools* available to you!

Our **Web Guides** (www.thrall.org/guides) are the product of *years of research and effort*. Drawing from all we have found, and continue to find, we have selected some of the very best websites and highlighted related library resources, making them all *easy* and *fast* for you to find in our guides.

Who cares if your favorite search engine can find millions of results but *not the one site you need*? We're talking **quality, not quantity**! We review and refine our guides regularly, creating new ones as necessary. We do this for you and our own librarians, so we spend less time searching and more time *helping you!*

You no longer have to search. You can browse – not only to find websites but to also take advantage of databases we freely offer to members of our library as well as materials available in our library system.

You can also search our guides, if you want. It's your choice! That's right, you have a choice. If you do use our own Web Search, you will often see actual descriptions of a website's contents. You will be given a chance to **locate similar resources**, to **search the library catalog** as well, and even, if you must, send your search back to the Internet – ***all without having to retype your search.***

We invite you to start here and see for yourself how much time we can save you: **www.thrall.org/guides**

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