

# Searching on the Net

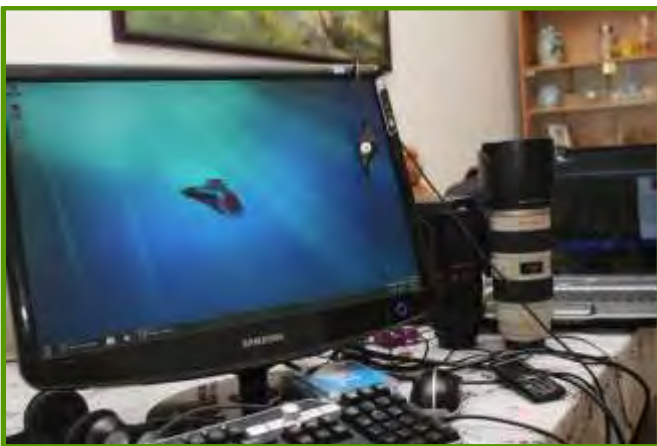
Thanks to the Internet, people have access to more information than it was ever thought possible only a few decades ago. However, with so much information available, finding exactly what you need on the Net can be very frustrating. Let's have a look at a few ways to refine your Internet searches and avoid a lot of wasted time.

## Thinking like a Computer

Before we start, though, it is worth talking about the way computers search. They just look for sequences of characters. If you type a word – snake, for example – into a search box, the computer will look for that sequence of characters **s-n-a-k-e** in every website on the Internet and bring up all the results.

However, if you type snale into the search box, even if it would be obvious to a person that you meant snake, the computer would just search for the sequence of letters **s-n-a-l-e** and produce every website that has that sequence of characters written in its page.

So we can see that computers are quite limited in what they can do when searching. Although they may be very fast they don't think like people. The trick is that you need to think like a computer when you are using them to research.



## Selecting Search Terms

### Use likely words

Enter words in the search box that are likely to be on the web pages you are looking for. Remember, computers just search for sequences of characters.

Use academic or professional terms when researching. For example: **child development** rather than **growing up**.

*Use only search terms  
that are likely to be written  
on the web pages you  
are looking for*

Avoid phrases that are part of your query but not likely to be actually written on the web pages. Such phrases would include “documentation on”, “pages about” or “discussion on”.

### Be specific

Use more than one word in order to narrow your results down to pages on the specific aspect of your topic.

For example: **multiple choice exam preparation** not **exams** or **open cut bauxite mining** not **mining**. However, don't add in too many words. For best results use just a few precise words.

Terms can be excluded as well by putting a minus sign (-) directly before the word you do not want included. Also a plus sign (+) directly before a word (no space between) means that that word must be included exactly.

For example **open cut mining -gold** will look for web pages that have the words open cut mining in the text but does not have the word gold.

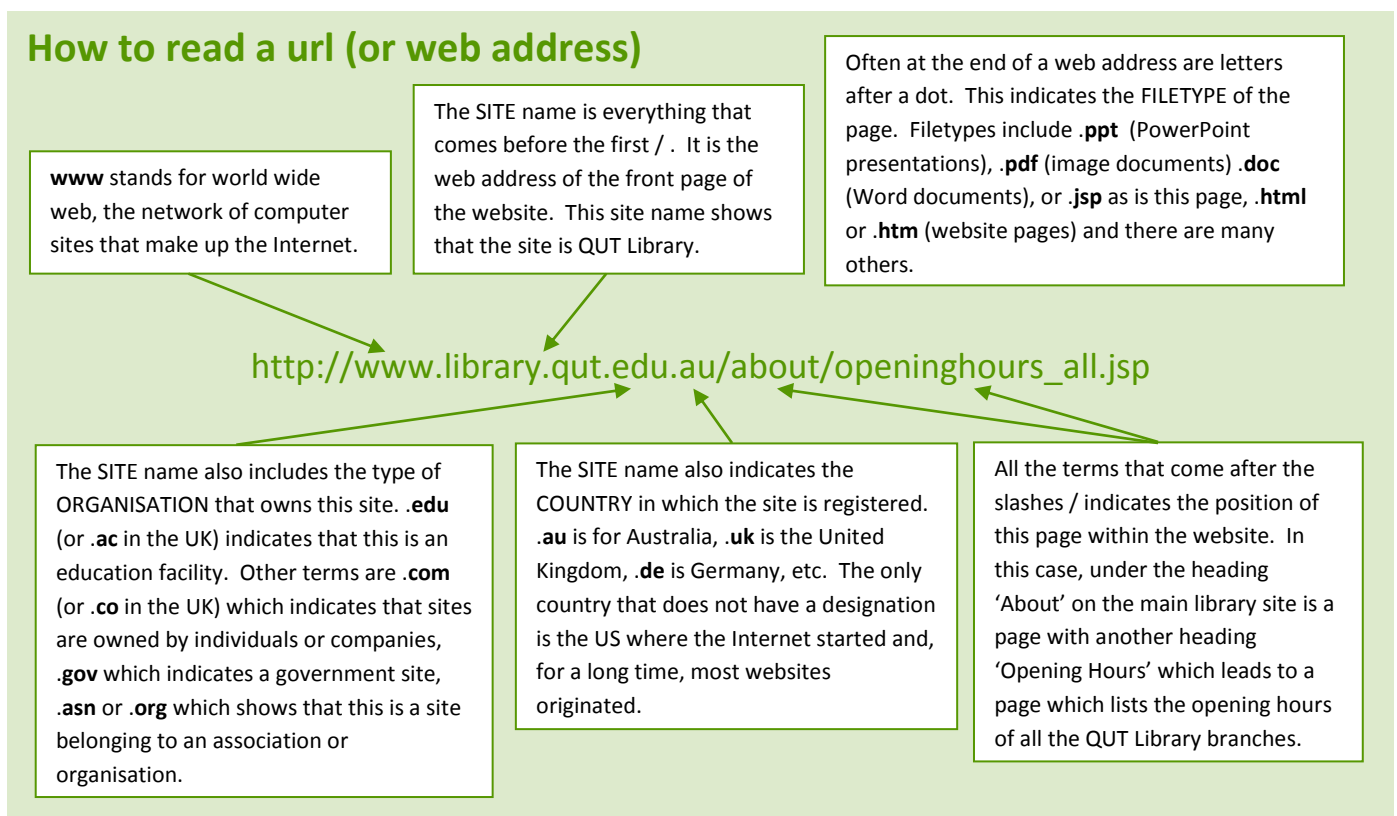
Likewise, **child care +infants** will find pages that have variations on the terms child care in the text and also the exact term infants.

### Indicate phrases

If you are searching for a name or a particular phrase, you need to enclose the words in inverted commas. What this does is tells the computer to search for the phrase all together as a single sequence of characters.

For example: **justice system** will bring up web pages that have the terms justice and system but not necessarily together. However, **"justice system"** means that the computer will only look for pages with justice and system side by side with system after justice.

Figure 1



Using inverted commas is useful for common phrases as well as names of people, organisations or documents that may be on the Internet.

### Reading a Web Address

It is possible to ask the computer to search only certain parts of a web page rather than the whole text. To do this, it is useful to understand how web addresses are constructed.

Have a look at *Figure 1* below which shows all the basic components of a web address.

### Limiting Search Results

#### inurl:

inurl: the search term must be contained in the URL which is the web address of the page.

For example: **inurl:AIDS "health care"** means you are searching for websites with the term AIDS as part of their web addresses and health care written in the text of the pages.

### site:

site: this requires that the search term must be in the site address of the web page.

For example: **site:edu.au "commercial architecture"** will find web pages of Australian educational institutions with the phrase commercial architecture in the text of the page.

For example: **-site:.com pneumonia** will find all pages that are not .com (that is commercial or individual owned) and will only show pages with pneumonia in the text and .org or .asn or .edu or .gov.

*Avoid using .com or .co pages on the net for your research. These are not reliable sources of information.*

### intitle:

intitle: finds words in the title of a page

For example: **intitle:"hybrid cars" "fuel consumption"** will find pages which have the phrase hybrid cars in the title of the page and the phrase fuel consumption in the text.

allintitle: finds all the words in the title of a page

For example: **allintitle:"hybrid cars" "fuel consumption"** will only show pages that have both phrases in the title of the page.

### filetype:

filetype: looks for web pages with a particular file type.

For example: **"Australian Government" filetype:ppt** will produce pages which are PowerPoint presentations with the phrase Australian Government in the text.

For example: **intitle:indigenous policy filetype:pdf** will look for pages which contain the words indigenous and policy in the title and is a pdf document.

### There's more ...

There are many more ways that you are able to refine your searches on the Internet. However, these are the ones that are most common and probably the most useful for your research in your studies.

For more information on searching Google effectively go to <http://www.googleguide.com/>

#### PHOTO REFERENCE

Samad Jee, 'The new W7 - Windows 7 ; Good or Bad?' In: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/samadjee/3183738090/>, ed, 2009.

