



Search Engine Knowledge

"The web is transforming society, and the search engines are an important part of the process" - Steve Lawrence and Lee Giles

What is a Search Engine?

A **search engine** is a generic term used to describe both true search engines and **directories**. True search engines use software programs called "robots" or "spiders" or "crawlers" to scan the Internet looking for information in the form of words and phrases. Those words and phrases are then indexed. The results of your search are sites that are ranked by how many times a word appears in a document, how close the words are to each other, and other factors. **Directories** depend on human beings to compile their listings. Subject directories group web sites under categories such as Arts & Humanities, Business & Economy, Computers & Internet, Education, Science, etc., so you can easily find information. In Yahoo! For example, you can find a list of all the community colleges in Connecticut by clicking on the "**Education**" link. Results in Yahoo! Are lists of links to subjects that you have requested.

Search Engine Facts

- The Internet has 2.7 billion Web pages.
- The largest search engine can locate 60% of them; smallest of the major search engines, only 2 percent.

From: "Lost Cyberspace" published in *The Industry Standard*, November 27, 2000.

- The growth in the number of Web sites worldwide is tapering off. There was a 52 percent increase between 1999 and 2000, compared with a 71 percent increase between 1998 and 1999.

- Web sites are getting fatter, adding content to the already half a trillion documents online at any given moment.

From: "Web Site Growth Slows" published in *The Business Journal*, October 27, 2000.

- Seventy five percent of Internet users use a search engine; half are stymied by poor results. Twenty percent will give up their search entirely.

From: "Supercharge Your Internet Search Skills" published in *Medical Economics*, September 4, 2000 by Neil Chesanow.

- On average, Americans experience "search rage" if they don't find what they want within 12 minutes.

From: WebTop Search Rage Study, August 2000

- Search engines are more likely to index popular sites, U.S. sites than non-U.S. sites, and commercial sites rather than educational sites.
- 83 percent of sites are commercial, 6 percent contain scientific or educational content, and 1.5 percent of sites contain pornographic material.

From "Accessibility and Distribution of Information on the Web" published in *Teacher Librarian*, December 1999, by Steve Lawrence and Lee Giles.

- Search engines are the top information resource Americans use when seeking answers, used 32 percent of the time, more than any other option.

From: Consumer Daily Question Study, Fall 2000

General Searching Tips

The following **general searching techniques** can be used when using search engines, however, you should always click on the search engine's "**Tips**" found on the search engine's home page for specific instructions.

1. **BE SPECIFIC.** String together all key words and phrases that are relevant to your question. If you are looking for information on ski resorts in Maine, type "Ski resorts in Maine" not skiing.

2. **USING THE + SYMBOL.** Use the + symbol when you want the search engine to find pages with all your search words on them. To locate pages that have references to food safety and fast food type: +food safety +fast food. To find camping sites and reservations information for Cape May type: +Cape May +camping +reservations. Pages that contain all three of the words will be displayed.
3. **USING THE - SYMBOL.** You may want the search engine you are using to find pages with one word but not another. Use the minus sign to omit certain words from a search. If you were looking for information about Hillary Clinton, but did not want to find pages that mention Bill Clinton, type the search like this: Hillary Clinton -Bill Clinton.
4. **USE EXACT PHRASES.**
Phrase searching allows you to search for the terms you specify in the exact order you type them in. In other words, search engines will look for these words as phrases that must appear together. Example: "Interstate Highway System."

Do you want to learn more about search engines and how to use them effectively and efficiently? Go to **Search Engine Watch** at <http://www.searchenginewatch.com> for searching tips, search engine listings, reviews and ratings, search engine resources and more.

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