

## Searching the Web for reliable, accurate information OR How to make Google and Wikipedia work for you!

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### Google.

1. Use quotations and search phrases. Compare outback [16.4 million hits\*] and "Australian outback" [620,000 hits].
2. Keep adding search terms (and quotations). Try "Australian outback" wildlife parks [17,100 hits] and "Australian outback" "wildlife parks" [827 hits].
3. Use the minus sign [-] to eliminate terms from your search. Try "Australian outback" -survivor [544,000 hits].
4. Use the site operator [site:edu] to limit results to .org, .gov or .edu websites only. Try "Australian outback" "wildlife parks" site:org [76 hits]. Note: use only one site operator per search.
5. For more help, check out "Build Your Own Search String" here:  
[http://www.google.com/educators/all\\_grades.html](http://www.google.com/educators/all_grades.html). Scroll down to Search Tips.

\*Reported hits were from a search on 09/10/09.

### Wikipedia.

1. Wikipedia *usually* provides an easy-to-find, easy-to-read introduction to almost any subject. Find <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outback>.
2. Is this information accurate? It may be, but ask yourself some questions:
  - a. Who wrote it? Wikipedia articles are not signed.
  - b. Where did the author find out his/her information? Just a few sources are cited.
  - c. What did the article say yesterday? *Anyone* can update a Wikipedia article at any time. What you quote in your paper today may not be included in the Wikipedia article tomorrow.
3. Wikipedia *does* identify its shortcomings. Note the message at the beginning of the article [accessed 09/10/09]: "This article needs additional citations for verifications."
4. Often there are excellent links within Wikipedia articles. Use them to help you search.
  - a. Click on the link in the Australian Outback article to Kakadu National Park.
  - b. Scroll down this article ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kakadu\\_National\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kakadu_National_Park)) to its External Links. Find the link(s) which you think will have the most accurate information.
  - c. Find the part of the article that covers wildlife (fauna). Click on the link to the Black-necked Stork. What External Links might help you here?

### What about another search engine?

- Exalead's (<http://www.exalead.com/search>) "Related Search" offers help with narrowing your search.
- Factbits (<http://www.factbites.com/>) says it "crosses a search engine with an encyclopedia." [That encyclopedia is often Wikipedia!]
- Duck Duck Go (<http://duckduckgo.com/>) offers a kid-friendly search.
- Dogpile (<http://www.dogpile.com/>) and Zuula (<http://www.zuula.com/>) find results from more than one search engine.

## Website evaluation.

So, now that Google and/or Wikipedia (or another search engine) has helped me locate some websites that I *think* I can use for my research, how can I really know that they are reliable and accurate?

Here's a handy checklist:

- ✓ Who made the site?
  - Is there a way to contact the site's author? An email, telephone number or snail mail address?
  - Websites created by libraries, museums, and schools often have accurate information and include links to sites they have evaluated.
- ✓ Do the pages look similar throughout the site? Is there a unifying design for the site?
- ✓ Do the pages link back to the home page, and is the site easy to navigate?
- ✓ Are there spelling and grammatical errors?
- ✓ When was it last updated?
- ✓ Is the purpose of the site clear?
- ✓ Are there a lot of advertisements? Use your judgment, lots of websites with good information contain advertising to help support themselves.
- ✓ Is it relatively easy to find the information you need?
- ✓ Who links to this website? Visit Google's Advanced Search page ([http://www.google.com/advanced\\_search?hl=en](http://www.google.com/advanced_search?hl=en)), click on the link that says "Date, usage rights, numeric range, and more" and enter your site's url in the search box next to "Find pages that link to the page:" under Page-specific tools. This step is helpful if you are researching a controversial topic and are unsure of the political slant of the site you are visiting.
- ✓ Don't stop at just one website! Find another that supports the information you read in the first. (In 2008, a reporter recently published as *news* a story that came out in 2002 ... and the reporter found the "new" article on Google!)
- ✓ Are there other sources that might provide more reliable, accurate information on your topic? (Books, research resources, articles ...)

For links to websites that have already been evaluated for quality and accuracy, use the Multnomah County Library Homework Center (<http://www.multcolib.org/homework/>).

For access to articles from encyclopedias, magazines, newspapers and other trusted library resources, visit the Trusted Online Research Tools page (<http://www.multcolib.org/homework/db.html>).

For some fun, visit <http://www.allaboutexplorers.com/> and give the above checklist a test run.

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