

Web Search Engines

Searching for information on the World Wide Web (WWW) is not very precise. There is no system like Library of Congress subject headings to help you, and search engines locate sites by a variety of methods. The number of hits you receive for a search can be tens or hundreds of thousands - way too many to sift through. Every search engine uses a different technique to find web sites, and even the best search engines look at 30% or less of the sites on the WWW.

This means that you need to be creative in your search strategy and you should use two or more search engines. Your aim really is to find a reliable site with a lot of links so you can continue your research from there.

In this exercise we are going to look at results from different search engines and compare them to each other.

Your instructor will assign a topic or have you use a topic you choose. The first thing you need to do is write out a list of word and phrases that will help you find the information you want. These are called search terms.

1. Write down a list of search terms relevant to your topic. Think of as many words and phrases as you can - you may need to use more than one search term.

2. First, try using several of these search terms in Yahoo. Yahoo is a topic index, not a search engine. This means that real people have looked at these sites, picked the best ones, and sorted them into categories. Yahoo is a good starting place if you are not sure of your topic.

List the search terms that got the best results and the number of hits (pages found)

Now try 3 different search engines using the term that was most successful in Yahoo. You may click on Netsearch and choose a search engine or type in the URL. The URLs for several search engines are listed below.

AltaVista - <http://altavista.digital.com>
HotBot - <http://www.hotbot.com>
Excite - <http://www.excite.com>
WebCrawler - <http://www.webcrawler.com>
Lycos - <http://www.lycos.com>

3. Complete the following table. For # relevant hits, look at the first 10 sites listed, and see which ones could be used for a research paper or project on this topic. You will find that some sites have little or nothing to do with your topic.

Search Engine	total # hits	# relevant hits

4. Of the first 10 sites, how did the results compare? Were all the sites the same for each search engine? If they were different, how much difference was there?
5. Find a good page on the topic with lots of links? A link is a direct connection to another web page, it is usually in blue and often underlined. You click on the link and go directly to that site. What is the URL? (You may print this page if you wish).
Why is a page with good links useful?

