



Week 4 - Search & Explore the Internet

Class Objectives

You should leave today with the ability to:

- Distinguish between a search engine, a directory and a portal
- Use a directory to browse for Web sites on a particular topic/subject
- Use a search engine to locate relevant Web sites according to specific search terms
- Limit your search results
- Evaluate the quality of a Web site

Search Engines vs. Directories vs. Portals

When to Use a General Directory

Web directories group Web sites by topic. The information in a directory is usually selected and sorted by a human intermediary. Web directories are a good starting place when you have a very general question or when you don't quite know where to go with a broad topic and would like to browse down through a category to get some guidance. You browse the directory versus inputting search terms/keywords to get results.

Examples of a directory:

- <http://dir.yahoo.com>
- <http://www.dmoz.org> (Google points to this)

When to Use Search Engines

If your topic is very specific or you expect that very little is written on it, a search engine (Google, Ask.com, etc.) will be a much better starting place than a directory. If you need to be exhaustive, use a search engine. If your topic is a combination of three or more concepts (e.g., "Italian" "paintings" "Haseltine"), use a search engine.

Example of a search engine: <http://google.com>

In the major search engines and many other search sites, when you enter terms, only those records (Web pages) that contain all those terms will be retrieved, and the engine will automatically rank the order of output based on various criteria.

Strategies for better search results:

1. Be as specific as possible in your search terms. If you're looking for information on beagles, enter "beagles," not "dogs."
2. Use Boolean Operators (if allowed by the search engine) such as AND, OR and NOT when constructing your search.
3. Certain symbols, including the "wildcard" (*), quotation marks for phrases and the (+) and (-) symbols, can help limit your search.

4. Most major search engines allow you to limit your results by type/format. For example, if you want images of Beagles, you'd select Google's Image Search and limit your results that way.

There are also specialized search engines that may target a specific audience (nettrekker.com for students/educators) or present results in a unique way (www.clusty.com).

When Portals Make Sense

Portals are Web sites that include search engines, possibly directories and lots of content (gossip, news, etc.) from content providers and advertisers. They also offer tools like free e-mail. If you want to stay on one site, or maybe you're a beginner, a portal may be your best bet. However, bear in mind that these sites don't specialize in search (they do many things), so your results may be less relevant.

Examples include:

- <http://yahoo.com>
- <http://www.excite.com/>
- <http://www.lycos.com/>
- <http://aol.com>
- <http://msn.com>

Assessing the Quality of Content

Once you've come up with a list of search results (or a category in a directory), you will want to evaluate whether the information is legitimate. Here are some things to consider...

1. Watch out for "Sponsored Links"
2. Consider the source. From what organization does the content originate? Look for the organization identified both on the Web page itself and at the URL. Is the content identified as coming from known sources such as a nonprofit organization (.org), a commercial site (.com), an academic institution (.edu) or a government entity (.gov)?
3. Consider the site's purpose (e-commerce versus informational)
4. Quality – Is the writing coherent, proper grammar, etc.?
5. Is the site and its contents as current as it should be?

Search Tips

Try and be as specific as possible – include all relevant keywords in your search (hometown name + newspaper versus just typing the word “news”).

If you input multiple keywords in a search, the engine will automatically append “AND” between each word – assumes you want results/web pages with all those words, i.e., type in the words “cats dogs” to get results that cover cats and dogs on the same site.

If you want to expand your search and get one or more of the words you type in the results, so web sites on cats or dogs, put the word “OR” between words.

If you want the exact wording/phrase, surround the phrase with quotation marks, i.e., “bad to the bone.”

If there are words you don’t want to show up, you can put NOT between the words or a minus sign at the beginning of the word you don’t want, i.e., “mother NOT Theresa” or “mother –Theresa.”

You can also narrow your search to just images, news, maps, etc. on most search engines.

If you are searching for something very specific, you will want to use a search engine focused on that, i.e., a job search engine if you’re only looking for employment (versus just using Google).

Explore the “Advanced Search” features of the search engine you’re using to get the best results.

Helpful Web Sites

- Web Search Strategies in Plain English -
<http://www.commoncraft.com/search>
- Google Search Basics -
<http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=136861>
- NoodleTools Search Tips -
<http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/5locate/adviceengine.html>
- The OWL at Purdue: Searching the World Wide Web -
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/558/01/>
- Search Engine Watch Web Searching Tips -
<http://searchenginewatch.com/facts>