

LESSON PLAN 13: GETTING THE BEST OUT OF GOOGLE

Objective: To improve and refine online searches for information

Age range: 8-18



“Google it”. It’s a phrase commonly heard in classrooms when students are asked to research a subject – but the outcome can sometimes be disappointing. Here **Suzie Vespers** looks at ways you can help them improve the overall quality of search results ... whatever the lesson.

YOU WILL NEED

- ▶ Computer, browser and Internet access
- ▶ Something to search for!

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Literacy, investigation, problem-solving, spelling

SEARCH METHODS

1. **Use only keywords** – Google does not search for small words like ‘the’ and ‘is’, so get into the habit of using only keywords (significant words or phrases that you believe are relevant to the information you are seeking). A good class exercise is to brainstorm possible keywords for a topic.
2. **Use synonyms** – results can improve through using synonyms (words or phrases that mean the same thing), such as ‘student’ and ‘pupil’. Google can do it for you. Simply put ‘~’ in front of a word. For example, ‘~woman’ will find results for ‘female’ and ‘lady’. Again, this can double as a class exercise.
3. **American spelling** – ‘centre’ or ‘center’? Using American spellings can be useful in refining some searches.
4. **Root words** – you can achieve better results by using root words as opposed to one specific word ending. Type in ‘swim’ and Google will search for all words that have ‘swim’ in the stem of the word, such as ‘swimming’ and ‘swims’.
5. **Speech marks** – if you use two words, Google will search for sites that contain both but they will not necessarily be together as a phrase – which generates many unwanted results. To have it search for the two words together (or longer phrases), say ‘Easter’ and ‘egg’, put speech marks around them, “Easter egg”.
6. **The minus sign** – by using the ‘-’ sign you can exclude some results. For example, if you search “Easter eggs”, you’ll get results about hidden features on software programs and DVDs, known as ‘Easter eggs’. If this isn’t what you were after, try entering “Easter egg” -software -DVD for quite different results.

7. **OR** – if you would like to find pages that contain two different terms, say Easter and Christmas but not necessarily together in one document, you can use OR – ‘Easter OR Christmas’. Notice that OR is capitalised, which means Google uses it as a command and not a search term.

8. **Search type** – In the top menu bar of the Google search window, there are options for what type of search you want to do – Images, News, etc. Using these allows you to further refine your search. ▲

For further tips and advice check out:

Suzie’s own wiki: <http://educationalsoftware.wikispaces.com/Web+searching+tips>

www.googleguide.com

www.google.com/educators/posters.html

http://udhsccf.wikispaces.com/space/showimage/Googling_Max-Exercises.pdf

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OTHER GOOGLE FUNCTIONS

Calculator – Google can do simple calculations. Enter your question, like 48+6, and push enter. Use / to divide and * to multiply. You can also find out percentages (20% of 100) and fractions (one quarter of 100).

Definitions – to find out a definition of a word, for example delirious, type define:delirious and you will be given only search results from online dictionary resources.

Search a site – there are times when you may want to search just one website, such as the BBC website. So, to find results on ‘counting’ from within the BBC site, enter site:bbc.co.uk/schools counting.

Specific file types – say you want to give a presentation on ‘searching techniques’ and would like to see what presentations other people have posted. You could search for PowerPoint files by typing filetype:ppt “searching techniques”. This will work for any file type. Just look at the ending of a file to find what to search for – doc, pdf, jpg, and so on.

Google is a very powerful search tool and there are many other ways that it can be used to search. You can even look in a specified date period or only in the title of a document.



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