

Internet Search:

# Tips and tricks to help you find information online

## Search engines 101

The internet offers boundless information, resources and opportunities for learning, entertainment and exploration. But how do you find the exact info you're looking for when there's so much online?

That's where search engines come in.

Search engines are the compasses of the digital age, guiding us through the wilderness of information.

However, using a search engine is equal parts science and art. This guide starts with the basics and works up to useful tips and tricks to reduce the time you spend searching and improve the quality of the results you find. We'll also show you how artificial intelligence is reshaping the way we search for information — and how you should (and shouldn't) be using it today.



“Search engines find the information, not necessarily the truth.”

- Amit Kalantri, Author



## How do search engines work?

A search engine is a computer program that constantly indexes information on millions of web pages and organizes them so you can quickly find what you're looking for. When you type a question or keywords into a search engine's web page (google.com, bing.com, etc.), it checks your input against its index of the information. Then, using complex mathematical formulas, it ranks the results by relevance and quality, with what it guesses will be the most useful pages listed first. This all happens in a fraction of a second.

## Searching vs. googling?

Google is the most popular search engine, handling 92% of all internet searches as of 2024.<sup>1</sup> It's so popular that its brand name has become a verb: "to Google." But Google is just one of many search engines. Other important search engines include Microsoft Bing, Yahoo!, and DuckDuckGo, which operate on similar advertising models.

## How do search engines make money?

Most search engines generate revenue through advertising. Companies pay to have their advertisements appear alongside the search results, usually marked as "sponsored" or "ad."

### PRO TIP:

You may need to scroll down to get past the sponsored results to see the results you want.

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# How to get better search results

## Use keywords to unlock the world's information.

Your search results rely on the keywords you use. Keywords are the terms or phrases you type into the search engine. To improve your search, use only the most important words.

### PRO TIP:

#### Use important words only:

Skip common words like "a," "and," "the," unless they are essential (for example, in a phrase like "The Beatles").

## Good search vs. bad search

**Poor keyword choice:** "cake"

**Why:** You'll be overwhelmed with information you don't care about, from recipes, books with the word cake in the title, movie titles with the word cake, and more.

**Better keyword choice:** "dark chocolate mousse cake recipe"

**Why:** You'll receive information that's relevant to what you're most interested in.



# What are search operators?

As you become more familiar with searching, you can use search operators to refine your results.

Search operators include:

## **Quotation marks (" "):**

Use these around phrases to search for exact matches, e.g., "global warming effects."

## **Minus sign (-):**

Place this before a word(s) to exclude it from your search, e.g., jaguar -car.

## **Plus sign (+):**

Use this operator ahead of a word you want to make sure is included in the results. e.g., Advanced +coding training +java (This will return only results that include the words coding and java.)

## **OR (written in all capital letters):**

Include results for either one term or another. e.g., "jaguar" OR "lion."

## **Filetype:**

Limit your search to specific file types. e.g., filetype:pdf quantum mechanics (This will only return PDF files related to quantum mechanics.)

## **Site:**

Use this to search within a specific website (e.g., Harvard.edu; FDA.gov; reddit.com) e.g., "global warming data" site: Harvard.edu

## **Related:**

Finds websites that are similar to the one you entered in the criteria e.g., related:nytimes.com (this will return websites similar to The New York Times.)

## **Wildcard (\*):**

It's used to find keyword variations or when the exact term is partially unknown. E.g., environment\* policy (This will return results for "environment policy," "environmental policy," and any other words that start with 'environment' followed by any extension).

## **PRO TIP:**

Start with a small number of keywords and then add more terms and operators to narrow your search.

## 3 tips for assessing the credibility of sources

Not all information found online is accurate or trustworthy. Some are intentionally misleading. Search engines tend to show more credible sources first, but it's imperfect. You should keep these tips in mind when looking at your search results.

- 1 Check the source:** Websites like educational institutions (.edu), government sites (.gov), and established media outlets are generally reliable.
- 2 Verify the date:** Check when the information was published or updated. Recent information is more likely to be accurate, especially on rapidly changing topics.
- 3 Cross-reference:** Look at several sources to confirm the information.



### Advanced features and tools

Search engines are great at organizing information — and finding it. Today, you don't even need to type information. You can speak or use an image to start a search.

- **Voice search:** You can click a microphone icon in the search bar and use your device's microphone to speak a search term.
- **Image search:** Upload a photo to find images related to your search terms or identify objects and places.
- **Built-in tools:** Need a calculator? Want to know the current U.S. dollar-to-Mexican peso exchange? Wondering if you need an umbrella tomorrow? Use your search engine to help with tasks like these.

“Everyone knows what search engines are, but relatively few know how to use them effectively.”

— Marc Ostrovsky, Author

## AI search vs. search engines

New artificial intelligence language websites like OpenAI, ChatGPT, Bing, Copilot and Google Gemini can also be used to find information. Unlike traditional search engines—which point you to web sites with the information you need — AI will synthesize information and give you its an answer. Both methods of search have benefits and drawbacks.

### Artificial intelligence (ChatGPT, CoPilot, Gemini)

| PROs   | CONs  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Conversational style:</b> Tailored to various reading levels, making it user-friendly for all ages.</p> <p><b>Context awareness:</b> Maintains the flow of conversation, allowing for deeper inquiries.</p> <p><b>Detailed explanations:</b> Simplifies complex information, making it accessible and easy to grasp.</p> | <p><b>Limited to training data:</b> Restricted by the data it was trained on, which may not include the most current events or information.</p> <p><b>Risk of inaccuracies:</b> Prone to producing errors due to how it interprets training data.</p> <p><b>Cannot browse the web:</b> Cannot fetch real-time updates, limiting its usefulness for current events or linking you to a site you want to visit.</p> |

#### PRO TIP:

When using AI, use natural language to communicate with the interface and provide it with detailed prompts to match your criteria.

“Search is a means to an end. The real need is to find useful information, whether it’s about health or finance or jobs or anything else.”

— Vin Cerf, Internet pioneer

**Traditional search engines**  
(Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.)

| PROs   | CONs   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Current:</b> Always updates and pulls information directly from the web.</p> <p><b>Transparent:</b> Directly connects you to numerous sources, enhancing trust and verification.</p> <p><b>Highly specific:</b> Efficiently pinpoints precise information, saving time and effort.</p> | <p><b>Information overload:</b> Often overwhelms users with too much information, requiring good filtering skills.</p> <p><b>Impersonal interaction:</b> Provides factual data without the nuances of a conversation, which can affect engagement.</p> <p><b>Privacy concerns:</b> Tracks search history and personal data, which may raise issues about user privacy.</p> |

## Conclusion

In a world overflowing with data, pinpointing the exact information you need can sometimes feel like looking for a grain of salt on a beach. That's why mastering the art and science of the internet search is the first step in maximizing the internet's potential.

## About Brightspeed

Launched in 2022, Brightspeed is building a future where more communities can benefit from a more connected life. We believe where you choose to call home shouldn't limit your options — and we're building the infrastructure to provide millions of homes with fast, reliable internet. So wherever you're streaming, gaming or working, you'll enjoy an uninterrupted experience. **Learn more at [www.brightspeed.com](http://www.brightspeed.com).**

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