
Activity 1 Using a search engine

Introduction

This activity should take you no more than an hour or so to complete. If you wish to spend more time than this you may, but bear in mind that only an hour or so of your total course study time is planned for this, and any additional time you take will add to your total hours of study. It is very easy to allow computing activities to predominate your studies!

If you have difficulties with this activity, we suggest that you seek the help of a friend, neighbour or family member, but remember that you *yourself should complete the activities*; otherwise you will not learn the needed skills. So by all means, if you need to, ask for specific help or a demonstration, but do the activity items yourself.

What you should learn from this activity

When you have completed this activity you will be able to:

- describe the differences between search engine interfaces;
- use search engines in a simple way;
- use search engine facilities in a more effective way using some advanced search features.

The activity

Install the browser(s)

If you have not already done so, now is the time to install the course software from the Online Applications CD-ROM (and establish your link with your chosen Internet service provider (ISP)). The CD-ROM offers you a choice of two browsers: *Internet Explorer* and *Netscape* and we recommend you initially install *Internet Explorer* and use it for browsing the Block 1 web pages. Note, however, that two of the exercises associated with Unit 2 require *Netscape* so you will eventually need to install this browser as well. It is perfectly possible to have both browsers available on your desktop, and to choose one or the other as you wish, or make one your default browser (that is, it will be the one that will normally open when you log on to the Internet).

Connect to the Internet

Log on to the Internet. Make a note of which browser you are using. This should also include the version number (important if you should need help from a phone or Internet help line). The Online Applications CD-ROM contains the latest supported versions of each browser at the time the course material is assembled for packing, so if you have an older version of either browser on your system, you should replace this with the newer version.

Look at the browser

Look at your chosen browser's interface and see whether it offers you access to search engines. For example, it may contain a separate window with search engine names in it.

If it does not then click one of the following below (they are the names of commonly available search engines):

- [Google](#)
- [Lycos](#)
- [Yahoo](#)

You should now see a space into which key words can be typed. (If not, we suggest you try the Google search engine as the main interface page is not a busy one and it is easier to see what to do.)

Do some searching

Choose **one** of the following topics to do some searching on. You should know enough about the topic or find it of such personal interest that you will be able to think of alternative terms for key words. (If need be, you can use a thesaurus or dictionary to help you.). You need to choose these such that they are likely to yield ambiguous results or too many results so that the point of the activity becomes very clear. I've tried to choose a wide range of likely interests that people might know a bit about - enough to ask 'follow on' questions and likely to yield some results that meet the requirements and some that may be in some way unsatisfactory.

- Doors or windows (e.g. for replacement)
- Family history or genealogy
- Art
- Travel
- Music
- Gadgets
- Computing
- Local history
- Cookery
- Gardening
- Recycling
- Wind (or solar) power

If you choose one of these, we will ask you to pursue a line of enquiry that is specific to you in some way - your family or a family you are interested in, your locality or one you have some associations with.

Type in to the box on the search engine interface the key word(s) you've chosen and click the Search button or the Return key. Now note approximately how many results have been returned to you.

Look briefly at the first ten responses you have from the search engine by clicking on each in turn (use the back function to return to the search engine results). For now,

don't follow any further links that may appear in any of these sites. For the topic that you chose, would you characterize the first ten responses as:

- general information about the topic;
- specific, but covering more than one aspect of the topic;
- specific to one aspect of the topic;
- puzzling because you are not sure why several of these are in the first 10 responses!

Are there any surprises in the responses you have? By surprise, I mean a website returned to you as part of this search that appears at first glance to have little or nothing to do with what you thought the topic was about? For your own benefit, note what this is.

Examine the first page again, and select some of the entries returned to you. Does one or more of the key words you typed in appear in the URL? (The URL is the address beginning with `http`.)

Again, on this first page, does one or more of the key words you typed in appear in a title at the top of a page? (This is usually displayed in larger letters in bold.)

Looking at this first page of results one last time, does one or more of the key words you typed in appear in what appears to be part of the body of the website? (This will generally appear in smaller type, possibly with three dots - the ellipsis - appearing one or more times, with the words you typed appearing in bold in an otherwise normal type.)

Make the search more specific

Now you are going to be asked to try to make your search more specific. I have repeated the list of topics, but now expanded with a more specific sub-topic. At first you should repeat your search exactly as you have above, but using this sub-topic as another key word. I have suggested sub-topics, but you should decide whether or not to use these words as key words or whether to choose your own.

- Doors or windows for houses
- Family history or genealogy name (using your surname or the surname of a family you wish to explore)
- Art galleries
- Travel by rail abroad
- Music on the Internet
- Gadgets for the DIYer
- Computing jobs in your area
- Local history with your town specified
- Cookery pastries with fruit
- Gardening design courses
- Recycling in schools and offices
- Wind (or solar) power for domestic use

Now, how many results have been returned to you as a result of adding more key words? Is this more or fewer than were returned in the general search?
The following are reasons why you may have found some difficulties with this.

Topic	Reason
Family history or genealogy	If the name you are searching for is common, you may find lots of sites. If it is very uncommon, you may find nothing. If it is the same as a word that is used in other contexts (e.g. Carpenter, Smith, Bird, Wall) you may get websites that have very little or nothing to do with families!
Art galleries	Museums may or may not describe themselves as galleries; places where art is available for sale commercially are also called galleries.
Travel by rail abroad	Did you define 'abroad'? The search engine will not be able to extract where you are located.
Music on the Internet	Might be far too much, and it might be of various types.
Gadgets for the DIYer	'DIYer' is a slang term rather than a proper term, so you may or may not have received much back - 'do-it-yourself' or an alternative term such as 'home maintenance' may be better
Computing jobs in your area	How did you define your area?
Local history with your town specified	Is your locality one whose name is duplicated in some way? For example stating 'England' probably will also yield 'New England', and many towns and counties have names which are duplicated elsewhere in the world (e.g. many English and Scottish counties are used as place names in the eastern United States and in Canada).
Cookery pastries with fruits	'Cookery' is a British-English term, so this will probably find few American websites, where the word used is 'Cooking'. 'Pastries' is plural, and 'pastry' may be equally valid as a search key word.
Gardening design courses	You may find that if the site mentions designing water courses, the site will be included, even if it's not the kind of 'course' you thought you were looking for. If you used the singular, you will find that the search engine will find websites where the only 'course' appears in the phrase 'Of course, ...'
Recycling in schools and offices	Using terms like 'schools' and 'offices' might also yield websites about recycling that include these terms, e.g. 'At the company's offices ...'
Wind (or solar) power for domestic use	'Domestic' and 'use' may be terms that appear in a website even though they are not, strictly speaking, about power for domestic use.

From this you should see that it is important to learn to use terms carefully and well.