

# How to use Google well in year 9 and 10

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## 1. Wikipedia- How to do it right

Before you start frantically Googling, read and reread your question and make sure you understand it.

If you don't know anything about your topic, Wikipedia is a good place to go for an overview and to find keywords.

You should never use Wikipedia as a final source because anyone can publish on it so you don't know whether the information is true or not.

But using it as a stepping stone to more in-depth research is fine.

While you're there, look at the sources listed at the bottom of the page and see if any of them will be useful for you.

Places like Encyclopaedia Britannica, National Geographic, and History.com are also good places to get an overview, and because they're written by experts you can use them as a final source.

Most subjects have this kind of website that gives an overview on a lot of different topics, it's just a matter of finding which website is best for your subject. Encyclopaedia Britannica is good for most topics.

## 2. Keywords

Now you understand the topic, make a note of your keywords. Remember that they need to be specific enough to find the right information. It's a good idea to write them down so you know later what you've searched for.

Using the keywords your teacher has given you in the task is a good start.

Don't just type the assignment question into Google; remember that Google is a machine and not a person and you'll get better results if you use language it understands.

Use the same language that will be used in the type of website you want to find. If there is jargon for your topic, use it.

Don't use full sentences, the extra words will muddle the search results. Just stick to keywords.

### 3. Predict your results

Type your keywords into Google. Before you open any sites, have a look at the results that your search found.

Are they what you expected? If they aren't, you're going to need to modify your search.

How?

*Are your results too broad?*

You'll need to use more specific search terms. Look again at the task your teacher gave you and see if you can add any words to narrow down the search. If you can't, go back to Wikipedia and look for extra keywords you can include in your search.

*Are your results too narrow?*

(ie. Too specific) Remove some of your search terms to make the search less specific. It's a good idea to only take out one term at a time, otherwise your search might end up too broad.

*Have you got a page of results that have absolutely nothing to do with your topic?*

Have a look at them and see if they all have something in common. Maybe it's a band that has the same name as your assignment topic. Maybe you've got results for a person that has a similar name to the person you're looking for. Maybe you've got tourism websites when you wanted information on the history or geography of a place.

The way to fix the search will depend on what's gone wrong, but here are some suggestions:

- Be more specific with your keywords, eg. using the person's full name
- Add the name of your subject to your search to remove things like businesses and rock bands that have the same name as your topic
- Use the NOT Boolean operator (go to the next step to find out what they means!)

### 4. Tricks for more efficient searching

*Boolean*

You can use Boolean to broaden or narrow your search results.

AND

When you want a website that includes both your search terms, put AND between them

Eg. Kennedy AND assassination

OR

When you want results with one term or the other term, but not necessarily both, you can use OR. This is also a good way to search for synonyms or different spellings.

Eg. Recipes cake OR brownie

## NOT

Use this to tell Google that there are certain words you don't want in your results. You can use the word NOT, but putting a minus sign in front of your word also works.

Eg. Martin Luther –King

## *Synonyms*

Sometimes your topic will have synonyms, which means it may be called different things by different people or in different countries.

Do some searches using the different synonyms and see if you get different results. If there are different ways of spelling it you might need to try searching for each of those as well.

Google has been designed to automatically search for synonyms and different spellings of common words, but when you're researching for school the words you're using might not be common.

## *Quotes*

If you're looking for a particular phrase and you want search results that contain those exact words in that exact order, put your search term in double speech marks. This is a good way to narrow down your search results if your search results were too broad on your first attempt.

Eg. "Martin Luther King Jr"

## *inurl*

Use this to look for websites with something specific in the url. Good ways to use it are to limit the search to results from Australia (or another country), or to search for government or educational sites. Just include it after your search terms.

Eg.

ecosystem inurl:au – will only find websites with au in the url

electoral system inurl:gov – will only find websites with gov in the url, so most of your results will be government websites

Tutankhamen inurl:edu – will only find websites with edu in the url, so most of your results will be education areas

Even when you do this you'll still have websites that slip through that aren't .au, .gov or .edu sites so you should still always check the url.

## **5. Filling in the gaps**

Now you've found some information stop and read your task again and work out if there are any gaps in your information.

Now that you know more about the topic you can try some different and more specific searches to find the information you need.

You should also glance over the information you've found. Are there any key words you don't know that keep popping up? They might be important keywords for this topic. Find out what they mean and try searching again using them as search terms and see if you get some results you didn't get before.

## **6. Places to go that aren't Google**

Google is very useful, but you can't find everything through Google. The internet has been described as being like an iceberg- the bit above the water is what Google searches, but the bigger bit under the water is called the 'hidden web' and you can't access that information using Google.

This includes websites that require a password to access them and places like library and museum collections that Google doesn't search. So if you want to find really good information, you'll need to think about where else you can look.

Your local library will subscribe to databases you can use. You can also research whether there are any libraries or cultural institutions like museums that have information that will help you.

Sometimes the best way to use Google to research is to use it to find out where the really good information lives.

## **7. Evaluating websites**

The thing you always need to remember about the internet is that anyone can publish things on the internet, whether or not they actually know what they're talking about.

You need to be able to evaluate a website for its accuracy or you're going to end up using information in your assignments that's not correct. This isn't just something that matters at school; if you're using the internet to research other things in your life (eg. whether to buy something) you'll want to make sure you're basing your decision on information that's accurate and correct.

This topic deserves its own set of instructions so follow the link below to find out how to evaluate a website.