Effective Online Searching
from http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/EffectiveOnline.aspx

Due to the sheer size of the World Wide Web, finding relevant information demands very specific searching skills and techniques. Learning how to choose the right search engine and practicing effective search methods helps minimize the irrelevant and offensive material that can turn up in a search.

Choosing the right search engine

The first step is to become familiar with the different types of search engines and the various services they provide. There are hundreds of search engines from which to choose, and there are several distinct styles of gathering, grouping and presenting information.

For example, “Ask Jeeves” permits users to type in questions. “Google” ranks results by importance and relevance of the site. “Yahoo!” has a directory where you can search by topic. “Vivisimo” clusters search results into categories selected from the words and phrases contained in the search results. Some search engine features may be better suited to a specific type of search than another.

Most of us use just one search engine, and often settle for the first, relevant Web site on the list. Some researchers advise using more than one search tool because each offers different features, and also because no search tool can access the billions of Web pages on the Internet. According to researchers, no single search engine captures more than 16 per cent of the entire Internet – and all search engines, combined, capture less than 50 per cent of online information.

Many of the major search engine sites now offer “parental filters” that, when activated, block offensive sites that may appear in your search results. It is important to note, however, that these filters are not foolproof. A 2003 report from the Harvard Law School states that the parental controls offered on “Google”, block many harmless Web pages including ones from the White House, IBM and the American Library Association.

On most search engines, companies can pay to have their sites appear during a search. These paid listings are usually separated from the main editorial results and identified as “sponsored links.” For example, “Google” places sponsored links on the right-hand side of the page away from editorial content. “Altavista”, on the other hand, incorporates them into the search results list, which can be misleading.

Conducting your search

Finding the right search engines is only the beginning. Developing effective search techniques greatly improves your chances of accessing quality information.
Here are some helpful tips from the Media Awareness Network Web site:

- Use six to eight key words, preferably nouns.
- Most users submit only one or two key words per search, which is not enough for an effective query. Avoid verbs, and use modifiers if they help define your object more precisely, e.g. “feta cheese” rather than just “cheese.”
- Combine key words into phrases by using quotation marks, as in “solar system.” Most search engines will only look for this phrase rather than the individual words, solar and system.
- Spell carefully, and try alternative spellings.
- Some search engines use a method known as BOOLEAN to fine-tune a search. The three most common BOOLEAN commands are “and,” “or” and “and not.”
  - “and” or “+” between key words means: “I want only documents that contain both or all words”
  - “or” between key words means: “I want documents that contain either word; I don’t care which”
  - “and not” or “-” means: “I want documents that contain this word, but not if the document also contains another word” (i.e. “teens and not sex”). The term “and not” applies only to the word or phrase immediately following.

Most search engines offer “advanced search” options. However, few people bother to use them even though they can make a big difference to the quality of their search results. A 2003 British study shows that only 10 per cent of Internet users refine their searches using the options search sites offer. Once you have found the information you want, confirm its accuracy by locating at least three other independent online sources that point to the same answer. This is known as the triangle method.

**Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation’s Youth**
[Click here to view the entire report](#).

This report is based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,501 youth ages 10 to 17 who use the Internet regularly and found that

- Approximately one in five received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet in the last year.
- One in thirty-three received an aggressive sexual solicitation — a solicitor who asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; sent them regular mail, money, or gifts.
- One in four had an unwanted exposure to pictures of naked people or people having sex in the last year.
- One in seventeen was threatened or harassed.
- Approximately one quarter of young people who reported these incidents were distressed by them.
• Less than 10 percent of sexual solicitations and only 3 percent of unwanted exposure episodes were reported to authorities such as a law-enforcement agency, an Internet Service Provider, or a hotline.
• About one quarter of the youth who encountered a sexual solicitation or approach told a parent. Almost 40 percent of those reporting an unwanted exposure to sexual material told a parent.
• Only 17 percent of youth and approximately 10 percent of parents could name a specific authority, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, CyberTipline, or an Internet Service Provider, to which they could make a report, although more said they had “heard of” such places.
• In households with home Internet access, one third of parents said they had filtering or blocking software on their computer at the time they were interviewed.3

Escaping or Connecting? Characteristics of youth who form close online relationships
Click here to view the entire report.

This report used the data from the above-mentioned national sample of Internet users, ages 10 to 17, to explore the characteristics of youth who had formed close relationships with people they first met online4 and found that

• Fourteen percent of youth reported close online friendships and 2 percent reported online romances. Girls were slightly more likely than boys to have close online relationships with 16 and 12 percent, respectively.5
• Girls aged 14 to 17 were about twice as likely as girls who were 10 to 13 to form close online relationships.6
• The two problem characteristics associated with close online relationships were high parent-child conflict and being highly troubled. The girls with high levels of parent-child conflict reported yelling, nagging, and taking away privileges by parents at a higher level than the other girls. The highly troubled girls had levels of depression, victimization, and troubling life events at a higher level than the other girls in the sample. Girls in either of these categories were more than twice as likely as the other girls in the sample to have formed close online relationships.7
• Boys who had low communication with their parents, and who also reported that their parents were less likely to know where they were and who they were with than the other boys in the sample were the most strongly associated with close online relationships.8
• Girls and boys who reported high levels of Internet use and home Internet access were more likely to report close online relationships.9
• Youth with problems were more likely to have formed online romantic relationships, been asked by online friends for face-to-face meetings, and attended face-to-face meetings with people they first met online.10

Youth who communicate well with their friends and family have people to talk with about online encounters; can get advice about behavior they find weird or unnerving; and, therefore, develop a sense of appropriate and inappropriate online behavior. Youth with problems may be less likely to get good advice and feedback.11