



5 TRICKS TO MAKE ON-LINE SEARCHING FASTER

It's so easy to lose whole chunks of unplanned time searching on line for one little something – a quote, a statistic, a person, or an answer. Here are five tricks to make the searching simple, fast and easy.

I used some social media tools to make this project quicker for myself by asking my fellow professional organizers around the country what they do to get to the information they want quickly.

Trick # 1 – Pick the right search engine or tool.

Google might now be a verb, noun and adjective in today's culture, but it isn't your only choice for searching. Find what you are looking for faster using the best search tool for the job. Here are a few options from my group of experts:

"I find www.ask.com to be very helpful when I have random questions about things. For example: 'What is the difference between a metaphor and a simile.'" *Terri Urquhart, Forever Functional, Inc.*

I also like how www.Bing.com is formatted. It uses the borders on either side the search results to help you focus and pick. Behind google, www.Yahoo.com is the next most popular search engine and www.aol.com has a high degree of user friendliness.

Though not technically search engines - they do not search the web and cull relevant results, but rather have collected or posted content – these tools may be the best source to get what you are looking for:

"www.ehow.com is a good choice for DIY's (Do-It-Yourselfers) or anyone who wants instructions for how to do something. They have videos as well." *Lori Watson, Anyone & Everything Organized, LLC*

"If you need to know if an offer, a 'fact' or a warning and the like are legitimate, www.snopes.com is indispensable for sorting out truth from urban myth." *Denise Lee, Professional Organizer*

From my own experience, I think www.Wikipedia.com is the best place to do in depth research for people, events, history and processes. If you are looking for video information www.YouTube.com is the best resource.



The bottom line, while you may still use Google most of the time, as I do, it is not the only option. You can focus in on what you are looking for by using some of these other choices.

Trick # 2 – Refine your search file type or web page title

We are all aware of doing keyword searches but when you are looking for something very specific you can refine the search criteria to improve your success rate. Here's a couple from my peers in the professional organizing industry:

“Use filetype extensions in your searches and receive web results with only the files you need. For example, search for .pdfs, excel documents or powerpoint presentations by typing **garbage disposal manual filetype:pdf**. For excel files type filetype:xls and for powerpoint presentations type filetype:ppt with your search inquiry.”

“Try searching the websites title pages for just what you want. Searching this way is very useful when you know exactly what you need but aren't sure where that product is available. For example, type: **intitle:"James Jeans"**. Just remember don't put a space after the colon and do put parenthesis around what you are searching for. Your search results will be very specific and exactly what you are looking for.” *Heidi Solomon, CPO Professional Organizing Services by Heidi*

Bottom line, if you know the file name or you know there are a lot of sources and you want to find the main one, use these search refining tools.

Trick # 3 - Be specific

The biggest mistake web searchers make is putting too few words in the search box so the volume of results returned is massive. Most people never look beyond the first page of results which may or may not display the best source for the information you want to find. Here's what the organizing pro's have to say:

“Use more words and be very specific. For example, let's say you want to contact our colleague, Angela Wallace. If you just type *Angela Wallace* into Yahoo's search box, you get 7,830,000 results and the Angela Wallace you want doesn't appear until page 7. If, instead, you type *Angela Wallace Professional Organizer*, you whittle the results down to 132,000 with our Angela Wallace appearing on the first page as the third entry. And, if you know that Angela is in Novato, CA, you could type *Angela Wallace Professional Organizer Novato* and the amount of results you get goes down to 2,740 with the right Angela Wallace being the first entry on the first page.” *Carla Mazzuchelli, Certified Professional Organizer*



“Include complementary contextual keywords, even if they’re not from same field or area, to help narrow the search and make it more relevant. This is more important as you look for more specific information on a subject. For instance, when wanting to search for a term with many meanings or uses, it’s better to search for ‘Poison music band hair metal’ instead of just ‘Poison music’ or just ‘poison’. *Amanda Wiss Professional Organizer*”

“When looking for product reviews, I also try using the term “sucks”. For example “Outlook Sucks”- It’s crude but effective for finding the negative reviews to consider when evaluating a product or service. *Lauren Halagarda, CPO®*”

“When using any search engine I try to be as specific as possible with the words I use. I try to include as much info as I know (product brand, last name, location, etc.). I glance at the suggested search words that appear as I type in the search box. I generally select one of the choices available. It just seems like the search results are more comprehensive and accurate if I select a phrase that has been searched before. I basically let the search engine help me pick the phrase to search.” *Ann Marie*

You can further narrow a search result by clicking on the “show options’ text link in the upper left of the results page. You can selectively add or remove the type of result, the date of the result, the result source, add or remove shopping sites and more. You can even view your results in a different format. Wonder wheel gives you a mind-map style view of connections and related searches.

The bottom line, with so much information online, the more key words you put in the search box, the narrower the search results. This is a time to be expansive with your words so you get right to what you want the first time.

Trick # 4 - Use search qualifiers

Most of the search engines have built in qualifier tools but unless you know where to look for them, you probably don’t know what is available. Here are some of the favorites other organizers like to use:

“Use a hyphen. To eliminate search results not related to your needs place a hyphen before the terms you want excluded from the search. For example, if you are searching for information on ravens for your child’s school science project, but when you search you receive a lot of results for the Baltimore Ravens. A search for ravens –football –Baltimore (note there is no space after the hyphen) removes all the results related to football or Baltimore.” *Heidi Solomon, CPO Professional Organizing Services by Heidi*

“One tip I like to use and share with clients is, when searching for comparable products, features, etc., use the term “vs.” in your search. For example, if you were looking for a product



similar to MS Outlook, start typing “Outlook vs.” The search will let you know what’s out there and even before you complete the search Google will provide a list of matching possibilities.”
Lauren Halagarda, CPO®

Some of my favorites:

Use quotation marks when you want to results that contain exactly those words. If I Google Susan Lannis, some of the returned results include Susan, Susan Lanni and Lannis. But if I Google “Susan Lannis” all the results are my name only. You can use it anytime, but one I use often is to look up error messages. When I get an error message I don’t understand I copy and paste it into the Google search box with “xxxx xxxx...” . I immediately get forum posting where people have already asked what the error is and others have given ideas for fixing it. Nifty!

Need the definition for a word? Just type define:theword.

Want exactly the word without plurals, tenses or synonyms? You add a + sign before a word. Example: +sock to get just 'sock' and not the plural.

You can use ‘and’ and ‘or’ as qualifiers. Search “this” and “that” – the results must have both words - or you can search for “this” or “that” where the results can have one or the other of the words.

Bottom line – using qualifiers makes search results more relevant. Here is a link to a Google cheat sheet with even more options: [Google Cheat Sheet](#). I don’t know how many of these work in the other search tools but time is precious so they are worth trying if it gets you to the results you want quicker.

Trick #5 - Stay focused

It is exceedingly easy to get sidetracked on line. If you are working on a project and you go on line to get some research, keep your focus. Anything you find during your search that spikes your interest but is not relevant to the task at hand can be bookmarked or tagged in favorites. It has been my experience that online searching is a lot like standing in the line at the checkout stand. You go in for one thing, but you are surrounded by temptation to get a little bit more. Yet somehow, when the visual stimulus is gone the desire for one more thing fades quickly.

The bottom line - Happy searching and be careful out there – don’t let this time thief steal away your precious time! Plan time to just explore and revisit what you have bookmarked and saved.