

Using search engines

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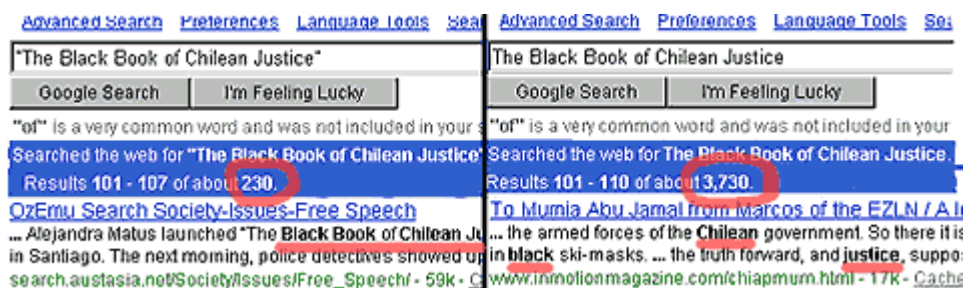
(October 10, 2001) Essential to human rights research—in fact, any research—is the ability to find accurate information. Surely, the Internet has opened up avenues for research that were inconceivable a decade ago. The availability of foreign newspapers, government information, and all sorts of primary documents on the World Wide Web allow someone to find out about an issue or individual in great depth without ever leaving his or her seat.

The only obstacle, then, lies in the ability of the user to successfully navigate through the Web in order to find the desired information. The tools on the Web used for this purpose are the **search engine** and the **Web directory**. Like any tools, however, they can be used with widely varying degrees of success depending upon the knowledge of their user. This article is divided into two parts. Part 1 discusses how to conduct a basic, thorough search. Part 2 discusses [which engines he or she should use to do it](#).

Part I: Using the Search Engine

The key to a good search is **specificity**. The more you can include important information, and exclude non-essential information, the better your results. The guidelines for adding and subtracting information in your search follow.

The most basic search is done by merely typing in the name of the item or person you want to research in the search box. This works if your item is only one word; if your search item is more than one word, however, then you should frame the item within quotation marks. So, for example, if you are looking for information on Alejandra Matus' *The Black Book of Chilean Justice*, then you should type "The Black Book of Chilean Justice", not just The Black Book of Chilean Justice, in the search engine box. See Figure 1 below, which illustrates the difference in results after a search with quotation marks, and then without.



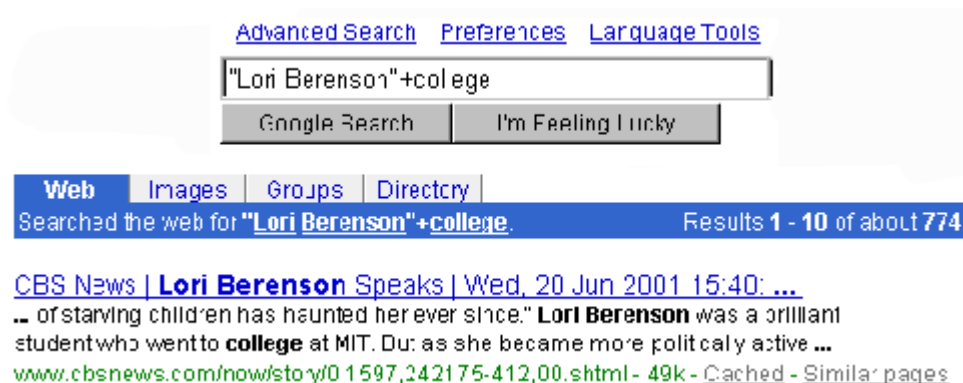
The search with quotations results in 230 results, all with the entry intact.

By contrast, a search with no quotes produces many more results (3,730). Each result contains the search words, but they're not necessarily together.

This elementary method, however, may not be enough to produce all the results that you are searching for. To narrow your search, you may "add" two search criteria together to indicate that you want both items to appear in your search result.

For example, suppose you are looking for where Peruvian activist

and prisoner Lori Berenson went to college. You would then type the two items and connect them with a 'plus' sign, signifying that **both** items should appear in the result. So, you would write "Lori Berenson"+college in the search window. (See example below.)



In the example above, the very first result of the search tells you the information you (theoretically) desired!

Of course, you could also write Lori+Berenson+college, as well, since that means that you desire your search results to include all three words.

In a similar way, you can subtract parts of a search which are unnecessary for your purposes. So, if you are looking for information on Peru, but do not want any information on "Lori Berenson", then you can write Peru-"Lori Berenson". This tells the search engine to look for all information about Peru **excluding** any material that references Lori Berenson.

While there are more advanced searches one can do, these basic commands—commonly referred to as "search engine math"—will allow one to retrieve desired information with a fairly high degree of accuracy.

Summary of basic search functions

Search with one word

kuchma

(Will search for all entries containing the word "kuchma")

Search with ""

"Leonid Kuchma"

(Will search for all entries containing the two words "Leonid" and "Kuchma" together)

Search with +

Kuchma+Gongadze+tapes

(Will search for all entries that contain the three above words, not necessarily in any specific order)

Search with -

kuchma-tymoshenko-yulia

(Will search for all occurrences of "kuchma" WITHOUT "tymoshenko" or "yulia")

Part II: [Using search engines: Which search engines you should use and why](#)