

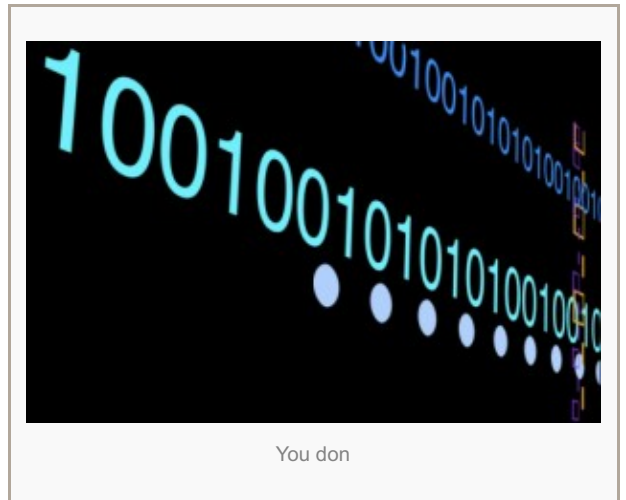
# 12 Ways To Be More Search Savvy

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Tina Barseghian

Google has made it possible for us to have instant information gratification. Just start typing the first letters of your search word and the site intuits your question and offers you the smartest choice of answers.

Seems simple enough. But as quick and facile as the process is, there are ways to be even more efficient, more search-savvy. And it's our responsibility to teach kids how to find and research information, how to judge its veracity, and when it's time to ask for a grownup's help. I spoke to Daniel Russell, Google's "search anthropologist" in charge of Search Quality and User Happiness (yes, really), who brought to light some important tips you may not have known.



1. **CONTROL F.** A deceptively simple tool, the Control F function (or Command F on Macs) allows you to immediately find the word you're looking for on a page. After you've typed in your search, you can jump directly to the word or phrase in the search list. According to Russell, 90 percent of Internet users don't know this, and spend valuable time scrolling through pages of information trying to find their key word. "They're being terribly inefficient," Russell says.
2. **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Use search terms the way you'd like to see them on a Web site. But think of how the author would phrase it. "It's not about you, it's about the author," Russell says. "What would they say and how would they say it? What are some common terms and phrases they'd write? It's the kind of thing that people over-think and are hyper-analytical about." Stay on topic and keep it simple.
3. **DEFINE OPERATOR.** This has to be one of the best items of Google's offerings. To learn the definition of a word, just type "Define," then the word.
4. **ONE MORE SEARCH.** It's one thing to do a quick search for Lady Gaga's birthday. But for more important questions that have a direct implication on your life, do one more search. Go deeper and find a second corroborating source, just like a journalist would. "We are a credulous society," Russell says. "When you have something you care about, something you're going to spend a lot of money on, or an issue with your help, do one extra search. Never single-source anything."
5. **FIND THE SOURCE.** Russell knows first-hand that Web sites can sometimes publish false information. Though we all know how to find contact information for an organization, confirm the phone number, look for the author's names and trustworthy hallmarks like logos, Russell says "the bad guys know that too. They're very good at mimicking credible sources of information." On the site [Who.is](http://Who.is), searchers can find details about the source: where it's located, when it was established, and the IP address.

6. **CONFIRM CONTENT.** It's common to find the same phrases and sentences on different sites all over the Web because people duplicate content all the time. To determine the original source of the content, you can look at the date it was written, but that's also not entirely accurate. When authors edit an article, that changes the posting date. So even if it was originally written in 2005, the date will say 2011 if it was edited last week. Again, here's when you put on your journalist hat. Trustworthy websites typically have an "errata column" or something like it where mistakes or corrections are posted. Sites where you see strikethroughs (~~it looks this~~) publicly show where previously published information has been corrected or stricken. You'll also see "Updates" at the top of articles, where clarifications are published, which shows the Web site's intention of providing the most accurate information. "Those idioms were not practicable or doable in pre-technology days," Russell says. "You have to understand how the practice of writing and publishing is changing."
7. **LINK OPERATOR.** The way Google ranks sites can be confusing. Sometimes even when a site has negative comments or reviews, it still rises to the top of the search list simply because it's been mentioned the most. When you want to know what *other* sites are saying about the site you're searching, type in "Link: [www.yourwebsitename.com](http://www.yourwebsitename.com)" and you'll see all the posts that mention that site. Whether it's following up on a debatable article or the reputation of an online shop or person, it's another incredibly useful research tool that didn't exist in "pre-Web times," as Russell puts it.
8. **DON'T USE THE + SIGN.** It might have negative side effects, Russell says. Adding the + sign will force the search engine to look for only that phrase and may tweak the search in a way you didn't intend. That said, it's a useful tool for looking up foreign words or very low-frequency words.
9. **PAY ATTENTION TO "GOOGLE INSTANT."** In most cases, Google's instant search function, which is fairly new, will accurately predict what you're searching for and offer suggestions. "Pay attention to it," Russell says. "You don't need to keep typing!" And sometimes it'll help you come up with the right words for your search phrase. It's all part of tapping into the wisdom of the crowd, he says. "It's good when you're stuck in a hard research problem. Like 'Which kind of hybrid vehicle should I buy?' might result in 'hybrid minivans' or other ideas you might not have known about."
10. **SWITCH ON SAFETY MODE.** If you've got kids in the house, Russell suggests enabling safe search. In your [Search Settings](#), scroll down to SafeSearch Filtering (or use Control F to find it quickly!) and choose what level filter you want to use. You can tailor it to every computer in the house. Google offers all kinds of safe search tips and functions on [Google's Family Safety Center](#). And what to tell kids if they accidentally stumble upon an inappropriate site? "I always tell my kids the Internet is a big, wide place, and if you find something inappropriate, hit the "back" button," he says. A teacher he knows tells her class to just instantly close the laptop when they find something objectionable. "It's an instant signal to the teacher in a K-8 class that something is not right, and it gives the teacher the opportunity to talk about how the student got there, and how to avoid that in the future." The tactic might not work as well in the high school setting, though, Russell jokes.
11. **FUNCTIONS GALORE.** You can use Google to do calculations (just type in "Square root of 99" or "Convert 12 inches to mm"). You can search patents, images, videos, language translations. And even if you can't remember a Google function, you can easily search it. "I use Google to Google Google," Russell says. "You don't have to remember URLs."
12. **LEFT-HAND SIDE TOOLS.** Most people don't notice these exist, but when you search a topic, a list of useful, interesting tools come up. For example, when you type in [War of 1812](#), on the left hand side, you'll see "Images," "Videos," etc., but below that you'll see things like "Timeline," which maps out a time sequence of events around the War of 1812 and links to each of those events. There's also a dictionary, related searches, and a slew of other helpful links.

To those who wonder if [Google is making us stupid](#), Russell has a pithy response: "Plato said that about books."

I better go search that.

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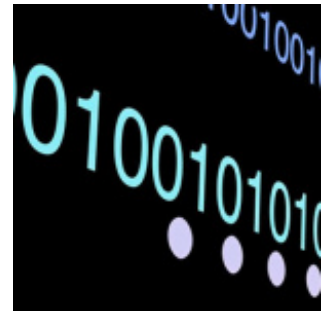
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