A Guide to Online Research

There's a whole world of information out there, easily available at the touch of a keyboard. That has advantages and disadvantages. We're going to look at these so you can get the best out of your time and efforts.

Before you start your search, it is worth spending time **defining** your task. **Ask a specific question** and if possible, the answer to it. This may sound strange, but it will reduce the number of hits that are simply not relevant.

Brainstorm words or phrases that you think will be useful. You can use multiple keywords but make them specific. Once you have these you can try them on their own or combine them with some search operators – that is symbols or words that can be used in your search queries to make your results more precise. The most common ones are listed on the next page, but for more advanced ones see The Ultimate Google Search Operators Cheatsheet (linkody.com)

It is good to research a wide variety of sources and media but **be discerning** and evaluate those sources of information.

- Question the authors perspective and motive?
- Can what is said be backed up by other sources?

Whilst it may not be possible to double check everything we access we can however build up a list of reputable websites and trusted sources. For example, trusted websites might include those with .gov – referring to a government body or department, or .ac referring to an academic institution.

A useful tip: When researching online record your sources as you go along and the date you accessed them, this saves a lot of time when compiling your references or bibliography. (For more help see the study skills sheets: **Referencing** and **6 Top Tips for organising your work**).

"Quotation marks" around your words or phrase will yield an exact match, rather than it searches on each word individually.
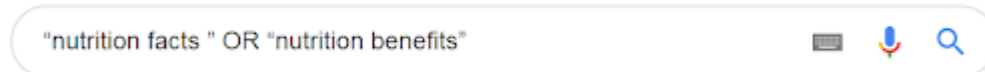
E.g "Dumfries and Galloway"

Comparisons: OR

The word OR can be used when searching for a comparison between two equally regarded terms:

(Used in Caps Lock)

peach OR nectarine	⌨ 🎤 🔍

You can also combine both the Quotes and OR symbols to get a comparison between two specific phrases. For example:

"nutrition facts " OR "nutrition benefits"	⌨ 🎤 🔍

Parentheses: ( )

Parentheses are used to group the search terms in order to control the execution logic of the search:

(peach OR nectarine) nutrition facts	⌨ 🎤 🔍

In this case, what is included in the parentheses is grouped as one keyword and information showed will only include comparisons (OR).

Plus and Minus

The short dash (-) Is used when excluding words, single and multiple phrases from search results

The search results exclude all pages that include the word "fact":

peach -fact

The same works for multiple words:

peach -fact -facts

Excluding single or multiple phrases

You can combine multiple search operators in the same search.

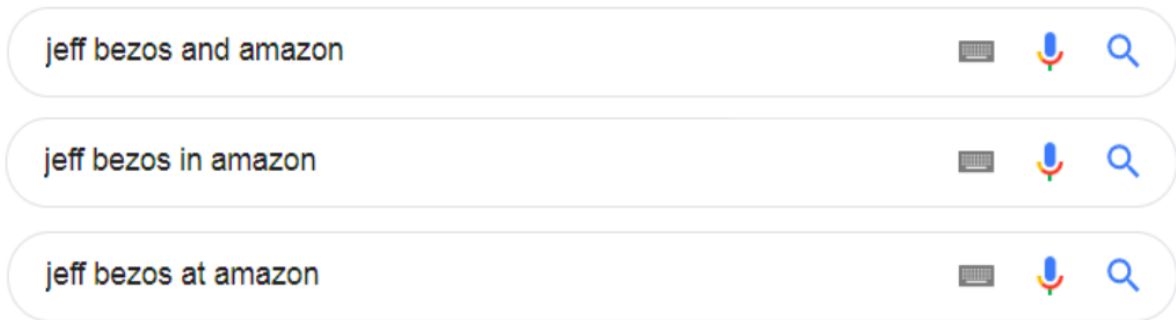In this case, we use the Short dash - to disregard specific phrases by putting it in Quotes " ":s

peach -"nutrition facts"

For example, let's say that you're searching for someone with a very common name like John Smith. Chances are you're going to come across a million search results. However, if you're looking for a John Smith in a certain location, you can add a + in the query.

e.g, "John Smith" + Dumfries

Asterisk: *

The asterisk ***** has been referred to as a wildcard due to its ability to gather more results in a single search query. Therefore, it's important to get an understanding of how this symbol can be utilized.

Normally, we could search for similar terms that lead to pretty much the same results:

jeff bezos and amazon	⌨ 🎤 🔍

jeff bezos in amazon	⌨ 🎤 🔍

jeff bezos at amazon	⌨ 🎤 🔍

However, when using the asterisk ***** you get a variety of results within a single search query. In this case:

jeff bezos * amazon	⌨ 🎤 🔍

This way, the search includes many possible terms just like the ones we showed above.

At the same time, this symbol can also be used to find other, more general results related to a specific location or situation, like for example:

best * in Madrid	⌨ 🎤 🔍

The reason we called this one a "Wildcard" is because you never really know which term will be the focus of the search result. You'll just have to test this one out for yourself.

Two full stops..

This is operator means "between". If you're trying to search for something within a date or price range, you can type said number range with two numbers and two full stops in between.

Example: If you're trying to find a car within a certain price range you can type "Cars £7,000..£27,000". This way Google will only give you search results within that specific range.

If you're on a higher level course such as HNC or HND you may be expected to do more 'scholarly' research. Therefore, you might consider using the following options.

Google Scholar

This public website has a familiar interface where you can access theses, abstracts, books and articles, not all of which are peer reviewed. It is not a comprehensive search tool and might not always have the latest results. It does have some useful functions though such as citation export and being able to create a query alert for when new results come in.

Dumfries & Galloway Library Services

Amongst many other resources (see link below) is access to a Directory of Open Access Journals. This <u>independent</u> index contains almost <u>17 500 peer-reviewed, open access journals</u> covering all areas of science, technology, medicine, social sciences, arts and humanities. Open access journals from all countries and in all languages are accepted for indexing.

<u>Library Services | DGC Student Portal (dumgal.ac.uk)</u>