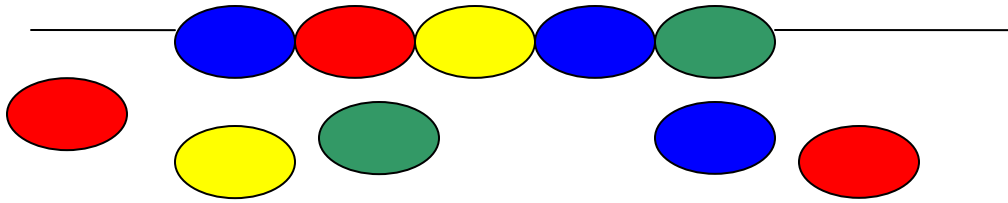


# Build Your Own Search String



## *The Search as Creative Process*

The search that you create in Google is a reflection of how you think. Imagine your search as a unique work in progress! Start with a big vision and add more detail as your search continues.

### **#1 Terms and Strings**

The words that you enter in the Google basic search box are called *terms*. As you look for information, try to use terms that are commonly used and that are absolutely essential to your research question.

A group of *terms* is called a *search string*. Try building your search one term at a time, just as you would add beads to a string. You don't need to add a *+* or the word *and* between the terms, but you must leave a space between each term and the next.

Be as specific as you can!

### **#2 Try a Phrase Search**

Sometimes the best way to find information is to search for two or more words in a certain order. Put those words in quotation marks to do a *phrase search*. For example, you might search

“peanut butter”

But be careful! Use a *phrase search* only for proper names and common or standard phrases. For example, if your question is:

What rights does everyone in the world deserve to have?

the common phrase is not

“rights everyone deserves”

but instead

“human rights”

### #3 Need a Negative Term?

React to your search results!

Sometimes your results include a term that you definitely do not want. Add a minus sign to that term to create a *negative term*. Then add the negative term to your search string so that it does not appear in your search results.

For example, if you are looking for information about the Vikings who settled North America, you probably want to exclude any results about football teams who call themselves the Vikings. Part of your search string might look like this:

Vikings -football

### #4 Search with a Site Operator

Using a *site operator* as a term in your search string will give you results from only certain organizations or institutions. For example, to search in only college or university sites, use *site:edu* (there is no space before or after the colon), or, to search in only government sites, use *site:gov*. The site operator is a simple but incredibly powerful tool for focusing your search.

### Good String, Better Results

Creating a search string that uses some combination of specific terms, a phrase search, a negative term, and a site operator can reduce the number of your search results from a few million to fewer than one hundred! It's best to build one or two terms at a time, adding terms to your string as needed based on your results.

Once you feel that the number of your results is manageable, try the *search within results* link at the bottom of the results page. Within a page, use the *find command* (*Ctrl F*) to search for your terms.

Certain Google features (Google News and Google Groups) limit search strings to 10 terms, so think hard about your search string creation! Take a look at the examples in the Google Help Center to get more ideas.

A good search string takes time to build—but the better results are worth it!

