

Common Sense on Strategic Searching

What's the Issue?

Although most teens know how to type keywords or a question into a search engine such as Yahoo! or Google, they may not understand that there are many ways to search for information. For instance, most search engines offer advanced search strategies, such as filtering by date, exact words, or type of results like news, blogs, images, or video. And once teens have their search results, they should seek out a variety of perspectives rather than rely on the same sites repeatedly, such as Wikipedia or About.com. Teens also need to be aware of sponsored ads that will come up in search results with the word *Ad* in small print. Teens should avoid clicking on ads because they usually don't lead to helpful or relevant information. Strategic searching will help teens find better information, more efficiently.

Why Does It Matter?

"I'll just google it," is a familiar refrain. When teens want to know something, they usually "google it" by typing a question or search term into a search engine. Though most teens have learned some research skills for school, the majority of their searches are for information related to their interests. But whether in school or out, teens need to acquire skills to get the best and most relevant information in their searches.

common sense says

Go beyond Google. Encourage teens to draw on a variety of search sites. It's easy to get in the habit of using only Google, Wikipedia, or About.com. But if teens rely too much on these sites, they might miss some other great resources.

Use multiple, specific, descriptive keywords. There's a difference between searching for *hip hop* and searching for *hip hop for social justice*.

Try synonyms. A teen searching for *rare cats*, for instance, can use synonyms such as *exotic cats* or *rare felines*.

Use quotation marks. A teen searching for the president's residence should search "*White House*" rather than *white house*.

Use a minus sign before a word to show you don't want it included. If you are searching for *mullet* but you want the fish and not the hairstyle, you would enter: *mullet – hair*.

Pay attention to URL domains. The URL domain can be found at the end of a website address, and it tells people what kind of organization they are dealing with. Companies usually aim to sell products or services, while organizations, educational institutions, and government entities usually aim to share knowledge and improve communities.

.com = company

.gov = government website

.edu = educational institution

.org = organization

Recommend trusted sites to search for specific issues. Rather than always using a search engine, there are times when it's better to search within a credible site. You can recommend several trustworthy sites for your teens on topics such as: health and puberty (TeensHealth – www.kidshealth.org/teen/), current events (CNN.com), or homework help (Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL) – owl.english.purdue.edu).

Sources

Norton Online Family. "Kids' Top 100 Searches of 2009." <http://onlinefamilyinfo.norton.com/articles/kidsearches_2009.php>

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