



Common Sense on Smart Searching

For Elementary Students

Some Facts

- Google is the most popular search engine in the world (ComScore study, 2009)
- A study of children ages 7 to 11 found that poor skills with spelling, typing, and keywords are barriers in finding the information they're looking for online (Druin et al., Proceedings of the Conference on Interaction Design and Children, 2009)
- Children are often frustrated by the return of too many results, and they lack the skills to figure out the best information to use (Large and Beheshti, *American Society for Information Science*, 2000)
- Children express confidence in their ability to search the Web, but in reality they often don't find what they're looking for, don't ask for help, and don't fact-check the results they select (UK Children Go Online, 2005)

What's the Issue?

"Let's google dinosaurs." Sound familiar? Searching the Web is so commonplace that even young children know what it means to "google." But when your children really need to do research for school – or dive deeper into any topic – it helps to know some strategies for improving their results.

Smart searching online can make a huge difference in the quality and relevance of the content your children find on the Internet. But it takes a bit of know-how to improve the chances of getting back the information they're looking for. You can help your child search smarter – and waste less time – by helping them search like a pro.

Why It Matters

Everyone knows there's a huge amount of information on the Internet. But only a tiny fraction of this information will apply to your child's needs. Although most children know how to type a keyword into Google, they may not understand that there are many ways to conduct a search, and that some are better than others.

Different search engines work differently. So if your family typically uses Google, you'll discover a whole host of additional information by using search engines such as Bing, Ask, and Yahoo. Another kind of search engine is called a "meta-search engine," which sends keywords to several different search engines at once. And search sites called directories select relevant data to match your search terms. By using a directory, you may not get as many search results, but the search results you do get are likely to be closer to what you're looking for.

Finally, the links that come up in searches may have some strings attached – to advertisers. Regular keyword searches might yield anything from an advertisement to a sponsored link (basically a different kind of ad). Children can spend a lot of time in front of ads if they are not sure how to select the best search results.



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- **Search together with young kids.** Younger children have a more difficult time searching and making sense of their search results. Your guidance will help them get the results they're looking for.
- **Consider using safe search settings.** Even typing innocent keywords into a search engine may yield search results you don't want your children to see. If you decide not to turn on filters, then you may want to keep an eye on your kids during their search process.
- **Choose search terms carefully.** The most precise words will yield the best results.
- **Add more words to narrow a search.** As kids get farther into their search, they may want to narrow their results. For example, there's a big difference between "Apple" and "Red Delicious Apples History United States."
- **Use synonyms.** If kids can't find what they're looking for, have them try keywords that mean the same thing or are related.
- **Point out sponsored links.** These links often appear at the top of a search result list to encourage users to click on them first, and they're usually labeled as sponsored. Remember that sponsored equals advertising.