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# Rev up your engine

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After e-mail, it's likely that the most frequent online activity is the search.

For better or worse, the days of thumbing through pages of a dictionary, thesaurus or encyclopedia for information are numbered. It's so much easier to just Google it.

Google is not the only search utility in town - there's Yahoo, Dogpile, AltaVista and many others - but it comes with such a formidable collection of tools to focus your search that it is the engine of choice for many of us.

The trick to efficient Google searches is mastering its tools to get what you want faster and easier.

Following are 10 tricks to do just that.

### 1. Find similar terms

And you thought the tilde character (~) served no useful purpose. When you insert the tilde in front of a search term, Google will retrieve sources matching the word as well as synonyms.

Searching "~conservative" will yield the National Libertarian Party, the National Republican Committee and the Right Wing News home page. Do not leave a space between the tilde and the search term.

### 2. Exclude terms

Sometimes a keyword will come up with items totally unrelated to the subject you are interested in. A student researching plasma in the cosmos would type in the word plasma and be forced to wade through scores of sites referring to plasma televisions.

The fastest way to solve this is to use the exclude function, the hyphen. Search "plasma -tv" and you will eliminate many irrelevant sites.

Though better, that may still not be good enough - you'll wind up with sites using the word "television." Simply refine your search this way: "plasma -tv -television" and eliminate both terms from your results. (No need to use the word "and" or other punctuation.)

If you really want to be cool, combine your newfound skills and type "plasma -~tv" that will exclude all synonyms of TV.

### 3. Substitute for unknown words

Friends kid me that my memory is pretty bad; I think they exaggerate. But sometimes I need to look up a quotation for which I can't recall all the words. No problem. Use asterisks to stand in for missing words.

So if you forget, oh, let's say, the number of years that Whatsisname referred to in his famous address: Something score and something years ago ... just type "Four * and * years ago." Sometimes you'll come up with humorous results: Try "To * or not to *." Ol' William is not the first person whose quotation is retrieved.

## 4. Find lost pages

A wonderful but mostly overlooked feature of Google search is the cache option. Most people glance right past it, but in virtually all search results, you will see a link to cached versions of pages you are looking for.

You usually won't need to refer to these archival pages, but if your search ever turns up an old news page, for instance, you may find that when you click on the link, the page no longer exists, even though it turned up in the search results.

In that event, simply click on the cache link (at the bottom line of the search result), and that will retrieve the last saved version of the page that had failed to show. This is a powerful, extremely helpful tool when you come across old pages from Web sites that no longer exist or are no longer maintained.

## 5. Get your number

Looking up a phone number? Give your fingers a break, and let Google do the walking.

Just type "phonebook" and the name and city (or state initials) of the person whose number you're looking for. The number will pop up instantly. Often, you can leave out the word "phonebook," though city or state will be required.

## 6. Get the name

If you have a phone number but want the name or the location, just type in the number - no hyphens, parentheses or spaces necessary. For fun, type in 2024561111 and see whose office this number belongs to.

## 7. Look up synonyms

With all due respect to Webster, you can now get definitions in a flash by typing "define:" and your search word. You'll come up with definitions, synonyms and links for further information.

## 8. Explore specific sites

Let's say you want to look up a past column by your favorite computer columnist. Hmm, I wonder who that might be. ... Well, let's say it is yours truly. If you type "the PC Guy," some dastardly people using the same name will appear in your results.

You, of course, don't want impostors; you want the real thing! So restrict your search solely to The Record's Web site by using the site keyword as follows: "the pc guy site:northjersey.com." Of course, this works with any domain name and is a great way to limit your results to a manageable number.

## 9. Get the picture

Did you know you can search for pictures with Google?

Just go to the Google home page, click on images, and pick out your favorite pics. Whether you're looking for the latest NASA images of Jupiter or the latest photos of Brad and Angelina, you can further narrow your searches using the advanced search function to, for example, retrieve certain types or sizes of files.

## 10. At your fingertips

Simplify all your searches by incorporating the Google search bar into your browser. Go to google.com, click "More," scroll down the page to Google Tools, then click on Toolbar and follow directions from there.

▪ Some of these tools will work with other search engines, too. Experiment, and see which ones work best for you.

Looking for The PC Guy online? Go to northjersey.com, click on Entertainment/Living, then eLiving. E-mail: thepcguynj@gmail.com.

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