

Getting the Best from Your Searches

The key to getting the best results from any search program is the *keyword*. A good keyword is specific. It relates to your topic, and it does not relate to very many other topics. After you have good keywords, you can use some strategies to get better hit results. Remember that *every search program is a little different*. What works on one may not work on another. Even so, some strategies work on most search programs.

How to Get Fewer Hits

- **Use more keywords.** Most search programs look for all the keywords you enter. When you enter more keywords, your hits should be more accurate. Of course, your keywords must be specific.
- **Use quotes.** Most search programs treat more than one word in quotes as a single keyword. They return only sites that have the exact same words in the exact same order.
- **Use AND or a plus sign (+).** If you want to see only sites that have a keyword, you can put AND or + in front of the keyword. Note that some search programs assume you only want to see hits that have all keywords.
- **Use NOT or a minus sign (-).** If you do not want to see sites that have a keyword, you can put NOT or - in front of the keyword. Note that some search programs may ignore NOT or treat it as a regular word.
- **Use more specific keywords.** Using more specific terms or proper nouns as keywords returns fewer hits that are more specifically related to the topic. For example, *greenhouse gases* returns fewer hits than *climate change*, while *Kyoto Treaty* only returns hits that are specifically related to efforts to reduce global warming.

How to Get More Hits

- **Use fewer keywords.** Just as more keywords give you fewer hits, fewer keywords give you more hits. Sometimes, you may not be able to find a lot of information on a topic. In those cases, you can use fewer keywords to get more hits.
- **Use OR.** If you want to see all sources that have any of your keywords (even if they do not have all of your keywords), you can put OR between your keywords.
- **Use more general keywords.** Using more general terms returns more hits that are less specifically related to the topic. However, you can often use these hits to identify other keywords that may be more effective. For example, *endangered species* returns more hits than *blue whale*.