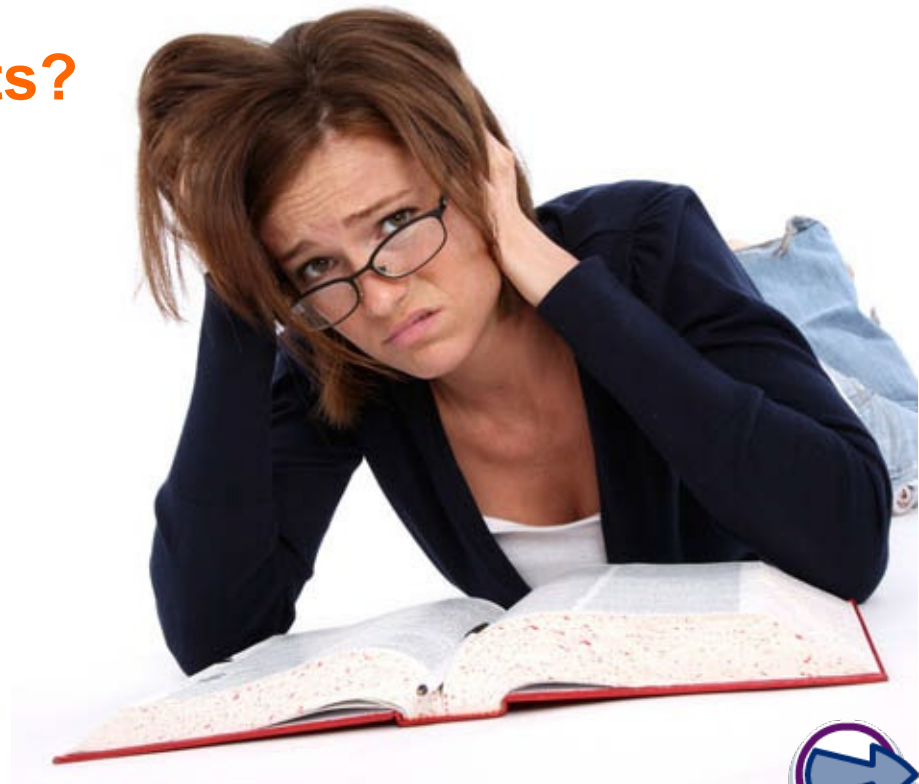# Doing Research

Finding information

Have you ever been asked to complete a project, or answer a question that you didn't know very much about?

Can you think of any topics you've researched?

What school subjects might propose the following projects?

- Fashion in the 1920s
- How to make chocolate
- Volcanoes
- Conditions on Mars
- Shakespeare
- Biomes

No matter what subject you are researching, there are some simple ways of finding exactly what you need every time.
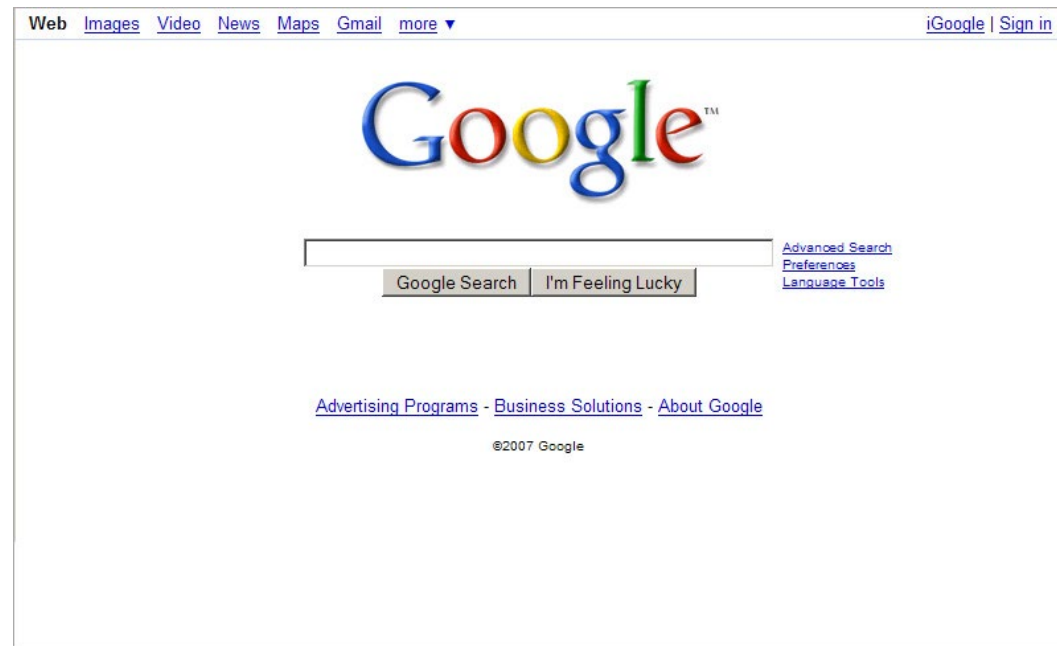
Where could you find information on volcanoes and how they work?

Internet search engines

The Internet is by far the most popular tool for research. Almost anything you want to know about can be found somewhere on the World Wide Web.
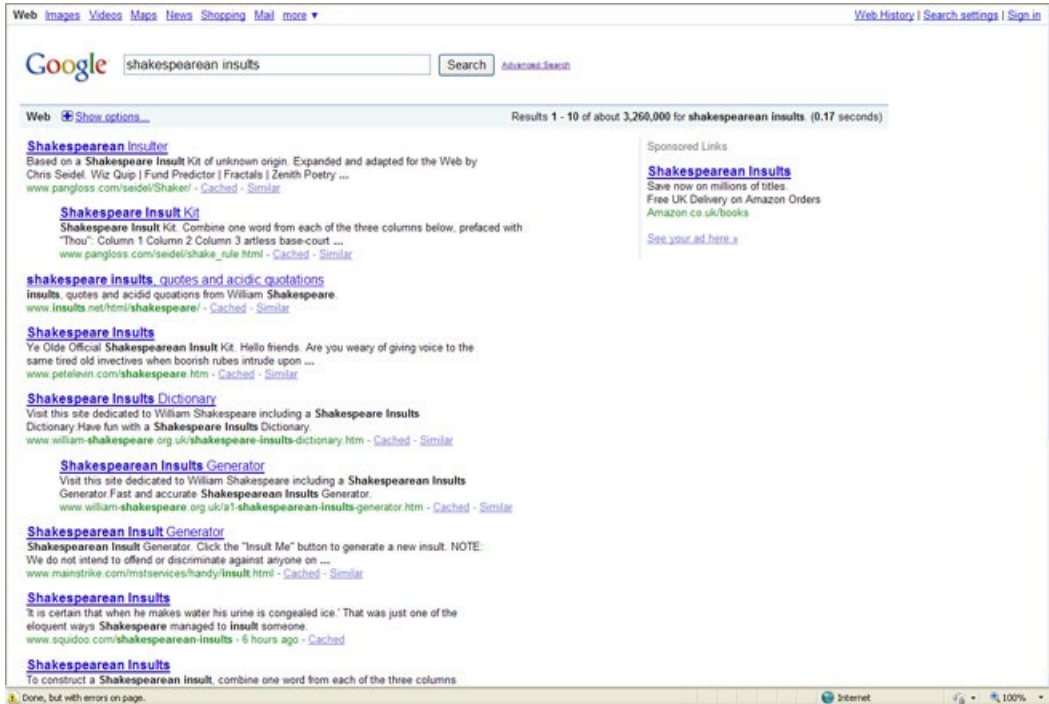
You have probably used websites such as Google and Yahoo. These are known as 'search engines'.

There are many search engines, but they all do essentially the same thing: search for information.

Web   Images   Video   News   Maps   Gmail   more ▼   iGoogle | Sign in

Google™

Google Search | I'm Feeling Lucky

Advanced Search
Preferences
Language Tools

Advertising Programs - Business Solutions - About Google

©2007 Google

Internet search engines

The search engine you use will search for web sites, pages and documents that contain any of the words you enter.

That is why you only need to enter keywords in your search. If you put in words like 'the', 'and', 'of' or 'to', it will bring up millions of search results because just about every single text written contains those words!

Normally, the most relevant web pages will be shown on the first two pages.

Internet search tip

If you want to narrow your search and look for a specific phrase, put the phrase in quotation marks. The search engine will then bring up web sites that contain the phrase exactly as it is in the quotation marks.

For example:

chocolate cake recipe = 3,580,000 results

whereas:

"chocolate cake recipe" = 218,000 results

Problems with Internet research

If you are doing research, there can be problems with using the Internet.

Can you think why?

One reason is that not all the information available on the Internet is accurate. Be sure to check the source of the information and make sure that it is reliable.

For example, a CDC website on sexually transmitted diseases is likely to have accurate, up-to-date information, whereas 'www.joesinfoonstds.com' may not.

Another way to be sure you have the right information is to check a number of sources on the Internet and see if they all say the same thing.

Encyclopedias are useful resources because they provide information on a wide variety of topics, from archery to zoology.

Watch this animation to learn more about encyclopedias.
Press **start** to begin.

start

Table of contents and indexes

Contents

Not all information books are organized in alphabetical order.

This is where a **table of contents** and **index pages** can come in handy.

The table of contents can be found near the beginning of a book. It gives a list of sections or chapters and tells you what page they start on.

Using a contents page

Imagine that you are doing some research on William Shakespeare. Read the questions that appear below and press on the relevant entry on the contents page.

What section would you refer to if you were looking for information on Shakespeare's children?

The table of contents is very helpful if you want to get a lot of information on a particular topic in a book. However, sometimes you might need very **specific information** which the contents page will not provide. This is where the **index** of a book comes in handy.

quest 78, 89, 92, 132–133.
Richard II 5, 149-155.
rivals 76–7, 79, 81, 91–4, 116–7, 132, 174, 180, 183.
Romeo and Juliet 5, 21, 156–172, 280, 331, 335.
rotten 42, 201.
royalty 2, 66, 192.

Do you know what an index is?

An index is like an alphabetical contents list.

Do you know where the index pages are normally located?

The index pages are normally at the back of a book and they provide information on specific keywords within a book.

Imagine you wanted to get some specific information on who Shakespeare's rival writers were. An index listing for 'rivals' might look like this.

rivals 76–7, 79, 81, 91–4, 116–7, 132, 174, 180, 183.
Romeo and Juliet 5, 21

The word 'rivals' will appear on every page number listed.

These are good places to begin because they each devote two pages to the topic.

The other pages could be followed up afterwards.
They might only contain a brief reference to rivals.

Skimming and scanning

When you are doing research and have a specific question to answer or information to collect, you need to be able to **skim** a page quickly to find the section you need. You can do this by **scanning** a text for a **keyword**.

Can you define the three highlighted words above?

Skim: to read something quickly so that you only note the important points.

Scan: to run your eyes quickly down the text, only looking for keywords connected with the topic you are researching.

Keyword: a word of importance.

You can also **highlight** useful keywords and sentences. Highlighting reminds you visually of where relevant information is positioned on the pages.

Summary

When doing research you should:

- use time-saving devices such as Internet search engines

- narrow Internet searches by putting quotation marks around a phrase

- use contents pages and indexes which will signpost information

- skim and scan pages to find keywords and sentences, and then highlight them.