Search Strategies and Techniques

Initiating an Internet search for information is very simple and very complex. It’s simple because you just type a keyword or phrase into the textbox of the search engine and press the ENTER key. The complexity comes when the search returns a list of 62,000 Web sites containing the keyword! There are several techniques that can be used to refine a search to identify sites that truly meet your information needs.

Search Terms

It is essential to select search terms that accurately reflect the information for which you are searching. For example, to find information about why dairy products bothered my sister, I did a search on Google (www.google.com) using the keywords milk allergy. Figure 8.1 illustrates the results.

The topic milk allergy is a very broad subject area and, as a result, the search engine returns a large number of “hits” or Web sites that match the keywords. One strategy to refine the search results is to use synonyms or related terms in your search. They will often yield different results. (Be aware also that if you capitalize a word of text in your search term, only sites that have that same capitalization will be returned. Lower-case words are matched independently of case.) Figure 8.2 illustrates the results of using the alternate keywords lactose intolerance.

Search engines will automatically insert an AND between words in a search term. So the search in Figure 8.2 was done for the words lactose and intolerance anywhere on the same Web page. The returned sites are not necessarily related to the subject of lactose intolerance but definitely contain both words somewhere on the Web page. To be more specific in your search, make the keywords into a phrase by enclosing them in quotation marks. Figure 8.3 illustrates the results of a search for “lactose intolerance” (note the quotation marks).
9. Using and Citing Information from the Internet

Figure 8.1. Search results for keywords milk allergy

Figure 8.2. Search results for keywords lactose intolerance.