

# Being digital

## Choosing good keywords

### 1: Introduction

Most of us search by choosing a couple of obvious terms to put into a search engine, like Google, and hoping for the best, adapting our words as we go along until we find what we're looking for.

If you need information for a specific purpose, such as an assignment or report, unpicking the question can help you to identify the best keywords to get you what you need.

### Learning outcome

By the end of this activity, you will be able to use terminology which is specific to your requirements as 'keywords' to search for information online.

### 2: Specialist words

The search terms you choose should reflect the purpose of your search – your goals in carrying out your search.

For example, are you looking for hits to browse for personal interest, information for work, or to find sources that will help you prepare for an assignment?

The purpose of your search will influence the keywords you use.

Below you will see two lists. The first contains options for the purpose of the search being carried out. The second contains groups of keywords about carbon dioxide and carbon footprints. Try to match the groups of keywords to purpose of the search.

### **Purpose of search**

1. Personal interest
2. Community group plans
3. Assignment on carbon dioxide research

### **Groups of keywords**

- a) CO2 levels, ice core, proxy
- b) carbon footprint, reducing, home
- c) carbon footprint, reducing, local action

(You will find the answers to this question in Appendix 1 on page 5.)

## **3: Specialist words: feedback**

In the exercise you have just completed, you will have noticed that each search only used three terms. The keywords used for the assignment search were more specialist. This will result in fewer, and more focused, results than the other two searches.

If the search was being carried out to help research for an assignment, you might expect the question to look something like this:

**“How can proxy data be collected to show CO2 levels in ancient atmospheres? Give a detailed example, and describe the effects of such data on our understanding of changing concentrations of CO2.”**

The student would have thought about how to improve their search results by using specialised terminology from their studies.

## 4: Refining your search

Even if you have used carefully chosen keywords, you may still be getting too many search hits.

The next step is to refine your search further, using the advanced features of your search engine.

For example, in Google you can exclude terms by using a dash before them (think of it as a minus).

If you were searching to find a supplier for bark that you could use to make a play area safe, you would want to exclude any results referring to dogs.

Your search terms might look like this:

**bark play –dog.**

What search terms would you use to search for second-hand or used violins in Warwickshire? Include at least one term you want to exclude from the search, using the dash.

(You will find feedback to this question in Appendix 1 on page 5.)

## 5: Summary

Here are some tips to help you improve your search.

- Plan your search by thinking about what you are really looking for, and decide which keywords best describe your topic.
- Look back through any background materials to find any relevant keywords you may have forgotten.
- If you get too many results, you may want to add more keywords to your search. This will make it more specific.
- If you find too few relevant results, try removing one or two words to make your search broader.
- Set a time limit, and stop if you have not found anything.
- Set a search to exclude certain terms in the result, or use other advanced features to refine the hits you get.

### Next steps

Spend a few minutes looking at the other advanced search options in Google, and choose one or two to try for yourself.

[Google advances search](#)

## References

### Being digital activity

[Choosing good keywords](#)

## **Appendix 1: Answers and feedback**

### **Specialist words (page 2)**

The answers to the exercise are detailed below.

1. Personal interest

The correct group of keywords is: **b) carbon footprint, reducing, home.**

2. Community group plans

The correct group of keywords is: **c) carbon footprint, reducing, local action.**

3. Assignment on carbon dioxide research

The correct group of keywords is: **a) CO2 levels, ice core, proxy.**

### **Refining your search (page 3)**

We searched for:

"violin sale Warwickshire -new"