

**Module 3: MLA**  
**Topic 1 Content: Search Skills**

**Search Skills**



Computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and the Internet have made finding information in today's world easy. All you have to do is type a word or phrase into the search bar of a search engine and a multitude of websites full of information are listed on your screen in the blink of an eye. However, you may have already noticed on your own that these searches do not always yield the best results right away. Internet searches can provide you with an abundance of information, but not all of that information is useful or reliable. Also, do not expect the Internet to provide you with every piece of information. Sometimes, you just need to go to the library.

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**Search Engine**



The best way to begin an Internet search is to use a search engine. A search engine is a database of information that retrieves relevant websites and webpages based on keywords. Popular search engines are Google™, Bing™, Dogpile™, and Yahoo™. Typing keywords into a search engine is a good place to start when beginning your research about a topic. Do not think that the first link presented as a result of a search on a search engine is the best. Just because a link is the first or second one listed on the page does not mean it is the most relevant or reliable source of information for your purposes. You will still need to read through many websites to find the information you want.

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Search Engine (continued)



The image shows a search engine interface with a yellow background. At the top right, there is a purple banner with the text "Search Engine" in white. Below this, the title "WEB SLEUTH" is displayed in large, blue, reflective letters. A search bar with a red border contains the text "Type keywords here" and a red magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, it shows "1,750,000,000 Results for [keywords](#)". There are two search results listed: "Keywords – Definition" with the URL [www.yourdictionary.com/keywords](http://www.yourdictionary.com/keywords), and "Keywords – Used in Internet Searches" with the URL [www.searchtheinternet.net/keywords](http://www.searchtheinternet.net/keywords). Each result includes a brief definition of keywords.

One way to improve your results is to use keyword searches. Keywords are specific words with some significance to the message or task. When you use keywords in an Internet search, you are prompting the search engine to find information on the web containing the specific word or words you typed into the search field.

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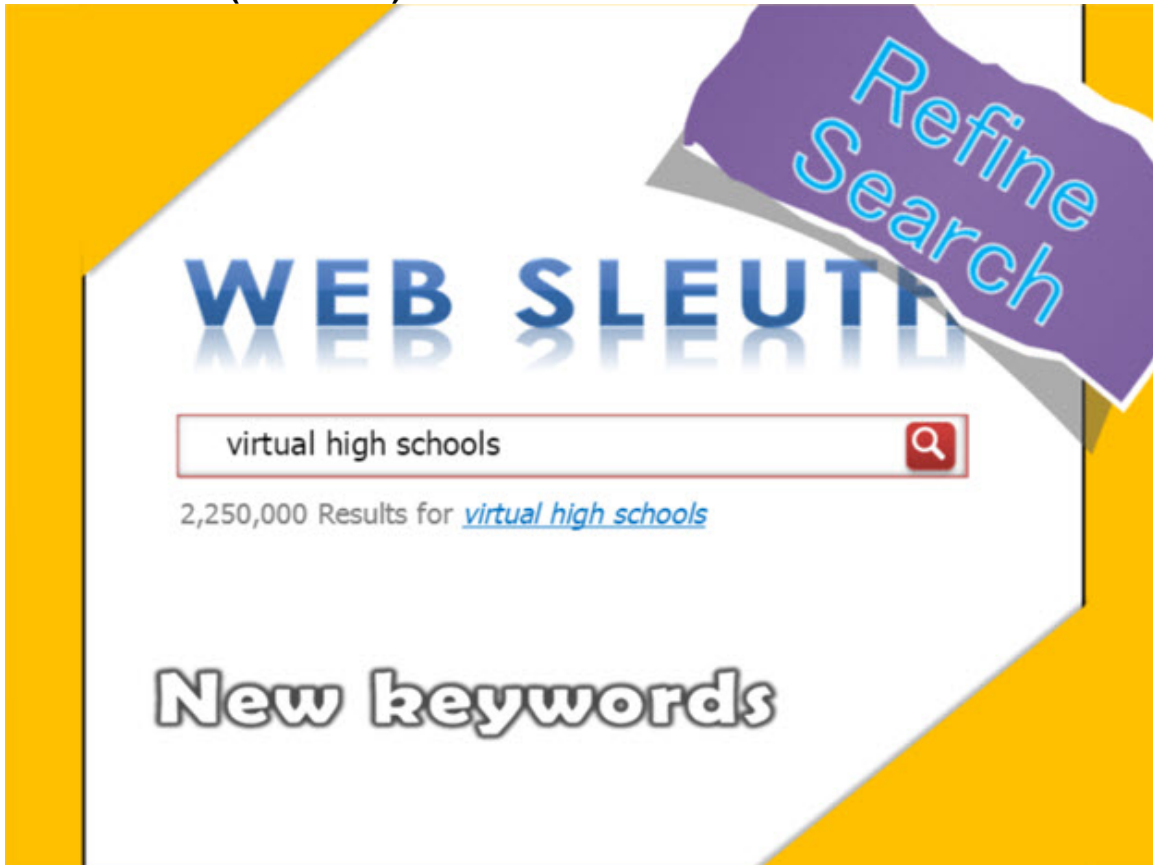
#### Refine Search



Using keywords can help refine, or improve, your search by narrowing your results to only websites or online documents containing that specific word or phrase. For instance, if you type *buffalo* into a search engine, you will get a mixture of results that contain the word *buffalo*, like websites for Buffalo, New York; sports teams that include the word *buffalo*; recipes for buffalo wings; or sites related to the American buffalo. If you were specifically researching *buffalo*, the animal, however, you would want to refine your keyword search. Using the phrase *buffalo animal* or even *American buffalo* might yield better results, weeding out the websites for the city of Buffalo, the professional football team, or the restaurant.

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Refine Search (continued)



So, how do you refine your search terms? Adding additional words to your original keyword search may yield better results in some cases. Try searching for *online high schools in Virginia* instead of just *online school* to get more specific results. Sometimes, though, too many words can put too many limits on the results returned. Searching for *online public schools* versus *online high schools in Virginia* will give you more results, just not specific to the state of Virginia. There are times when you need to completely change the keywords used in your search. You can search for *virtual high schools* in place of *online schools*.

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**Sponsored Links**



When using the Internet or online search engines for research purposes, be wary of the inclusion of sponsored links. Sponsored links are, in actuality, advertisements, and while they may contain keywords that you used in your search, the websites may contain no information relevant to your search. Many popular search engines allow websites and companies to advertise on search-engine webpages. This means that websites may appear at the top of your list of results that are not relevant to your search. Usually, they are set apart by coloring or by special language indicating that they are paid advertisements. Be cautious when choosing which websites, webpages, and online documents to use in your research.