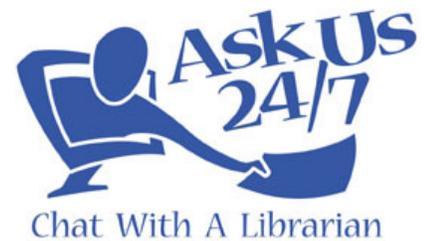# Search Techniques for VR

The Google Trap

> "In all of the transcripts I've reviewed, patrons generally are not satisfied with a referral to Google."
> — Wren Spengler, QuestionPoint Quality Control

It's tempting to take a few words from the patron's question, type them into Google, and just push the first result to them. But this isn't always the best solution. Why?

The patron most likely has already done it!

These days, almost everyone knows about Google, and unless your patron just started using the internet today for the first time, they most likely already know how to perform a simple Google search and look at the first result. They are coming to us, the librarians, because they haven't found the info they needed on their own. Try using the following tips to improve your search strategies, to help you find something better than the patron could have done on their own.

Use Wikipedia's links/references

Wikipedia isn't always an ideal source. Not because it has bad information, but as with Google, almost everyone knows about it, and the patron probably already uses it. Also, many teachers and college professors do not allow it to be used as a source. But it can be a good starting point, because often at the end of the article are references and links to "official" sources of info, and you can head to those links without needing to use the actual Wikipedia article. Below are notes and links found in Wikipedia's article on the Titanic:

Notes

1. ^ a b c d Staff (27 May 1911). "The Olympic and Titanic". *The Times* (London) (39596): 4.
2. ^ a b Beveridge, Bruce; Hall, Steve (2004). "Ismay's Titans". *Olympic & Titanic*. West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity. p. 1. ISBN 0741419491.
3. ^ Chirnside, Mark (2004). *The Olympic-Class Ships*. Stroud, England: Tempus. p. 43. ISBN 0752428683.
4. ^ a b c d e Richard Howells *The Myth of the Titanic*, ISBN 0333725972
5. ^ Moss, Michael S (2004). "William James Pirrie". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
6. ^ Bullock, Shan F. (1912). *Thomas Andrews, Shipbuilder*. Dublin: Maunsel and Co.
7. ^ Jenkins, Stanley C. (1926-03-06). "Alexander Carlisle Obituary ⟱". *The Times*. Retrieved on 2008-11-08.
8. ^ a b "Testimony of Alexander Carlisle" ⟱. *British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry*. 1912-07-30. Retrieved on 2008-11-08.

External links

- *BBC Archive: Titanic* ⟱, Hear the survivors describe a night they could never forget.
- Titanic Historical Society ⟱
- *Encyclopedia Titanica* ⟱, an invaluable source of information concerning the sinking of the *Titanic*.
- RMS Titanic, Inc ⟱ Corporate information and the official *Titanic* archive.
- Titanic Inquiry Project ⟱ Complete transcripts of both the US Senate and British Board of Trade inquiries into the disaster, along with their final reports.

Who has the info?

Sometimes it can be helpful to think of who is the most knowledgeable source on the topic in question. For example, someone wants general information about Dalmatians. What agency/organization/person would be likely to be an authority on this topic? Maybe the American Kennel Club:

On the other hand, a simple Google search for "Dalmatian" didn't even bring up the AKC anywhere on the first page of results:

Or, if you already know that a particular site has the info you want, you can search just that domain name in Google. Just use the word "site" followed by a colon, and then the domain (no spaces):

You could use this technique to find information about another library that isn't in the policy page. For example, if a patron at the Mid-York library system asks if fax machines are available, but the policy page doesn't say, try this search:

```
fax site:midyork.org
```
Google Search   I'm Feeling Lucky

This technique can be used for top-level domains as well. If you think that a certain topic would have better information on college/university websites, for example, you could limit your search to anything ending in .edu:

```
astronomy site:edu
```
Google Search   I'm Feeling Lucky

The Jeopardy Technique: Start with the answer, not the question.

Don't search for a question. Search in the way you think the answer will be written. If someone asks "How many Oscars has Meryl Streep won?" don't do this:

```
"how many oscars has meryl streep won"
```
Google Search   I'm Feeling Lucky

True, putting it in quotation marks will insert the entire phrase, assuming the phrase as you wrote it appears on any websites. But it's not the best way to go about it. Instead, do this:

```
"meryl streep has won * oscars"
```
Google Search   I'm Feeling Lucky

The asterisk acts as a wild card, where any word can appear. This improves your chances of finding the answer, which is much more likely to appear on a webpage in the form of an answer, rather than a question.

"Self-Gratification" - 5 Sure Bets For Tonight's Oscars | The ...
Correction **Meryl Streep has won two Oscars** its just that she's been nominated the most times (Kate Winslet's probably going to break that ...
smokingsection.uproxx.com/TSS/2009/02/5-sure-bets-for-tonights-oscars - 65k -
Cached - Similar pages -

20 Oscar Facts - Sky Movies
Feb 20, 2009 ... **Meryl Streep has won two Oscars** - Best Actress for Sophie's Choice and Best Supporting Actress for Kramer Vs. Kramer. ...
movies.sky.com/20-oscar-facts - 35k - Cached - Similar pages -

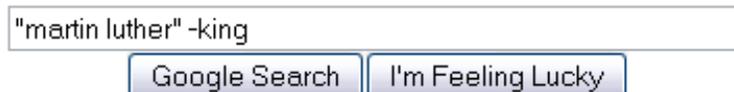**Keep Ready-Reference Bookmarks for Information at Your Fingertips**

See the "Reference Sources for VR" guide.

More Google Tips

Search for words as a phrase by surrounding them with quotation marks.

You can search for pages without a particular word by putting a minus sign in front of it. For example, if a search for "Martin Luther" is bringing up too many results about Martin Luther King, try this instead, which will eliminate any results containing the word "king":

"martin luther" -king

Google Search   I'm Feeling Lucky

Consider Other Search Engines

Google is the first-choice search engine for many librarians and patrons. But if it's not turning up the results you want, consider some of these others:
The big ones:

- Yahoo! – http://www.yahoo.com
- Bing - http://www.bing.com
- Ask – http://www.ask.com

Lesser-known:

- Hakia - http://hakia.com/ - This search engine is still in Beta, but it has an option to filter results to show "credible sites" (recommended by librarians) only.
- Exalead - http://www.exalead.com/search - allows you to truncate searches by using an asterisk. (eg, a search for manag* will return results for managing, management, manager, etc.)
- Top 10 Alternative Search Engines of 2008 - http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/top_10_alternative_search_engi.php
- Infomine - http://infomine.ucr.edu/ - returns results from scholarly sources