

National Assembly for Wales

Members' Library
Finding information online

January 2011

Members'
Research
Service



The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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Finding information online

This guide is intended to help Assembly Members, their support staff and Assembly officials find useful information quickly when searching the internet.

Different types of search engines and online directories are included, followed by information on creating a strong search strategy and evaluating websites.

Lastly, further sources of information and useful links are listed.

The basics

Search engines

Search engines do not search the World Wide Web directly. Each one searches a database of web pages that they have already collected and stored using spiders which “crawl” the internet looking for new web pages.

When a user clicks on the links provided in a search engine's search results, they retrieve the current version of the page.

Many web pages are excluded from search engines, including most library catalogues and article databases, because search engine spiders cannot access them. This material is referred to as the invisible web as it cannot be “seen” by search engines.

Search engines are useful when you know what you are looking for and can define it in a few keywords or phrases.

Popular search engines include:

- **Altavista**
<http://uk.altavista.com/>
- **Bing** (Microsoft's search engine)
<http://www.bing.com/?mkt=en-gb>
- **Exalead**
<http://www.exalead.com/search/>
- **Duckduckgo**
<http://duckduckgo.com/>
- **Google**
<http://www.google.co.uk/>
- **Google:** Welsh language interface:
<http://www.google.co.uk/webhp?hl=cy>
- **Yahoo**
<http://uk.yahoo.com/?p=us>

Meta search engines

Meta search engines search other search engines in order to find the broadest range of relevant hits. Most include results from Google, Yahoo, MSN, and Ask.

Meta search engines include:

- **Whonu?**
<http://www.whonu.com/index.php>
- **Dogpile**
<http://www.dogpile.com/>
- **Metacrawler**
<http://www.metacrawler.com/>
- **Trovando**
<http://www.trovando.it/>

Visual results search engines

A number of search engines now display search results in a more visual format.

- **Middlespot** previews screenshots of the websites it has found:
<http://middlespot.com/>
- **Oscope** searches Amazon, eBay, Flickr, Fotolia, Yahoo! and YouTube. Results can be arranged in different ways according to the preference of the user:
<http://www.oskope.com/>
- **Search-cube** displays a cube of thumbnail images showing search results:
<http://search-cube.com/>
- **Viewzi** displays linked screen shots of search results:
<http://www.viewzi.com/>

Directories

Directories arrange data in hierarchies from broad to narrow. They can be useful if you're not sure what you're looking for and need a general overview of a topic.

Popular directories include:

- **Google directory**
<http://www.google.com/dirhp>
- **Yahoo directory**
<http://dir.yahoo.com/>
- **Best of the Web UK directory**
<http://botw.org.uk/>

The invisible web

The invisible web, or deep web, are webpages which search engines cannot index because they are hidden behind a search interface or login page. Databases, electronic journals and library catalogues are all part of the invisible web, and often contain useful information.

Websites which allows users to search the invisible web include:

- **Intute**
<http://www.intute.ac.uk/>
- **Complete Planet**
<http://aip.completeplanet.com>
- **The WWW Virtual Library**
<http://vlib.org/>

Forming a search strategy

Search strategies

It is easy to quickly type a few words into Google, but formulating a proper search strategy will save time by producing much more relevant results.

The process of planning a search strategy will help clarify your ideas about a topic, and ensure that you search for the right information.

Most search engines allow you to use Boolean search operators to help define your topic:

- **AND** narrows a search to include all keywords, eg Education **AND** Wales
- **OR** broadens a search, listing results with one, two, or all keywords given, eg Wales **OR** Welsh, devolution **OR** devolved
- **NOT** excludes a word or words from a search, eg Education **NOT** England
- Google also allows the use of “-” instead of the word **NOT**, eg education –England

Speechmarks can be used to search for an exact phrase. This is useful when searching for the title of a report or publication.

- eg “Funding devolved government in Wales: Barnett and beyond”.

* The wildcard function (*) allows you to fill in the blanks when creating a search.

- eg “Obama voted * on the * bill” will bring up results for President Obama’s different votes on different bills.

Please note, in Google, the wildcard function can only be used for whole words, not parts of words.

Pdf documents

Searching for a pdf document?

Adding **filetype:pdf** after your search keywords using Google will ensure only pdf documents are retrieved.

- eg Barnett formula **filetype:pdf**

Variations

Does your topic have synonyms or alternative spellings?

Things to consider:

- The BP oil spill has been reported as “the BP oil leak” or “the BP oil disaster”.
- Owain Glyndŵr is sometimes anglicised in the national press to Owen Glendower.
- Are the singular and plural forms of the term different?
eg child, children; devolution, devolved
- This is especially important to consider when searching for medical terms and animals or plants which may also have Latin names.
eg heart attack **OR** cardiac arrest **OR** myocardial infarction.

Google offers more useful hints and tips for searching here:

<http://www.google.co.uk/help/features.html>

Evaluating results

If the search has produced too many hits, look at the keywords used. Are they too general? Could a more specific term narrow the results?

If the search produced too few results, would more general terms be more useful? Have you identified and included any synonyms in the search?

Evaluating webpages

Information source

Anyone can publish information on the internet and it can be difficult to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources.

Use what, who, why and when to help you evaluate webpages.

- **What** information being given, and is it suitable? Is it too general, or too specialised? Have sources been referenced?
- **Who** produced the information? Does the author's name appear, and can their credentials be verified? Are they an authority on the subject? Are contact details included?
- **Who** has published the website? Is it a personal webpage, or hosted by a larger organisation? Look at the url – is it an educational organisation (ending with .ac.uk / .edu), an organisation (.org) or a government department (.gov)?
- **Why** has the information been produced? Is it trying to influence the reader to buy or think something? Is other research referred to and referenced? Could the information be biased?
- **When** was the page created, and has it been updated since? Is it current enough for your needs?

Quotations

If you are looking for a famous quotation on the internet, you might find different versions on different websites.

The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations is available in the Members' Library if you need to confirm any wording.

Further information

Archived government information

The National Archives are preserving government information by regularly archiving UK central government webpages.

The archive includes the 10 Downing Street website under Tony Blair, and snapshots of the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Assembly Government websites over the last ten years.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/webarchive/default.htm>

Any pages which have been captured by the scheme will have a red National archives banner at the top of the page like this:



Key information sources

The Members' Library team has produced **Key Information Sources**, a web-based guide to finding key documents and information from the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Government, the UK Government and UK Parliament.

Printed hard copies are available from the Members' Library.