Find a web page or report from an organization or government agency

Search tips for Sleuth & Critic

Overview

Using a search engine like Google strategically is a process of being specific with search terms and including command language to control the resulting list of webpages. The strategies included in this tip sheet will help you use Google to find relevant organization or government agency web pages that publish online reports with substantial information on your topic for Assignments #4 and #7. You only need *ONE web page or report* that provides substantial information on your issue, and the following strategies are suggestions for how to find it!

Find government information or organization reports

Government agencies, such as the *Administration for Community Living*, actively collect data and publish statistics for the public. They often produce reports that provide some analysis of the problem or issue, in addition to the data being available for use. Nonprofit organizations, such as the *National Council on Aging*, also play an important role in tracking and reporting out on social issues, and actively publish reports or information websites on topics relevant to this course.

Recommended websites

- Browse the list of recommended agency and organization websites on the FN 211 library guide to research: https://guides.pcc.edu/FN211

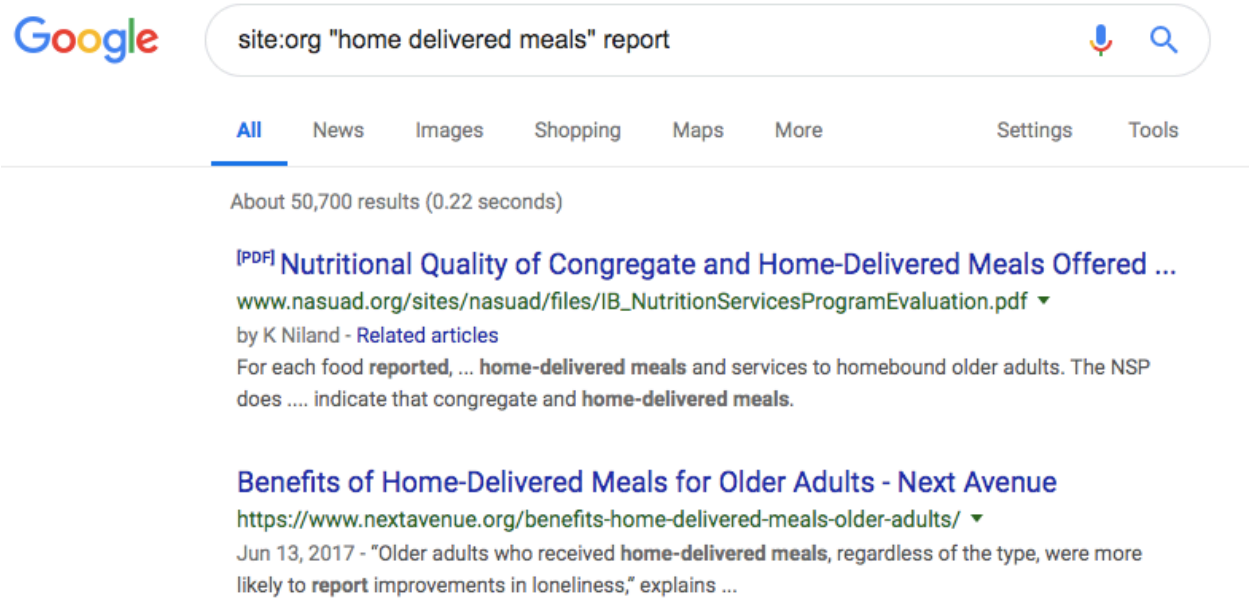
Google search tips

Add combinations of these words or command language to a search, along with words related to your topic, in order to find relevant results:

- One of the best features of Google's advanced search is the ability to limit your search to particular domains (areas) of the web, such as organization sites or government sites. The shortcut for this is to add **site:org** or **site:gov** to your regular Google search. For example, if you search for nutritional supplements site:gov , the top results (except for the sponsored ads) will be sites such as the National Institute of Health and the Food

and Drug Administration, which are authoritative, unbiased sources that are not trying to sell you anything.

- Add quotes around words to search them as a phrase, such as **“home delivered meals”** in the example below.
- Add a word to your search that describe the kind of information you are looking for:
    - Statistics
    - Report
    - Data
    - Trends
- The image below is an example of a Google search that brings it all together and reads as follows, **site:org “home delivered meals” report**. Notice the results are from organizations like the and *Next Avenue.org* and the *National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities*.



Unsure whether what you’re looking at is quality information?

Oftentimes it isn’t obvious whether the information being provided is of quality or from a reputable source. Below are some guidelines and tips for critically evaluating information found on the open web.

Check Wikipedia

Yes, you heard that right! Wikipedia is great for a quick check on basic information. If you don’t know the organization publishing the information, look to the **Wikipedia article on the organization** like this one on Next Avenue.org to get an overview of their intent and scope.

While the doesn't give a lot of information, it does describe the origin of the website, names the host (PBS) and describes its notoriety. Some organizations have an extreme bias, an unbalanced agenda, or funding from a select few corporations that influence their advocacy work. Get to know the goals and affiliations of an organization as part of evaluating the information they provide.

Watch a short video on evaluating sources

On the web, it can be difficult to tell what type of source you're looking at and whether or not it's something that would provide quality evidence for your assignment. This video on evaluating sources will help you look more critically at your own search results: https://youtu.be/LnIy95_66B0

Ask critical questions



How do you know if a source is right for your research? Below are some questions you can ask about your sources. There are no good or bad sources, but sources can be useful or not useful based on the sorts of evidence you're looking for.

1. Who is the author? What do you know about the author's background? (hint: Google the author). What makes the author an expert on this particular topic (remember that experience and research are markers of expertise as well as education)?
2. What journal, magazine, organization, or website published this information? Look for an about page on the publisher's website (or explore their website) and also Google the name of the publication/organization/website (or look for a Wikipedia page about it) to learn more about the publisher of the information. What kind of reputation does it have? What is their purpose in sharing this information? Is it known for promoting specific points of view?
3. Can you tell where the information in the article came from? Do they share any information from other sources or does it seem like they're sharing their opinion? If they used other sources, do those sources seem worth trusting?
4. Based on your answers to these questions, would you trust this source? If not, could anything from this article still be useful? Often articles link to other useful resources or mention other authors and studies that could be helpful.

You may not get good answers from all of these questions and still trust a source. For example, an opinion piece from a noted expert in a specific field could be a useful source, but chances are, they are not going to be citing sources. Information from the Centers for Disease Control

website is trustworthy, but much of it doesn't have an author. You have to weigh each of these factors when making your decision.