Investigate

How Do I Search for Relevant Resources?
The ability to come up with good search terms is the first step in finding relevant information for your Investigation.

Even though searching online may seem like a simple process, it’s important to be able to choose effective search terms. Otherwise, you wind up wasting a lot of time looking at poor results.
Let’s say that you’re interested in learning about how scientists came up with the Big Bang Theory.

Go to Google and type “Big Bang Theory” into the search bar.

What do you see?
How could you refine your search terms to come up with better results?

What other specific words could you add to your search terms?

Try some and see if you get different results.
Which terms gave you the most relevant results for how the Big Bang Theory in science came to be?

Did you try any of these?

- big bang scientific theory
- big bang theory evidence
- big bang theory universe
Here are some tips from Google Help for search terms:

1. Start simple, then add descriptive words.
2. Be specific.
3. Don’t sweat the small stuff (capitalization, spelling, punctuation).
Using the previous tips, try a search related to YOUR research question on KQED Learn.
First, SCAN your results.

Read the title of each result and its description.

Are your results relevant to your question?
Often, the first one or two results listed are ads.

Sometimes they are very relevant; sometimes they’re not.

Companies pay to show up in these spots.
Sometimes, you may see a box with related searches.

Are any of these search terms closer to what you are looking for?

If so, click on one of them!
Next, look at the first section of the web address, or the *domain name*, of one of your results.

(In your search results, you can find the web address just below the title of each result.)

Is the domain name something you recognize, like “kqed.org”?
The domain name can help identify where the information is coming from.

Here are some of the most common top-level domains and what they mean:

- .com - usually a company
- .org - usually a non-profit organization
- .net - an alternative to .com or .org
- .edu - an educational institution, like a university or school district
- .gov - a government agency
The domain name can also help identify which country the information is coming from.

Sometimes domain names contain two letters after (or instead of) “.com” or “.org.” If so, the website is often from a country other than the U.S.

example.de (Germany)
example.uk (United Kingdom)
example.au (Australia)
Based on your results, you may want to REFINE your search.

If your results aren’t stellar, try changing the search terms before you click on any of the results.
Here are some other handy ways to gather information to help in your investigation:

- Find recent content
- Find content from government agencies
- Find images
- Find videos
Find recent content

Is your topic based on recent news? Do you know if there’s brand new information or a study that just came out?

If so, you may want to use the Tools tab to narrow your search to content that was published recently.
Find content from government agencies

To search for content from a government source, you can go directly to an agency’s website or add site:.gov to your search terms.

NASA, NOAA and USGS are all good agencies to search for information for science topics.

Humanities classes may want to specifically search the Smithsonian, Museum of American History, U.S. Census Bureau or the Library of Congress.

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Find images

Images may also be great sources of information for your investigation. They include charts, graphs and maps.

Find these using the **Images** tab. Hovering over an image on the results page will display the website where the image is published.
Find videos

You can find videos related to your topic on the **Video** tab.

Check these carefully by looking at the URL. If the video is on YouTube, see who uploaded the video. Many videos are created by people who are not experts in the topic.
Now that you know how to find relevant resources, how will you know if they are reliable?

Check out What IS a Reliable Source Anyway?