

Research Skills

1.

Think about exactly what terms you need to put into your search engine to get the results you are looking for:

- a. Have a think about what the key words are for your search and remove excess words and parts of words. You usually only need a few key words to get the results you're looking for. For example, 'What is the most sustainable form of transportation?' could be simplified to 'most sustainable transport'.
- b. If you want the search engine not to show you searches about certain, specific words then use a – in front of them. For example, if you type sustainable transport –buses into your search engine you won't be shown results containing the word 'buses'.
- c. Use OR to get results for a couple of different things at once. For example, 'fastest buses OR trains' will find results that include the word 'buses' OR 'trains'.

2.

When you get the results, scan them to pick out the most relevant ones to click on. Avoid adverts or untrustworthy sources. Adverts can often appear near the top of a search because the search engine makes money by putting them there. However, other than adverts, the higher up the result is in the list, the more relevant the search engine thinks you'll find it. It's important to know that they decide what you'll find relevant based on a few things including:

- a. What you've searched for before
- b. How many people have clicked on that site before
- c. Key words in your search

3.

Deciding whether a site is trustworthy often comes down to the company that created it. Some companies are good sources because they need to make sure the information they produce is accurate and impartial. For example, the BBC. Other sites might be good sources because they created the product or topic you're looking into. For example, the UN Sustainable Development Goals main site is the best place to start when looking into the goals themselves, in the same way that the maker of an electric car might be the best place to find out what its key features are. If a site is 'opensource' it means that anyone online can change the information on it; Wikipedia is an example of this. It means that information on Wikipedia is less reliable because anyone can write whatever they want about a topic and others can then change the information however they like. That's why sites like these aren't great sources of reliably accurate information. It can be good to compare what you find on a few different sites to get a better idea of whether the information is accurate or not.

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4.

Once you open a page you'll need to scan again to see if it contains what you're looking for. Some search engines have tried to make this easier for you by highlighting what they think you're looking for in yellow and taking you straight to that place. However, this only works if the search engine does actually have a good idea of what you're looking for; if you've not used careful key words then it might not have worked that out correctly. So it can be good to have a scan of some of the rest of the page to try to see if that is exactly what you're interested in.

5.

Once you've found the information you're looking for you may need to 'cite' your source. This means that you tell your reader where you found the information. The minimum information you'll need for this is the website address and the date you viewed it. If an author is shown, for example, in an article written on a topic or in a quote, then you should add their name too.

Using AI (Artificial Intelligence)

AI tools, like chatbots or smart assistants (ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) can help you find information quickly by summarising articles or explaining ideas. But it's important to check that what they tell you is correct.

Tips for reliable AI research:

- **Always fact-check:** Compare AI answers with trusted sources like BBC, government websites, or textbooks.
- **Look for evidence:** If AI gives you facts or numbers, check if it mentions where the information comes from.
- **Be aware of mistakes:** AI can sound confident even when wrong, so never copy answers without checking.
- **Use AI as a starting point:** It's great for ideas, but your final research should come from reliable sources.