

Web Literacy

“Write a biography of Thomas Edison.” “Make a poster showing the exports of Chile.” School projects take research.

Your middle schooler may love the Internet, but can he find accurate information for homework assignments and projects? Share these tools and tips to help him learn where to search, what to look for, and how to recognize the best information on the Web.



Search engines

Different kinds of search engines will give your child different results. Have him try these.

General search engines

Does your youngster have a favorite search engine? If he always goes straight to Google (www.google.com) or Yahoo (www.yahoo.com), suggest that he explore a few others to see if he finds one he likes better. Quintura (www.quintura.com), for instance, is a “visual” engine. It shows results in two formats: a straightforward list, and a “cloud” of related words that shift and change as your child moves his mouse over them. He may also want to try Ask (www.ask.com), Cuil (www.cuil.com), MSN Live Search (www.live.com), and AltaVista (www.altavista.com).

Metasearch engines

Your middle schooler may be surprised to learn that an engine doesn’t search the entire Internet. Luckily,

he can search several engines at once with a single click in a metasearch engine. You might suggest PolyMeta (www.polymeta.com), Zuula (www.zuula.com), Info (www.info.com), or Meta-Crawler (www.metacrawler.com).

Specialty search engines

Some engines cover one topic exclusively. To find one of these, your youngster should type his subject and “search engine” into a regular engine. For instance, “science search engine” will give him www.scirus.com, and “agriculture search engine” leads to www.agrisurf.com.

Search strategies

If your child uses the first few links that appear in a search, she may miss out on other great sites. Encourage her to look deeper with these tips:

- List questions. What exactly does your middle grader want to know about her topic? Suggest that she come up with specific questions. *Examples:* “What causes volcanoes to erupt?” “How many volcanoes are in the United States?” “What is lava made of?” Then, she can type those specific questions into a search engine.

- Let a search engine automatically narrow a topic. For instance, typing “volcanoes” into Yahoo will give your child a drop-down box with subtopics like “active volcanoes,” “Hawaii volcanoes,” and “types of volcanoes.” Other engines, like Ask and Cuil, offer a sidebar with related categories, subtopics, or search terms. Your youngster can keep narrowing down her search until she finds exactly what she’s looking for.

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Safety Note: Be sure your middle grader practices safe Internet surfing. Remind him never to give out personal information that could identify him, such as his last name, address, phone number, or school. You can use the parental controls that come with your browser to help ensure safe surfing, and review each site to determine its appropriateness for your child.

