

6 Google Tricks That Will Turn You Into an Internet Detective

By [Whitson Gordon](#) Sept. 19, 2018

Like it or not, Google is most people's portal to the internet. And when you're searching for something simple — like the latest news about Iran — Google will usually get you what you want on the first try. But if you're trying to find something a bit more niche, you may need to do some digging. Here are a few tricks to keep up your sleeve that will make life easier.

Use quotation marks to find a specific phrase

It's one thing to search for a couple of words, like *Sony HT-Z9F soundbar*, and find the product(s) you're seeking. But let's say you need more specific information — like the dimensions of the speaker drivers inside that soundbar. Searching for *HT-Z9F soundbar driver diameter* does not return any pages that list that particular spec, nor does including the word *inches*. Instead, we need to think about how this would exactly be phrased on the page, and use quotation marks to narrow our search.

When you put quotation marks around a collection of words, it tells Google to look for the words only in that order. So, *sony HT-Z9F inch drivers* (don't worry, capitalization doesn't matter) will search for any page that has the words "inch" and "drivers" on it — but not necessarily together. Searching *HT-Z9F soundbar "inch drivers"* on the other hand, narrows our search considerably, producing a result right at the top that lists the exact spec we're looking for: 2.5-inch drivers. (If you can't find the terms you searched for on the resulting page, press Ctrl+F on your keyboard — Command+F on a Mac — to locate your words on that page.)

Bonus tip: If you're looking for a specific page but aren't sure the exact words it uses, you can put an asterisk in those quotes to symbolize any

word. For example, if you forgot the title of Taylor Swift's dance-pop single from "1989," you could search *taylor swift "* it off"* and find the "Shake It Off" lyrics you're hunting down.

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Exclude words with the minus sign

It's frustrating when a search returns oodles of results that have nothing to do with what you're looking for. This is especially common with homonyms — words that are spelled and pronounced the same but have different meanings. For example, let's say you're searching for a music group to play at your wedding. Searching for *wedding bands* brings up a ton of results, but most are for wedding rings — often called bands — not musicians that play at wedding receptions.

The minus sign is your friend here. Think of a word that would appear on all the irrelevant pages — in this case, "jewelry" or "jeweler" is probably a good bet — and include it with a minus sign in your search: *wedding bands -jewelry*. Just like that, you've got yourself a bunch of sites that review wedding bands across the country.

I also use this often for products with similarly-named siblings — say, Apple's MacBook line, which includes the MacBook, MacBook Air, and MacBook Pro. Getting too many results for the Air and Pro? Just eliminate them from your search with *macbook -air -pro* and you'll get more relevant results.

Narrow your search to a specific time period

If your head is spinning after that last one, here's an easy tip for you.

Occasionally, search results will consist of older articles that have ranked on a given topic, but haven't been updated to include recent changes. If you encounter this problem, you can put a date restriction on the results by clicking the Tools button under Google's search bar, and then clicking the "Any Time" drop-down. You can narrow your results to the previous week, month, year, or a custom time frame.

Search your favorite sites with the "site:" operator

If you're looking for an article you read a while back, but can't find now — or if you specifically want to see what one of your most trusted sites has to say about a topic — you can use the *site:* operator to limit your search to that specific publication. (This is especially useful for sites that don't have a search function — though it's often better than a site's built-in search bar, too.)

Let's say I want to read about the Iran nuclear deal, but I prefer coverage from The New York Times. Instead of just Googling *US iran deal* for the latest news, I can search *site:nytimes.com iran deal* to see coverage only from The Times. This also allows me to see everything The Times has done on the topic going back weeks or months, rather than my results getting cluttered with versions of today's news from other publications.

Add search shortcuts to your browser's address bar

Ready for a more advanced lesson? Tricks like the *site:* operator are great, but they take a while to type out — especially if you search for Times content regularly. You can save yourself precious seconds on every search by creating a short keyword for bits of text you search regularly, if your browser supports it, and most do. That way, instead of typing *site:nytimes.com* every time, you can just type *nyt* in your browser's address bar, add your search terms, and get right to the good stuff.

To do this, perform an example search on Google, then copy the URL from the address bar. Using the above example, my URL is:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=site%3Anytimes.com+iran+deal>

This is what we'll use to create our shortcut. In Chrome, right-click the address bar, choose "Edit Search Engines," and click "Add" to create a new one with *nyt* as the keyword. In Firefox, right-click the Bookmarks Bar and create a new bookmark instead with *nyt* as the keyword.

Paste the search URL you copied earlier into the "Search Engine" or "Location" box, and replace your search terms with %s (making sure to leave in any terms you want to keep as part of the keyword). So, since I want my nyt shortcut to search site:nytimes.com and whatever search terms I add, my URL would look like this:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=site%3Anytimes.com+%s>

See how I replaced *iran+deal* with %s in the URL? Now, whenever I type *nyt* into the address bar, I can search The New York Times for any terms I want.

I use this for all kinds of common searches: sites I like (*nyt* searches *site:nytimes %s*), authors I trust (*jk* searches *Jolie Kerr %s*), or — if you want to get really advanced — other URL tricks, like getting driving directions from Google Maps (*http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&q=from+123+main+street+to+%s*).

Find the source of a photo with reverse image search

Finally, not all searches are made up of words. Sometimes, it can be handy to know where a certain photo came from, or to find a larger version of it. You probably know you can type a few words to find a photo with [Google's Image Search](#), but you might not have realized it works in the other direction too: Drag an image into Image Search and Google will find other versions of

that photo for you.

A few years ago, I was searching for an apartment, and found one that looked great — it had the number of bedrooms I needed, in the part of town I wanted to be in, and the photos looked nice. But I found it on one of those “members only” apartment listing sites, so I had to pay a monthly subscription in order to get the name, address and contact info of the complex. Not to be outdone, I dragged the building’s photo to my desktop, then dragged it into [Google Images](#). Google immediately found another site that had used that photo: the building’s official website, where I could call or email and ask directly about open units for rent.

Google isn’t the only site that has this feature, either. [TinEye](#) is a similar tool with a few more options, if you’re trying to find where the image first appeared. [EBay’s iPhone](#) and [Android apps](#) also let you search by image, which is useful if you’re trying to find a rare piece of china with no markings, or something like that. It doesn’t always work, but when you’re in a bind, it’s worth a shot — and if nothing else, it may give you another clue to add to your search terms.