

Google - How to find what you need

a Guide to internet searching for translators and others

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For me as a professional interpreter and translator, Google is a priceless tool. Back in early 90's when I worked on my first translations and I came across a word or an expression I failed to find in a dictionary, I tried to excuse my ignorance by reasoning to myself – 'If it's not even in the great Oxford English Dictionary, I have the right not to know it.' Such an approach would not get me very far today. Today one can find almost anything and there is just no excuse if you don't know how. So, how do you find what you're searching for as quickly and efficiently as possible?

I assume you know and use [Google](#). I also recommend installing a [Google Toolbar](#) to your internet browser. Among other things, the toolbar will allow you to have the Google search box always available in your browser and use a yellow marker for highlighting the searched words.

My intention is not to list all available functions and all possible searching methods, but rather to mention only those that I have learned to use and found most useful. There are many ways how to find what you search. Many of the below functions can also be found under the [Advanced search](#) link on the right of the Google search box.

1. Search tips and tricks

Searching for a specific phrase:

This is my single most often used search function! Just put the phrase between quotes (actually, it's enough to use the opening quote). Google finds the searched phrase exactly as quoted, including the propositions, conjunctions, etc.

Example: "without prejudice to

You can put more than one phrase in quotes to the search window. Let's say you need to find out some standard wording of the clause on concluding the contract from "*free will*" and you know that this clause is usually part of the "final provisions". Search for

"Final provisions" "free will"

Searching in a specific language

Sometimes it is good to limit searching to a specific language. For instance, you want to find a Slovak translation of an English phrase. First try to find that English term on websites written in Slovak (or Czech, for that matter). Chances are you'll find the phrase integrated to a Slovak text with a Slovak translation, or at least an explanation next to it. To do that, tick off Slovak

and Czech in the *Preferences* menu located right to the search box and press the *Save Preferences* button. You can also narrow the search by adding a suitable contextual Slovak word to the search phrase.

Example: „Short Chain Branching Distribution“ polymerizácia

Searching for a phrase or abbreviation definition

This is an extremely useful function! It searches for a definition of a specific phrase, word or abbreviation in various dictionaries and glossaries. Write the phrase with *define:* in front of it.

Example: *define:shaft alignment*

It seems that the function is supported only for major languages. Slovak is not yet one of them.

Searching for synonyms

To search for a specific word including its synonyms, write a tilde (~) in front of the word.

Example: *public procurement ~glossary*

With this syntax Google will search for the phrase not only with the word *glossary*, but also its synonyms, such as *vocabulary, terms, dictionary, definition, etc.*

Searching websites in a specific country or with a specific domain suffix.

The search results may sometimes be misleading. If I am checking an “English” phrase for correctness and Google finds it only on two Slovak websites, one Czech and one Italian, the phrase is probably not often used in the English speaking world. To check whether or not a specific term is used by native English speakers in UK, limit the search to websites in the United Kingdom, i.e. websites with *.uk* domain suffix. Type the searched phrase followed by “*site:uk*”. This filters out all potentially incorrect variation of the phrase used in other countries.

Example: *“have a clean slate” site:uk*

Using this method, I can limit my search to websites with a specific domain suffix: *.eu, .sk, .cz, .gov, .edu, .org, .net, .com, etc.* Alternatively, if you want to exclude certain type of websites from the search, use the minus sign (-).

Example: *Mozart -site:at*

Such search will return websites about Mozart from everywhere, but Austria.

Searching within a website

If you come across a website where you want to search for something and the site doesn't have a search box, just enter your searched phrase followed by "site:" and the website address.

Example: *Adhesion molecules site:www.sav.sk*

Asterisk (*) instead of an unknown word

If you insert an asterisk (*) in the searched phrase, Google returns phrases where the asterisk is substituted by any single or multiple words. Useful, when you want to find a suitable word(s) used in a specific term.

Example: *"contract is concluded for * period"*

Words returned instead of the asterisk include *a, the, definite, indefinite, fixed, unlimited, maximum*, etc.

Note: The asterisk replaces whole words only, not their parts.

Narrowing down the search

If you search for a word with multiple meanings you can narrow down the search by excluding certain words from the query.

Example: *queen -music -band -rock*

The query will return mostly topics related to monarchs rather than the rock band Queen.

Extending the search

Unless the search term is in quotes, Google excludes common words like conjunctions, prepositions, some adverbs, single digits, etc. from the search. If it's important for some words to be included, put "+" operator in front of the word.

Example: *Louis +1*

The search is limited to the Louis the first.

Note: The same can be accomplished, usually more effectively, if you use quotation marks (see Searching for a specific phrase).

Searching for pictures

When you search for the meaning of a term, sometimes pictures turn out to be helpful. Google can search for pictures based on their name and description.

Example: revetment wall

If you type your search phrase and then clicking on the *Pictures* tab in the upper left corner of the Google webpage, Google returns pictures associated with the “*revetment wall*”.

Searching for cashed content

Sometimes even though the search result short description contains your searched term, when you actually click the link the content is not on the website anymore. The website has been updated. When that happens, go back and click on the *Cached* link in the right corner of the last line of your desired search result. Google will show you the cached old version of the website in which your search phrase was found.

Use of diacritical marks

Slovak, Czech and many other alphabets contain accented letters. Although in most of the cases the use of diacritics is desirable, sometimes it helps to write words without it. Google may return some more relevant search results. Experiment!

2. Some examples of model situations.

Example 1

I want to find out which of the two propositions *on* or *upon* is more preferable in the sentence „Contract shall enter into force on/upon the date ...“.

Search: „shall enter into force on the date“

Result: 97900 results (see the top right corner of the Google search result window)

Search: „shall enter into force upon the date“

Result: 1100 results

Both options seems to be usable. Let's check which option is preferred by native English speakers in the UK. I limit my search to websites in the UK by adding *site:uk* at the end of my search term.

Search: „shall enter into force on the date“ *site:uk*

Result: 1950 results

Search: „shall enter into force upon the date“ *site:uk*

Result: 6 results

I decided – I gave preference to the preposition *on*.

Example 2

I failed to find the term *loop reactor* in any available dictionary. How do I find out its Slovak translation?

I limit my Google search only to websites written in Slovak and Czech (see above how). I hope to find a website written in Slovak/Czech and containing the search term in English. I type the following

Search: „*loop reactor*“ *reaktor*

Result: 5 results

Based on the short description of results I chose to open some of the returned websites. To make browsing through the website content more convenient I highlight the search term in the text by clicking on the yellow highlighter icon in the [Google Toolbar](#) integrated in my browser (see the introduction above). The website contains both English and Czech text. The Czech part of the text refers to a Czech term *smý kový reaktor*.

I'll do a backward check. I enquire Google for

Search: „*slu kový reaktor*“

Search: *slu kový reaktor*

Search: *smý kový reaktor*

Result: There is only a few results, but the context suggests that this is what I was looking for.

Example 3

A document refers to a specific act, standard or patent. How do I find the official translation of the title or a part of the text?

The first option is to simply search for the numerical code associated with the title (in quotes if need be). Sometimes it helps to limit the search to the target language. Another hint is to add to the query a word that you suspect to find in the translated title. If even that doesn't help, try searching the websites of relevant institutions, e.g. Slovak legislation - [Zbierka](#), legislation translations – [Odbor pre aproximáciu práva](#), patents – [Espacenet](#), technical standards – [SUTN](#) (wording of standards is more difficult to find because they are for sale).

Example 4

How do I find a glossary of terms from a specific field?

If I'm searching for a glossary of corporate finance terms, I can query the following (from the most specific to most general)

Search: „*corporate finance glossary*“ or
„*corporate finance*“ *glossary* or
„*corporate finance*“ ~*glossary* or
corporate finance ~*glossary*

Example 5

How do I find the meaning of an unknown term, word or an abbreviation?

The fastest way is to use the *define:* function. For example

Search: *define:acoustic pressure*

Search: *define:contagious*

Search: *define:NCBS*

Google will return definitions of the searched for term in available dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

If not successful, you can try a manual search in encyclopaedias, dictionaries or forums. For links to some useful sources check the Sources and Links section of my website www.entia.sk.

Example 6

How to find the name of a specific animal specie or a plant in another language.

Use its Latin name as a reference. For example, I'm searching for an English name of a bird called *sýkorka hôrna* in Slovak.

Search: „*sýkorka hôrna*“

I found its Latin name *Parus palustris* (for the list of species see Wikispecies or catalogueoflife.org and consequently

Search: „*parus palustris*“

Google found the English name *Marsh tit*. To double check I can compare pictures.

Example 7

Everything failed. What should I do now?

Try rephrasing your search, if applicable change the grammatical form of words (declension, singular/plural, etc.), omit diacritical marks, use a word in another language. If you received too many irrelevant results, try narrowing down your search by using quotes, minus (-) operator, more specific words, limiting the search to a specific language, etc.

Check if the words are spelled correctly.

Use other words from the context to look for articles about the topic.

One option is to ask at relevant discussion forums dealing with similar topics. There are many of them on internet and most of the time someone will help you.

Another option is to contact authors of articles dealing with the relevant topic and ask them kindly for help.

Searching for pictures can sometimes help, too (see above). For instance, once I used a catalogue part number to find a picture of a machine component at an English website of one manufacturer and then used the picture as a reference for finding the Slovak name of the identical component produced by a Slovak manufacturer.

3. Additional information sources

For detailed list of all Google supported search functions (in English) see:

[Google Librarian Central - Tools](#) – Various aids, cards and posters listing Google search functions. Ready for print. Very nicely done!

[Google search basics](#) – Basic search functions

[Google advanced search](#) – Advanced search functions

[Google Guide Cheat Sheet](#) – A guide with all Google search functions, ready for print

[Entia](#) - You'll find lots of additional sources and useful links on my website

My final advice

When searching internet for terminology proceed with certain caution. Not everything you find on internet websites can be considered authoritative. The multitude of results returned to your query might tell you a lot, but even that doesn't give you a definite answer. Sometimes you find even hundreds of instances of a phrase which you know for sure is incorrect (especially in English) and other times, quite to the contrary, even a single occurrence of a very specific term (especially in Slovak) can lead you on the right track. Before you decide to use the term, besides the number of returned results thoroughly consider also where you found it, in what context, if it is the original text or a translation, if you were able to backward check it, etc.

Was the article helpful? Please let me know your thoughts and share your experience. What are your own well-tested search methods that works for you? I hope that from now on you find whatever you are searching for on the net quickly and efficiently ☺.

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