Making searches more effective

Don’t expect to find what you are looking for on the first search. With over 2 billion web documents on the Internet it is highly unlikely that the term(s) that you have typed in will give you precisely what you are looking for in the first result or even the first page of results. Queries and query terms are highly ambiguous. Due to this, adding terms on subsequent searches can help you narrow your search and the number of documents returned. Using some very basic advanced operators, the plus (+), minus (-) and quotes before and around your query terms is the best way to narrow your search. See the example below.

1. Lets say you are looking for Ancient Documents about Martin Luther. Start your search with: Martin Luther
   Slightly better than the above query would be: “Martin Luther”
   Why? Well, “Martin Luther”, with the quotes surrounding your query, specifies that the two query terms should be next to each other and in the same order. This is what we call an exact phrase. This is precisely how you want to find the terms within the documents you are searching. You could have entered: +Martin +Luther
   however, this would not necessitate Martin to occur in the same order and next to Luther.

2. With the documents returned you may notice, by merely examining the titles and descriptions of the results returned that some or even a lot contain the term King. Well, of course this is because Martin Luther King is an entirely different person and there are plenty of web pages written about him as well. In order to eliminate these documents you will need to modify your query as follows:
   “Martin Luther” -King
   You should now notice that none of the results returned contain the term King. By putting a minus (-) in front of King you are telling search engine that none of the documents should contain King. It’s really that simple.

3. The more you look at the results you will notice the terms Historical and Manuscript appearing. Fortunately, you didn’t initially try to enter the specific query Ancient Documents as this may have lead you to lower quality results or the wrong results all together. You will also notice that the occurrence of these additional terms is not necessarily in the same order or together. Hence, specifying these terms to be an exact phrase would eliminate valuable pages. When you want to require words to be in a document without specifying the proximity or adjacency of the terms, you need to put plus (+) in front of the terms. Hence the query now becomes:
   “Martin Luther” -King +Historical +Manuscripts
   If you find it easier for a search engine to add the advanced operators to your query for you, you can always use the Advanced Search option that most have. The Word Filter in the advanced search allows you to perform the exact query done above, without needing to supply the operators. The advanced search feature allows you to filter results in much more complex and finite ways as well.

These search techniques are almost the same for all search engines that you may choose to use. Most all search engines will have a help section to help you improve your search criteria, and narrow the possible choices that fit what you are looking for.