

Lasso the power of Google

Create a custom search engine that produces safe, useful results

Letting students loose on the wild, wild Web is a frightening prospect, especially when they're just learning to distinguish between reliable and not-so-reliable sources. Google's Custom Search Engine feature can help. It enables you to specify which websites appear in search results and thus cut down on Internet clutter, as well as remove the possibility that Wikipedia will be the first result returned.

Setting up a custom search engine through Google is easy and takes only a few steps.

1. Make a list of the websites your custom search engine will include.

Start a Word or Notepad document in which you copy and paste the URLs, or addresses, of the sites you want to include. That way you can later copy and paste the addresses into the search engine creator. Note whether you want students to be able to search an entire site or a specific page. For instance, if you use the address *www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents*, your search engine will include only the White House's page on the presidents, but if you include *www.whitehouse.gov*, it will include every page on the White House website.

2. Visit www.google.com/cse, click on Create a Custom Search Engine, and log in using a Google Account.

If you don't already have a Google Account, create one for free at www.google.com/accounts/NewAccount. A Google account gives you access to many free services, including Google Docs and Google's RSS reader.

3. Name your search engine.

First, you'll be asked to name your search engine. For example, if you are creating a custom search engine to research U.S. presidents, you could name your search engine "Let's Learn About the U.S. Presidents." Then, you'll need to describe the search engine (e.g., "Search here to find information for your social studies report").

4. Enter your chosen websites.

Copy and paste the URLs of your chosen sites into the input box. Be sure to list only one URL per line. If you want to include every page of a website in the search engine, place an asterisk after the forward slash (e.g., *www.atpe.org/**).

5. Select "standard edition," and agree to the terms of service.

The standard edition option is free, but note that ads will appear on your search results page. The ads will be generated from keywords related to your search engine's topic. Depending on your students' age and level of online sophistication, you likely want to alert them to the presence of ads and explain the difference between ads and search results (an important lesson to learn).

TECH TERM

Doodle: Decorative versions of the Google logo that appear at www.google.com to celebrate special events, holidays, anniversaries, and the lives of artists and scientists. Google Doodles have marked occasions such as the Olympics, John Lennon's 70th birthday and the 40th anniversary of *Sesame Street*.



6. Choose a style for your search engine.

Google offers you a choice of six search engine styles, all of which you may customize.

7. Test your search results.

Do a test search to see if your search engine delivers results that meet your needs. If so, click Next, and you'll see a box of code and a line of text that says, "Congratulations, you've finished creating the search engine."

8. Save your custom search engine.

Google provides you with code to copy and paste into a website, if you are so inclined. But if you don't have a website, return to www.google.com/cse, and click on Manage Your Existing Search Engines (a link under the Create button). Then click on the name of your search engine. Once you're on the search engine page, add the page to your bookmarks or favorites.

9. Create a page address that's easier to remember.

Copy and paste the original address of your search engine into a URL shortener such as <http://goo.gl> or <http://bit.ly>. (On <http://bit.ly>, you can customize the shortened link so it includes actual words rather than random letters.)

Check out a sample custom search engine created for this article at <http://bit.ly/ATPEsample>. (URL is case-sensitive.)