1. You need to use a search engine to find hard information (factual data), not advertising. This is very different than “surfing” for fun or exciting pages.

2. Problems with most search engines include:
   a. Too many results from the search – usually hundreds of thousands of results, or more. How do you sift through all the results to find the information that you want?
   b. How do you narrow your search? Most search engines allow you to do this in a fairly intuitive way, but you need to hone these skills.
   c. Redundant search results. The same web site is listed many times.
   d. Advertising appears in response to your search. Web sites unrelated to your search appear all the time. Sometimes these sites contain offensive or sexually explicit information.
   e. You need to evaluate the reliability of the facts or information obtained from the web.

3. Go to Google or other search engine such as Bing and Yahoo. Google is simple to use. Logic that narrows your search is built-into the Advanced Search feature: to find, google “advanced search”. Advanced search is fairly intuitive and it can filter out most offensive material. You can now also preview the results without leaving the search page as long as instantly see results as you type.
   a. These search engines do a relatively good job of reducing redundancy.
   b. A good search engine limits advertising and offensive material; however, paid advertising seems to mysteriously appear at the top of the results.
   c. All three engines can search for information specific to a particular location: try Google Local (http://maps.google.com). You can ask for, say, all the bookstores in a given ZIP code. The service will list them and even display a map, showing where each store is located.
   d. You need to evaluate the reliability of the facts or information that you obtain from a Google, Bing, or Yahoo search.

4. Be as specific as possible with the words you enter into the search engine.
   a. Several words are usually better than one.
   b. If you want data, not reports or studies, try entering “data.”
   c. Google allows you to limit your search to Excel files (.xls extension).
   d. If you want to limit your search to education or governments sources (less oriented towards advertising) try .gov or .edu as one of your search terms.
   e. Review examples of search: “Move DC Search” about a family that is relocating to the Washington DC area. Searches related to a market analysis for Simsbury Commons shopping center.

5. How do you evaluate the results of a web search? Answer these questions:
   a. Who is providing the information?
b. What are the providers selling? Even a government may be promoting its own country or town, presenting only positive information.

c. What is the source of the data? How was it collected? Who is responsible for collection? What are the self-interests of the data collectors? For example, school test scores are from exams administered by local school teachers who want to make the scores as high as possible. They can influence which students take the exam.

d. Can the information be verified by another independent source? I.e., are there 2 or more sources that agree on the main message conveyed by the data?

e. Remember: No data are perfect. All data sources have weaknesses. For example, the U.S. Census probably undercounts poor and minority households.

6. Use directories of web sites compiled by others.
   a. Two examples:
      http://www.business.uconn.edu/cms/p269#one has real estate links, including national real estate organizations and federal government sites. Geospatial One-Stop (GOS) is a GIS portal for federal, state, and local geographic data, designed to offer many powerful, new tools for government and public access to geospatial information.
   b. The organization or person compiling the directory is saying that they have chosen the best web sites in the given area. They may provide notes on the content and quality of the web site.
   c. Who compiles the directories? Ask the same questions about the compilers as in 5a., b. and c.
   d. How carefully are the entries in the directories described to the user?
   e. How frequently are the entries updated?
   f. You may develop confidence in the source by working with a directory for a few weeks.
   g. E.g., New York University has a real estate directory. There is no advertising. Historically, universities have had independence and objectivity. But, NYU does receive substantial funding from the industry. http://www.nyu.edu/library/rei/brweb.htm#top.
   h. An example of what to avoid is www.reals.com. It is heavy on advertising and the organization provides no information about itself. A search for real estate brokers in West Hartford showed a very small list.

TIPS:

1. Specify What You Want When you're researching a product, for example, use a query that helps the search site know what you want. Try entering "Sony vaio reviews" instead of just "Sony vaio." The words "compare" and "buy" help, too.

2. Quote Me Putting quotation marks around a search phrase often works magic. For example, if you include quotation marks when you search for the historian "Studs Terkel," you will avoid getting listings for cufflinks or building materials.
3. **Be a Task Master** You can often locate what you want by entering a task into the search field. Try typing in "update my social security" or "File my taxes," say.

4. **Make a Date** If you want links that relate to a particular time, include the date or year in quotation marks. Example: "Olympics and 2012."

5. **Learn Your Lingo** If you're searching for specialized material, make a note of the specific phrases that others use in the field. For example, a fundraiser who often researches potential donors' biographies tells us that the quickest search is often "John Smith" combined with "honorary degree."

6. **Think Before You Click** Avoid wasting time on irrelevant sites and pages. Scan the search results blurb for the context in which your terms were used, the URL, the identity of the publisher, and the date (if available).

7. **Ask the Expert** Web Savvy columnist Brad Grimes says that you can often save time by going to an expert. Got a question about wine? You could go to Wine Spectator, for example, instead of going to Google or Bing.

8. **Quit It, Already** It's important to know when to stop Web searching, says pundit Danny Sullivan. Depending on your query, sometimes it might be faster to pick up the phone.