

Understanding the keyword search of online databases assignment

Type: Short assignment

Learning objectives

- Students learn to engage with the web in an academic way. This includes: contextualizing online objects, and engaging in digital source criticism by understanding the role of online keyword searches.
- Learning to engage critically with digital heritage environments.

Assignment suggestion

Internet searches are based on matching relevant data, and sorted according to a number of patterns. In this exercise, you will examine, and critically evaluate whether and how relevant links are made.

Select a tour from *Inventing Europe*. Note the contexts in which the object is placed and the narrative that the story develops. Select one object from the tour and scroll down to the “What’s like this?” section and look at the key words. How do they relate to the object? How do they relate to the context of the story?

Select the top three results. What keywords were important in making the link? Where are they found in the metadata of each object (title, description, etc.)?

Are the results relevant to the story told in *Inventing Europe*? Try to adjust the keywords to generate a more relevant result. (If you think they are already relevant, think of a different story you might tell about the same object for which the presented results are less relevant, and try to adjust the keywords accordingly). How did you go about this (narrowing or broadening categories, adding or subtracting a search word)? Why was this more effective?

Based on your observations, describe in your own words how relevance is determined by the search function in *Inventing Europe*. - Alec Badenoch, Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

Approach

This assignment takes place online at *Inventing Europe* by making use of the “What’s like this?” section that can be found below each of the stories in each of the tours.

1. When preparing for this assignment, please take into account the “Tips for use”. Of course, you can adjust the approach based on your own preferences.
2. Introduce the assignment to your students.
3. Let your student select a tour of their interest, or one of the tours of your choice (see “Tips for use”, tip 2).
4. Ask your students to choose an object of their liking and let them take note of the context in which this object is displayed.
5. Let them scroll down to the “What’s like this?” section and have them explore the key words (see “Tips for use”, tip 3, 4 & 5), also in relation to the object and the story of the tour (see “Assignment suggestion” for questions and approach on this).
6. Let your students explain in their own words how relevance is determined by the search function in *Inventing Europe* (see “Tips for use”, tip 6).

Tips for use

1. The assignment can be done in class, for instance during a two-hour working group in case an internet connection is available, or at home, as part of homework.
2. If your course deals with a specific topic, such as “food” or “history of informatics”, you have the option to preselect specific tours from *Inventing Europe* that you want your students to work with during this assignment.
3. The “What’s like this?” section below each of the stories in the tours shows the keywords the *Inventing Europe* development team used to create the related content results. The filters that have been used to draw the results from Europeana onto the *Inventing Europe* website can be found below, after having clicked on “Adapt search”. As soon as you open “Adapt search”, you can start adapting the original keywords.
4. It is possible to compare your set of keywords with the original set of keywords used by the *Inventing Europe* development team. After adapting the keywords to your liking, you can click “Show original results”, and you can see the difference between the two. This allows for keyword comparison.
5. If you want to teach your students to work with a more extensive filter system in the area of digital cultural heritage, you can direct your students to <http://www.europeana.eu/portal>.
6. As a teacher you decide how you want to evaluate the assignment. You can think of a 1-page essay, or a short presentation in class.

Are you planning on using this suggestion and teach with *Inventing Europe*? Then we invite you to join our teaching community. You then keep up-to-date on activities, have ample opportunity to share your materials and experiences, and can easily be in touch with other teachers.

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