



Gmail Tip #19: Advanced Search – Query Words

One of Gmail's excellent features is its Search function. Searching can be as simple as entering a keyword or two into the Search field at the top of any page to very complex using Gmail's advanced "Query Words" to better constrain searches. Read more to better understand how "Query Words" can help you with your advanced message searching...

Clicking the "Show Search Options" link will open up a pane containing several entry fields and dropdowns. This lets you easily specify more detailed search criteria. For example, say you want to search for all email that is unread, regardless of under what Label it is filed. Simply click the "Search:" dropdown, select "Unread Mail" and click the "Search Mail" button. Gmail will display a list of all unread messages. Likewise, you can select specific Labels and you can enter specific terms. It's very powerful and useful.

But as more savvy users, we often crave, as Tim The Toolman Taylor says, "More power!" Gmail also provides users the ability to prefix their search keywords with "query words" that instruct Gmail how to search. And there is no need to open the Search Options—these can be entered in the simple search window at the top of any page.

For example, say you want to search for all messages Labeled with the "Family" Label. You could open the "Show Search Options" pane, select the "Family" Label from the dropdown, and click "Search Mail". Or, you could just enter into the search box at the top of any page "label:family" and hit Enter! Both do the same thing, just in different ways.

But this type of searching goes way beyond this by letting you search using more complex criteria. For example, building on our example above, say you want to search for messages containing attachments from your family sent before May 21, 2004? You would simply enter the following advanced search criteria:

label:family has:attachment before:2004/5/21

Yes, this could actually be done in the Search Options pane, but in addition to the available search criteria fields, query words not only let you search using criteria not included in the Search Options pane, (like

“cc:” and “bcc:”) but you can do “compound” searches otherwise not available in the Search Options pane. For example:

label:doctors label:statements has:attachment before:2004/5/21 in:anywhere

would return all messages with both Labels of “Doctors” and “Statements” containing attachments, sent before May 21, 2004, existing anywhere in my account including the Trash and Spam views.

It's pretty powerful, and fairly intuitive once you get the hang of it.

For more information, you should check the direct link to Gmail's “How do I use advanced search?” help page found [\[here\]](#) (You may need to be logged into your Gmail account to access this page.)

Here is table of “query words” from that page:

Operator	Definition	Example(s)
from:	Used to specify the sender	Example – from:amy Meaning – Messages from Amy
to:	Used to specify a recipient	Example – to:david Meaning – All messages that were sent to David (by you or someone else)
subject:	Search for words in the subject line	Example – subject:dinner Meaning – Messages that have the word “dinner” in the subject
OR	Search for messages matching term A or term B* *OR must be in all caps	Example – from:amy OR from:david Meaning – Messages from Amy or from David
– (hyphen)	Used to exclude messages from your search	Example – dinner -movie Meaning – Messages that contain the word “dinner” but do not contain the word “movie”
label:	Search for messages by label* *There isn't a search operator for unlabeled messages	Example – from:amy label:friends Meaning – Messages from Amy that have the label “friends”
has:attachment	Search for messages with an attachment	Example – from:david has:attachment Meaning – Messages from David that have an attachment

filename:	Search for an attachment by name or type	<p>Example – filename:physicshomework.txt Meaning – Messages with an attachment named “physicshomework.txt”</p> <p>Example – label:work filename:pdf Meaning – Messages labeled “work” that also have a PDF file as an attachment</p>
” “ (quotes)	<p>Used to search for an exact phrase*</p> <p>*Capitalization isn't taken into consideration</p>	<p>Example – “i’m feeling lucky” Meaning – Messages containing the phrase “i’m feeling lucky” or “I’m feeling lucky”</p> <p>Example – subject:”dinner and a movie” Meaning – Messages containing the phrase “dinner and a movie” in the subject</p>
()	<p>Used to group words</p> <p>Used specify terms that shouldn't be excluded</p>	<p>Example – from:amy (dinner OR movie) Meaning – Messages from Amy that contain either the word “dinner” or the word “movie”</p> <p>Example – subject:(dinner movie) Meaning – Messages in which the subject contains both the word “dinner” and the word “movie”</p>
in:anywhere	<p>Search for messages anywhere in your account*</p> <p>*Messages in ‘Spam’ and ‘Trash’ are excluded from searches by default</p>	<p>Example – in:anywhere subject:movie Meaning – Messages in ‘All Mail’, ‘Spam’, and ‘Trash’ that contain the word “movie”</p>
in:inbox in:trash in:spam	Search for messages in ‘Inbox’, ‘Trash’, or ‘Spam’	<p>Example – in:trash from:amy Meaning – Messages from Amy that are in the trash</p>

is:starred is:unread is:read	Search for messages that are starred, unread or read	Example – is:read is:starred from:David Meaning – Message from David that have been read and are marked with a star
cc: bcc:	Used to specify recipients in the 'cc' or 'bcc' fields	Example – cc:david Meaning – Messages that were cc-ed to David
after: before:	Search for messages after or before a certain date* *Date must be in yyyy/mm/dd format.	Example – after:2004/4/17 before:2004/4/18 Meaning – Messages sent on April 17, 2004.* *More precisely: Messages sent on or after April 17, 2004, but before April 18, 2004.

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Date

04/29/2024

Date Created

06/22/2004