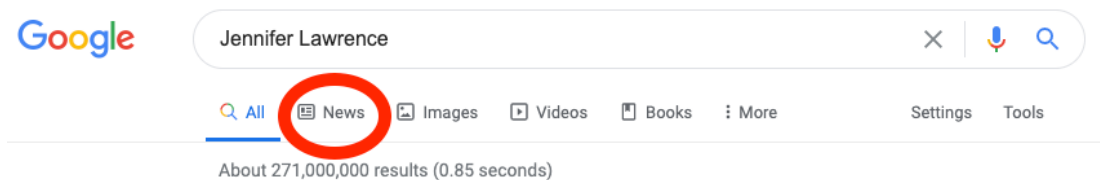




Digital Hacks¹

Disclaimer: This advice does not guarantee foolproof web searching. It does make the promise that if you follow it, you will make fewer bonehead errors and arrive at better, more reliable information.

- 1) **Read Laterally**: Have you landed on an unfamiliar page or an organization you don't know or a meme that could be true but you're not sure? *Read Laterally*. The Web's a web! You understand a node in a connected network by understanding its relationship to other nodes. This one [strategy](#) will cut your error rate by a whopping 25% (... or maybe 30% or 27%, in any case, a substantial amount!).
- 2) **Practice Click Restraint**: Don't be a *promiscuous* clicker and click on the first search result. Step back from the "SERP" (insider talk for "Search Engine Results Page"). Scan the snippets, the brief sentences underneath the URL. Look for sources you recognize and make a *wise* first choice.
- 3) **Make friends with Wikipedia**. So many errors could be eliminated just by checking what Wikipedia says about an organization or some so-called "expert." Scan Wikipedia's entry but then dart to the references at the bottom. Look for sources you recognize.
- 4) **Use the other 99% of Google**. Breaking news: "Jennifer Lawrence eaten by an alligator!" Go first to *Google News* rather than doing a general Google search. If CNN, NBC, Fox, Vox or Vice haven't said anything, it's probably a hoax. As for a claim by a world famous medical researcher—"Cutting Your Hair Prevents Corona!"—look that person up in "[Google Scholar](#)." If this "famous" researcher" has no scientific papers to her credit, hoist a red card.



- 5) **Snopes** is a reliable site for debunking conspiracy theories. Use it.
- 6) **Don't reinvent the wheel**. Check out the [research-tested lesson plans](#) at [cor.stanford.edu](#). Look at the YouTube videos of John Greene's [Crash Course](#), *Navigating Digital Information* (full disclosure: we wrote the syllabus). See Mike Caulfield's excellent and free online guide, [Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers](#).
- 7) **Be wary** of approaches to digital literacy packed to the brim with [lists of questions](#). Be just as skeptical about an organization's "About" page as you are about an friend's Instagram feed. As for the advice that a .org is more trustworthy than a .com? Forget it. Scores of hate groups are .orgs. The .org domain is an [open](#) domain—pay the fee and you, your cousin, and your golden retriever can get one too.

¹ "Hack": jargon for tricks that circumvent a lot of *bs* & allow you to do something quickly & efficiently.