

Micro Module: How Lesser Known Nyms Help You Improve A Search?



Micro Module: How Can Lesser Known Nyms Help You Focus Improve A Search?

When striving to name a concept with great precision, it helps to know about *nyms*. The root word "nym" comes from the Greek word *onoma*, a name. We use the term nym to identify many classes of words. In his book, *Find It Online*, author Alan M. Schlein describes searching the Internet as, "...a blend of learned skills, common sense and a bit of clever intuition." Knowledge of nyms will sharpen your skills and enhance your intuition.

Knowledge of nyms helps you understand the shades of meaning contained in your keywords. Understanding how search engines deal with keywords helps you craft queries that avoid nym confusion. Mastering nyms means better search results.

Well Known Nyms

The most common nyms are synonyms, hyponyms, and hypernyms. We're all familiar with synonyms: words that mean the same thing. Generating a list of synonyms for your keyword is the first step of query formation. Hypernyms are general words that broaden a search, while hyponyms are often proper nouns that narrow the focus of your search. Car is a hypernym. Chevrolet is a hyponym.

(For more on more commonly used nyms see two other IMSA Micro Modules:

- What are Synonyms? How Can Using Synonyms Help Your Search?
- What Are Hyponyms, and Hypernyms? How Can These Nyms Help You Focus A Search?

Lesser Known Nyms



Some words change meaning based on how they are used, spelled, or punctuated. Naturally these distinctions are difficult for computers to recognize. Heteronyms, Homonyms, Contronyms, Capitonyms, and Acronyms are lesser-known nyms that confuse search engines.

- *Heteronyms* are words that are spelled the same, but change meaning based on pronunciation.
- *Homonyms* are words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings.
- *Contronyms* are words with identical spellings but contradictory meanings based on usage.
- *Capitonyms* are words that change meaning when capitalized.
- *Acronyms* are words created from the beginning initials of a group of descriptive words.

Understanding these specialized nym categories will give you greater precision when you form your queries. English is an intricate language with many inherent contradictions. Careful use of these nyms can help any search engine find just what you are looking for.

FAQs



What are Heteronyms?

Heteronyms are words that are spelled identically, but change meanings when pronounced differently. Consider:

- **buffet** *BUFFet* - to pound or bump; *booFAY* - place where you serve yourself;
- **dove** *DUV* - a bird; *DOEV* - jumped off;
- **wind** *WHINEd* - to coil up; *WINd* - the blowing air.

Given the slippery nature of heteronyms, it is best to combine them with synonyms that are highly specific. *buffet* + *bump* will return more information skiing than it will about cold cuts.

*Listen, readers, toward me bow.
Be friendly; do not draw the bow.
Please don't try to start a row.
Sit peacefully, all in a row.
Don't act like a big, fat sow.
Do not the seeds of discord sow.*

From the Word-A-Day Archives! <http://wordsmith.org/awad/archives/1201>

What are Homonyms?

Homonyms are words that have the same sound but have a completely different spelling and meaning. Misspelling these common words can create confusion. Consider:

- **acts** things done / **ax** chopping tool
- **racket** illegal moneymaking scheme / **racquet** woven bat for tennis
- **right** correct / **rite** ritual / **wright** a maker / **write** to inscribe

Proper spelling and application of homonyms will not only improve your writing, it will focus your queries and improve your results!

What are Contronyms?

Contronyms (sometimes called Janus words) confound search engines because they are words with the same spelling and contradictory meanings. Consider:

- **buckle:** to hold together (e.g. buckle your belt) *vs.* to fall apart (e.g., buckle under pressure);
- **cool:** positive sense (cool web-sites) *vs.* negative sense (cool reception);
- **transparent:** easily seen ("His motives were transparent.") *vs.* invisible.

If you have contronyms in your query, be sure to add more specific synonyms to reduce confusion and improve your search results.

What are Capitonyms?

Capitonyms are words that change pronunciation and meaning when capitalized. If you are looking for Herb's herbs you are dealing with capitonyms. If capitonyms cause confusion consider changing the word. This little poem from Word-A-Day makes the point nicely!

*In August, an august patriarch
Was reading an ad in Reading, Mass.
Long-suffering Job secured a job
To **polish** piles of **Polish** brass.* * See how Google grapples with polishing Polish brass!

From the Word-A-Day Archives! <http://wordsmith.org/awad/archives/1201>

See how 'capitonym confusion' can complicate a Google search:

The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "polish brass" and a red speech bubble icon with the text "Capitonym confusion! I want brass from the country of Poland!". The search results show a category of "Shopping > Home and Garden > Cleaning" and a note: "Note: Google does not automatically recognize capital letters in keywords." The search results list two items from "The Zippo Shop": "Classic - High Polish Brass Zippo Lighter" and "Geometrics - High Polish Brass Zippo Lighter". To the right, there are two sponsored links: "Astro Shield Polish" and "Flitz Metal Polish".

The screenshot shows a Google search for "poland brass". The search bar contains "poland brass" and the "Google Search" button. Below the search bar, there are navigation links for "Web", "Images", "Groups", "Directory", and "News". A red arrow points from the text "Eliminating a capitonym can solve the problem!" to the search bar. The search results show "Results 1 - 10 of about 55,000. Search took 0.16 seconds." and a note: "Note: Google does not automatically recognize capital letters in keywords." The category is "Business > Industries > ... > Industrial Forging". The first result is "SMSU Music Department: Faculty Brass Quintet in Poland" with a link to "www.smsu.edu/music/faculty/fac_brass_poland.html - 25k - Cached - Similar pages". The second result is "Decorative Wooden Boxes with Brass Inlay" with a link to "www.uniqueboxshop.com/boxwitbrasin.html - 33k - Cached - Similar pages". The third result is "Poland - The Black Madonna, Silver and Brass Icon, 11.5in.x8.5in ..." with a link to "www.gifts-of-faith.com/Poland/icons/p66-058L.shtml - 5k - Cached - Similar pages". On the right side, there are two sponsored links: "Discount Brass" with a link to "www.eBay.com" and "Learn Polish in 3 hours" with a link to "www.unforgettable-polish.com".

What are Acronyms?

According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate dictionary, an acronym is: *a word (such as NATO, radar, or snafu) formed from the initial letter or letters of each of the successive parts or major parts of a compound term.* When using acronyms as keywords consider spelling out the entire sequence. An acronym may have several meanings including cultural or national interpretations. Consider: radar

- RADio Detection And Ranging.
- Regional Alcohol and Drug Awareness Resource
- Royal Association for Disability And Rehabilitation (London, England).

The Internet and education both have a number of obscure acronyms.

- NCLB (No Child Left Behind)
- NETS (National Educational Technology Standards)
- 21st CIF (21st Century Information Fluency)
- PBL (Project Based Learning)

Acronyms can quickly become buzzwords that make professional vocabularies obscure. When using acronyms in your writing or in your queries it is wise to provide translations. Glossaries can be helpful when struggling to understand what an acronym means. Also consider online acronym translators when working with particularly obscure words.

Some popular online acronym finders:

- Acronym Finder: <http://www.acronymfinder.com/>
- Acronym Search: <http://www.acronymsearch.com/index.php>