

# Search stories and reflective search practices

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## Keywords

Online search, visualizations, self-reflective practices, search engines

## Abstract

We all use online search engines everyday – but how do we use them? Are there personal search styles? How do we adapt to different information tasks? Within the framework of a research project, we captured the web logs of over 150 young people engaged in solving information tasks online, and we developed instruments to visualize the “search stories” we collected in multiple ways, emphasizing actions, time, query strings, etc.

The visualizations were useful to identify online search patterns and styles – but also as instructional tool to help students reflect on their search behavior and enhance their Information Literacy skills.

The visualization of search stories can be a powerful self-reflection tool, as it helps students to review their (often not completely aware) online actions, e.g., how they use search engines and search result pages, how they navigate web sites or if they cross-check information with websites they visited earlier.

Moreover, search stories visualizations provide a means for students [to compare their search behavior with each other](#). When a class discusses online information search activities, the only visible evidence they can display are the quantity and quality of the results, so that the discourse often focuses on effectiveness. Search stories visualizations make the process visible, so that it can be commented and interrogated, bringing efficiency in the discussion as well.

Finally, search stories can help identify recurring patterns, different search styles and the evolution of search practices in time, contributing to increase search self-awareness and to making online search a self-reflective practice.

## Short description

We all use online search engines everyday – but how do we use them when solving real-life information needs? We captured the web logs of over 150 young people engaged with online information tasks, and we developed visualizations of their “search stories”. Search stories visualizations can be powerful learning tools: they promote self-reflection, provide support for discussing the search process (and not only its results), and allow comparisons and learning from peers.

## Motivation

Search stories visualizations (i.e., visualizing how a person navigate and select information online in a special chart) can be powerful learning tools for Information Literacy: they promote self-reflection, provide support for discussing the search process (and not only its results), and allow comparisons and learning from peers.