

# SEARCHING MADE EASIER

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Foundational Things

## 1 Choose a search engine that is appropriate for your needs.

Consider what your needs are and what you are looking for when choosing where to search.

For example, you can:

- search directly on YouTube.com if you know you're looking for a YouTube video
- consider using a non-Google search engine, if you have privacy concerns
- use an academic-based search engine intended for academic research

## 2 Build your search using distinct and meaningful words.

Be strategic and intentional with the words you choose for your search. The more unique and specific you can be the better your search results should be.

Some words have more than one meaning so be sure you give your search good context. Rephrasing a tricky search can be very helpful sometimes.

## 3 Reduce the number of potential search results by getting more specific. Use techniques like search operators, filtering, or advanced search.

Use search operators to manually specify what should and should not be included in your search results. You can use these individually or combine operators to create more powerful search queries.

Search engines also often include filters or an advanced search option which can be used to give you a more helpful set of results.

## 4 After searching, examine the results and consider their value to you. Return to prior steps as needed to help refine and improve your search.

To revisit your context, ask yourself questions like:

- Is this context the best choice for what I am seeking?
- Is my location influencing the results in an undesired or unintended way?
- What changes can I make to my search that will return results from a source I trust or prefer?

# SEARCH OPERATORS

A **search operator** is a symbol or text pattern that allows us to refine searches. Most search engines use search operators. The ones shared here are relatively common and can be helpful for daily searching. But there are many more than this! Be sure to look for a current list of operators available for your preferred search engines.

- " "** words surrounded with quotes looks for an exact match. *e.g.*, "french fries"
- a hyphen in front of a word excludes it from the search. *e.g.*, vegetable -potato
- site:** using site: before a web address searches specifically on the indicated website.  
*e.g.*, grand piano site:www.yamaha.com
- OR** using OR (or |) includes either word in the search. *e.g.*, iPad OR iPhone
- ( )** parentheses group words together and is helpful when using operators like OR
- ..** indicates a range to include in the search. *e.g.*, movies 2017..2022

## Example: spaghetti with meatballs

Searching for spaghetti with meatballs is a very general search topic. If you only type those words into a search engine, it will have to make its best guess about what you are looking to find. It can't know your intention, so it will make a guess based on whatever information it has.

For instance, the search engine might have access to your location. It will also have historical information about what others have clicked after conducting a similar search. This information might inform what it suggests to you.

You might find exactly what you want with a search engine's best guess. But you might also find yourself overwhelmed with lots of results to sift through, some of which might be unrelated to your goals.

The good news is that you can make choices up front based on the intention behind your search. Intentionally stating what you want to know about spaghetti with meatballs will impact where and how you search.



"Spaghetti with Meatballs 02" by TheCulinaryGeek is licensed under CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/?ref=openverse>.

# WHAT DO YOU WANT TO FIND?

Do you want to find a written recipe for making spaghetti with meatballs?

***Or...***

A video showing how to make the dish?

Are you looking for a local restaurant that serves spaghetti with meatballs?

***Or...***

Find it served at a restaurant in another town that you will be travelling to in the near future?

Are you looking for the history of the dish?

***Or...***

Do you want to find the name of that classic animated movie  
with two dogs eating spaghetti with meatballs?

Do you need to find images of spaghetti with meatballs to learn what it looks like?

***Or...***

Are you looking for images that are legal to reuse in a presentation or on a website?

There is no way that your search engine will truly know what you mean when you enter search words. But, the chances are much higher that you already know what you mean!

And, sure, once you review your initial search results, you might find yourself growing more curious about other things and choose to continue exploring. That's great too! The point here is to begin by establishing your purpose. Doing this will help your searching adventures go much more smoothly overall.

# LET'S PRACTICE, LOOKING FOR...

1. The name of an animated movie with two dogs eating spaghetti with meatballs
2. A recipe for spaghetti with meatballs for a gluten-free meal
3. An image of spaghetti with meatballs for a public fundraising poster

# Case 1: animated movie

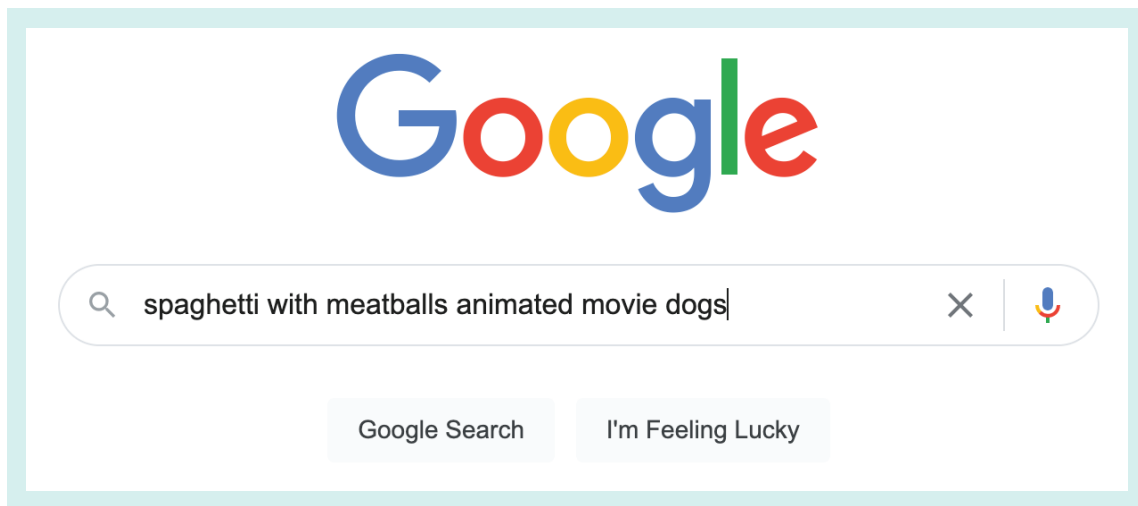
## Step 1: Choose a search engine that is appropriate for your needs.

A standard search engine of your choosing would work well for this scenario.

Using Google.com (or a version local to you, like Google.ca) is a common choice. But, it is not the only choice. Since the information we're searching is widely available on the Internet, and it's a text-based search, most any search engine will fit the need.

## Step 2: Build your search using distinct and meaningful words.

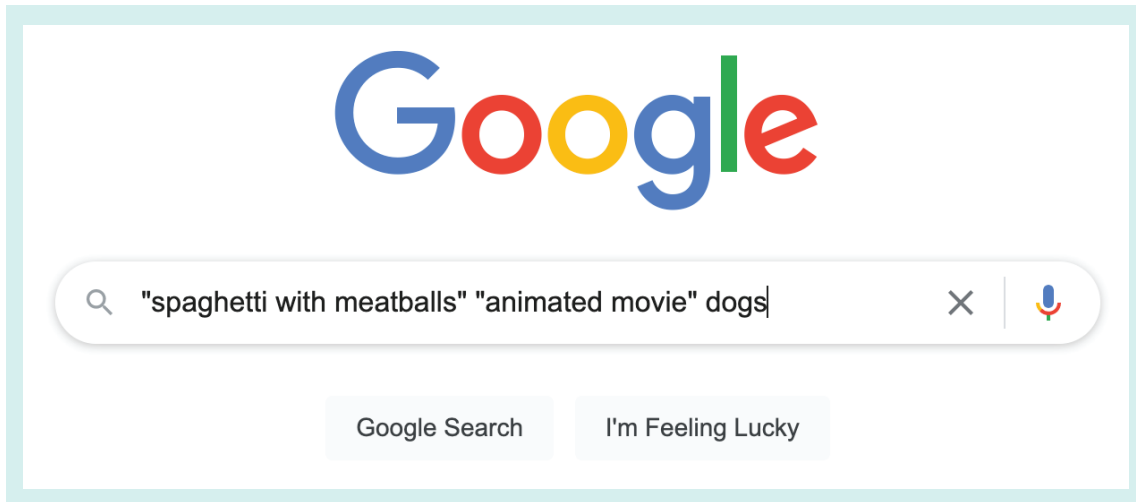
Besides the obvious words of **spaghetti with meatballs** it is a good idea to add a few more search words, such as **movie** and **dogs**. You might even decided to include **animated** as well. In this case, the word brings a specific detail that really helps narrow down the search up front.



## Step 3: Reduce the number of potential search results by getting more specific.

In this example, searching without any additional alterations will likely present you with some results you want. However, making a few adjustments will help us get more matches specific to what we want.

Let's look at using a search operator to help with this.



Using quotation marks around specific words and phrases will give us results containing exact matches, wherever possible.

### **"spaghetti with meatballs" "animated movie" dogs**

Here we are asking for results that include the phrase **spaghetti with meatballs** specifically, with those words appearing in that exact order. The same goes for **animated movie**.

Creating our search request in this manner ensures our search results all contain those exact phrases along with the word dogs.

### **Step 4: Examine the results and refine your search, as needed.**

It's highly likely in this example that both text and image results have come back with the name of the Disney classic animated feature *Lady and the Tramp* from 1956. As a searcher with a mental picture of the movie, they would likely recognize the scene from one of the images without requiring additional refinement.

Another helpful search word to include would be **Disney**. We can only add this if the searcher recalls this detail in the first place. Including it here has value since this scene has been recreated and parodied in other animated films. Adding Disney would help reduce results.

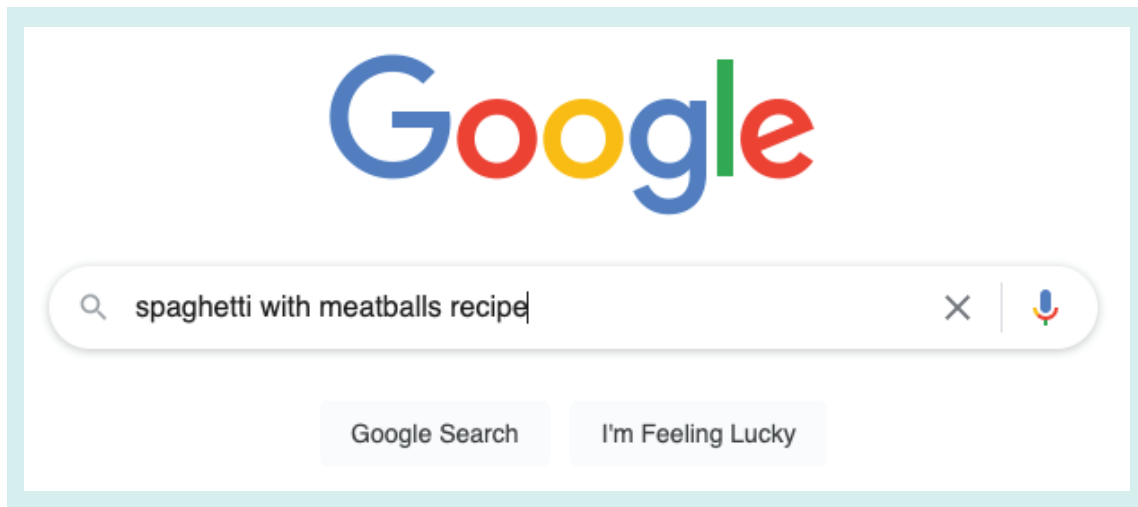
## Case 2: gluten-free recipe

**Step 1: Choose a search engine that is appropriate for your needs.**

Once again, a standard search engine of your choice would work well for this scenario.

**Step 2: Build your search using distinct and meaningful words.**

In addition to the phrase **spaghetti with meatballs**, we will want to include the word **recipe**.



With this scenario, we are interested in finding gluten-free recipes specifically. One approach for this search is to include **gluten-free** as a search term. But instead, we'll look at an alternative way for this example in the next step.

**Step 3: Reduce the number of potential search results by getting more specific.**

As with Case 1, let's add quotes around **spaghetti with meatballs**, like this:

**"spaghetti with meatballs" recipe**

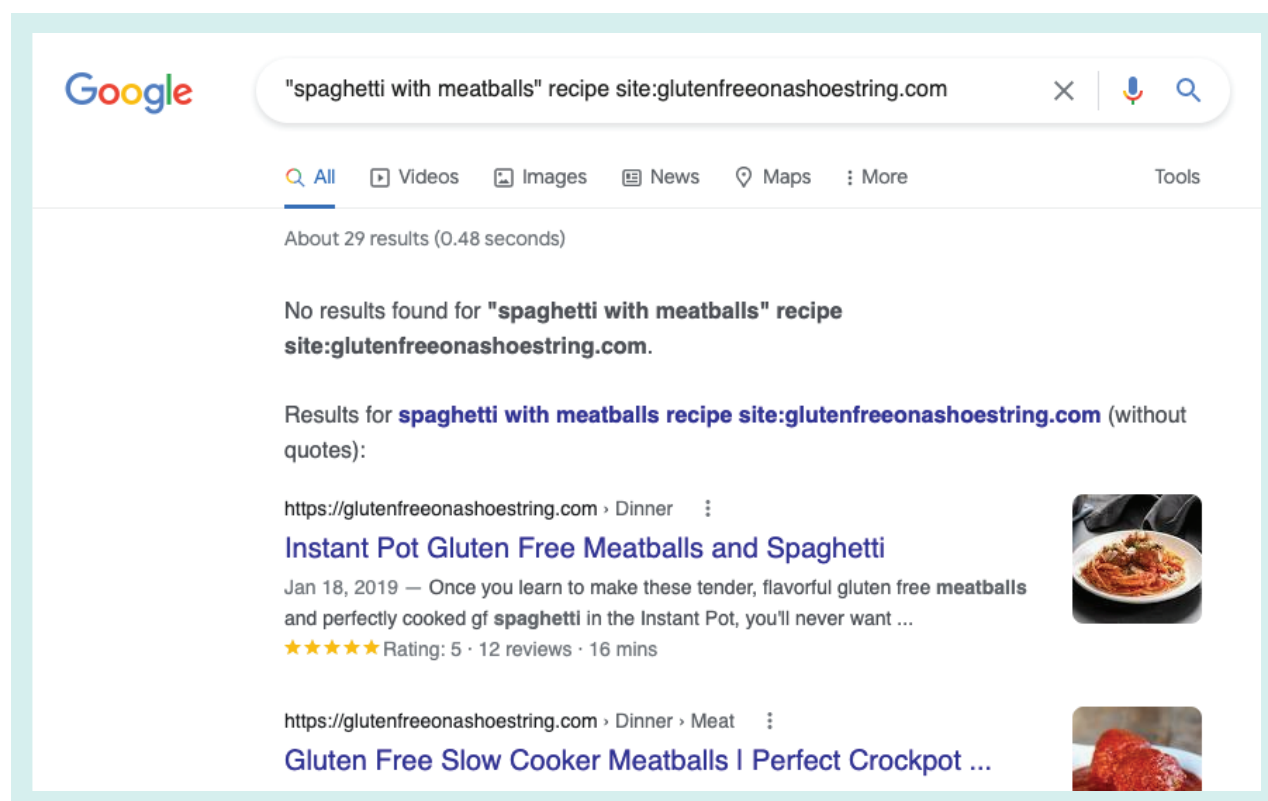
In this scenario, let's imagine the searcher knows a specific website for gluten-free recipes. In Step 2, it was mentioned we wouldn't be using **gluten-free** as a search word. That is because the searcher already knows their source website only features gluten-free recipes. If they did not know this, we should definitely include **gluten-free** in the list of search terms.

The website is *glutenfreeonashoestring.com* and we can use the **site:** search operator to focus the search specifically on this website:

**"spaghetti with meatballs" recipe site:glutenfreeonashoestring.com**

### Step 4: Examine the results and refine your search, as needed.

An interesting thing happens with the search results for this case. Multiple recipes come back to us in the search results. Note it is a very small list of results compared to the millions of possibilities that could have been returned to us, if we hadn't been so specific.



But, if you search with Google the results it gives are its best guess because the exact phrase "spaghetti with meatballs" does not appear on the website. Another popular name for the dish is "spaghetti and meatballs", which is what this recipe website calls it. Regardless, we found what we need!

# Case 3: free to use images

## Step 1: Choose a search engine that is appropriate for your needs.

Use a search engine that is good for dealing with images and is also aware of licensing.

Openverse (formerly Creative Commons Search) is one good option to help ensure the licensing, but Google's image search can also be used. Be sure to carefully watch your settings and be prepared to validate the license another way after your search.

## Step 2: Build your search using distinct and meaningful words.

The search criteria itself is pretty simple. We are looking for **spaghetti with meatballs**. The other details come with Step 3.

## Step 3: Reduce the number of potential search results by getting more specific.

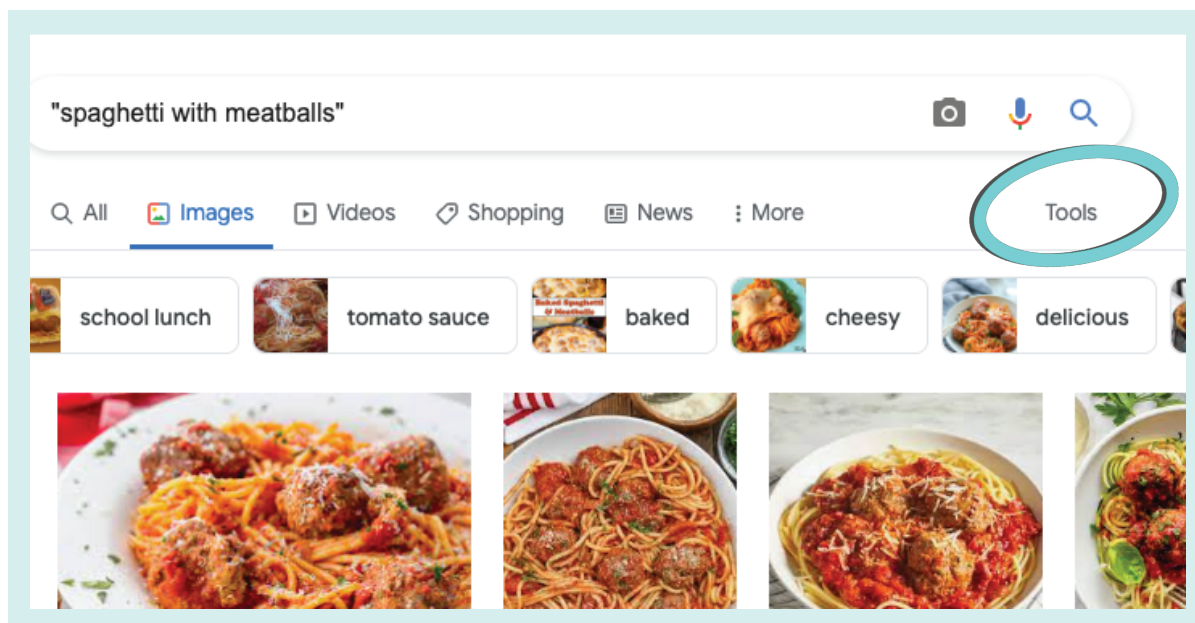
For this example we want to ensure we use some kind of image search. Using quotes to specify "spaghetti with meatballs" is still an option, but this filtering is essential. You can configure your chosen search engine to only show images at the start of your search, or apply the filter after getting your first search results.

The diagram illustrates the search process. It starts with a box for Google at <https://google.com>. The 'Images' tab is circled in blue. An arrow points from this box to a box for Openverse at <https://wordpress.org/openverse>. The Openverse box shows the search query "spaghetti with meatballs" and the 'Images' filter selected in a dropdown menu, also circled in blue.

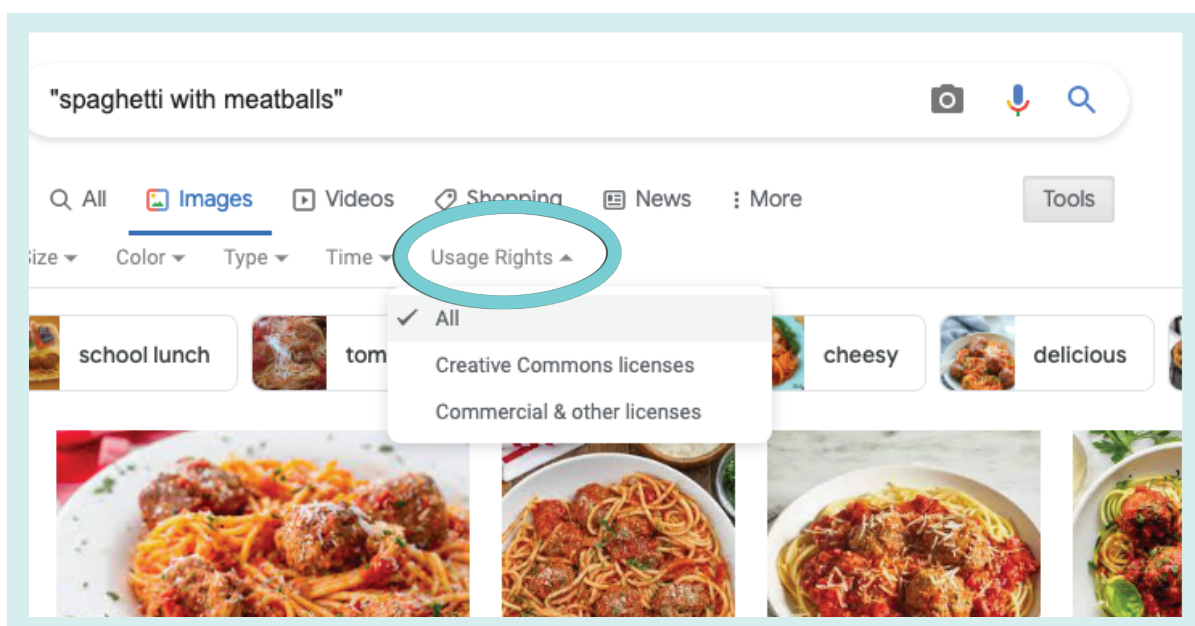


Next, find where to specify which kind(s) of licensing you have chosen. In this example, the searcher wants something already in the public domain or with a Creative Commons license compatible with their purposes. Examples included here demonstrate doing this in both Google and Opensearch.

<https://google.com>

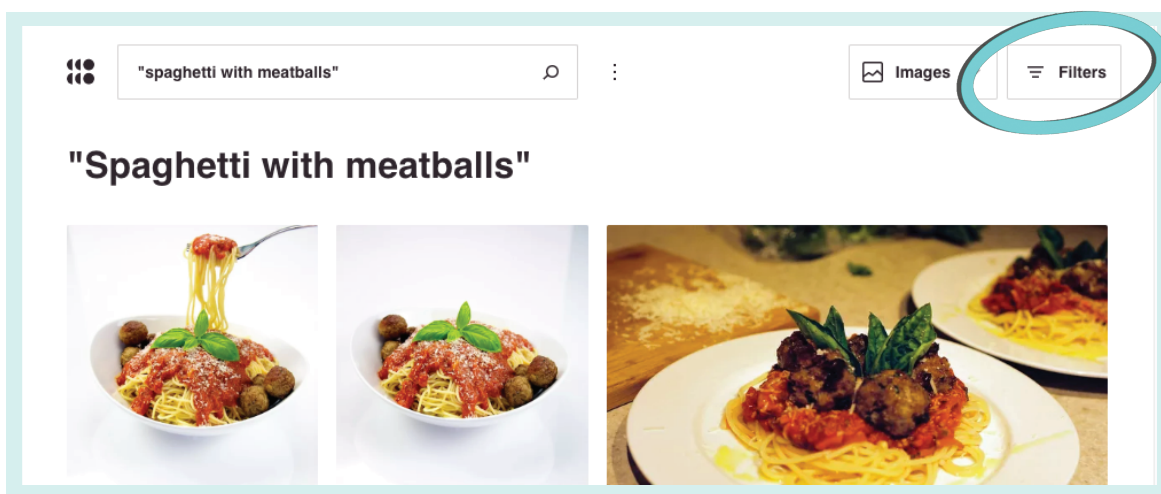


Expand the “Tools” filter bar to reveal multiple filtering options. We’re looking for a licensing-related filter, which we find under “Usage Rights”.

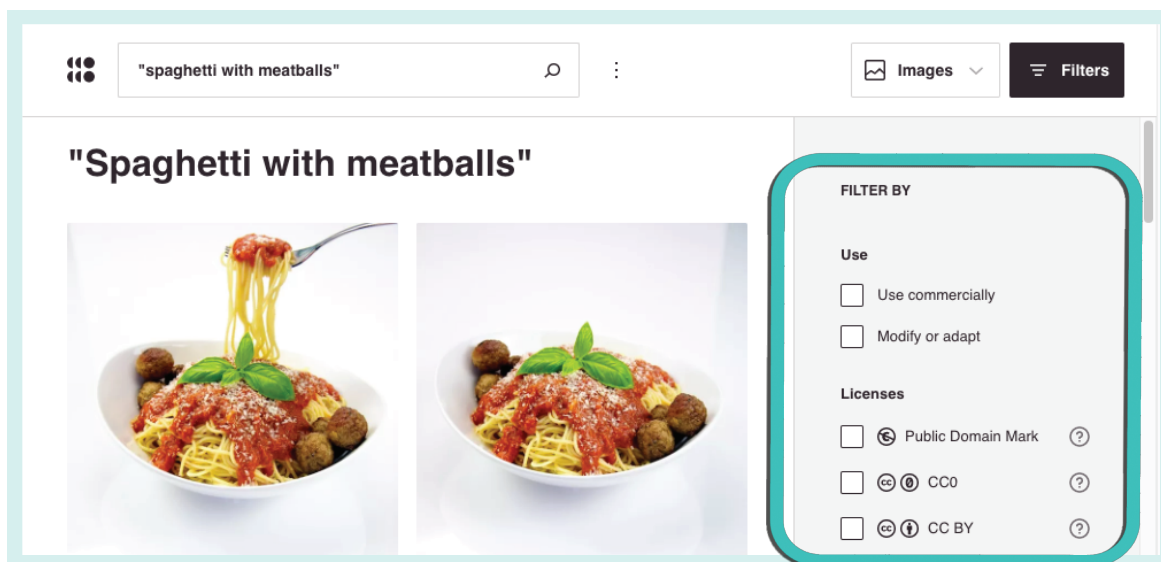


From here, we can select “Creative Commons licenses” to filter out other types of licenses. Take care here – there are many different kinds of Creative Commons licenses. Be sure to do your research.

<https://wordpress.org/openverse>



Expand the “Filters” area to reveal multiple filtering options. The license and use filtering is featured at the top, but be sure to scroll down to discover other filterable options.



The different kinds of Creative Commons licenses are broken down very finely here. You can click on the question mark icon to learn more about each type.

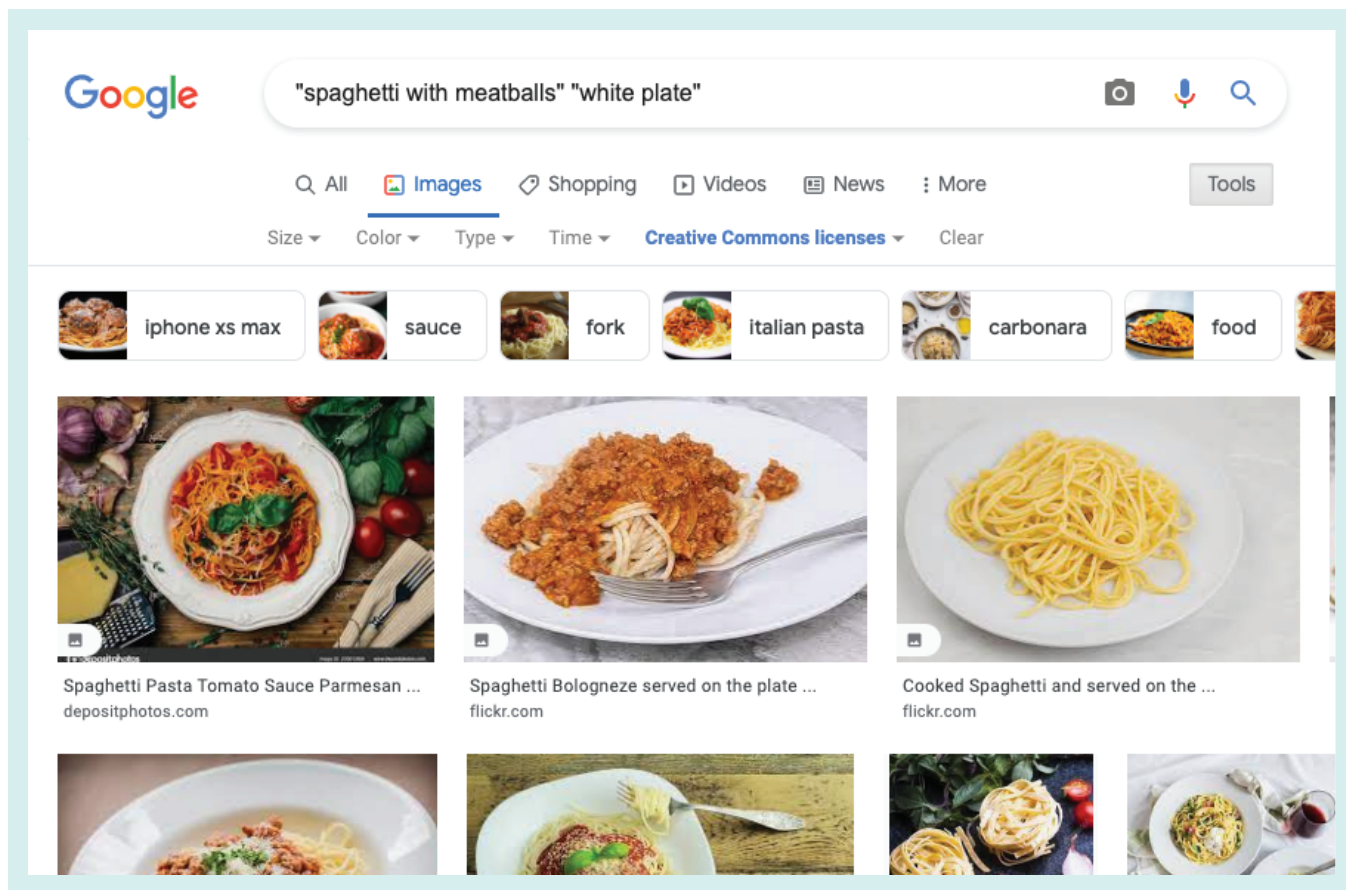
## Step 4: Examine the results and refine your search, as needed.

As you look at the results, you may want to refine your search to find more specific images, such as another object or colour. For instance, you may decide that you want the food served on a white plate. Let’s refine our search based on your criteria.

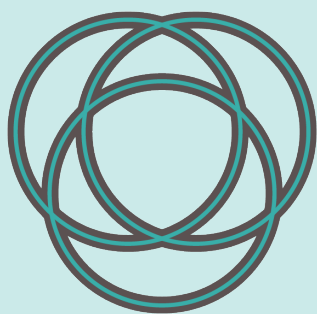
## Case 3 Search Refinement: Revisiting Steps 1 - 4

**Step 1.** Google's image search is currently better at detecting nuances in images when compared to Openverse. If we want to be presented with white plate options, it is a better tool for the job.

**Steps 2 & 3.** Adding **"white plate"** should help refine our results to a more specific collection of images. Also, we must remember to change the license filter after our search. Google resets this setting with every search, unfortunately.



**Step 4.** This adjustment results in a much better outcome and we have several images of white-plated spaghetti with meatballs to choose from for our fundraising poster.



Be sure to visit the Foundational Things YouTube channel to find a nine-part video series walking through these and other searching tricks and tips that will help make your Internet searches even easier. Just look for the "Searching Made Easier" video playlist.