GETTING THE MOST OUT OF:

Google

Google is the world’s most widely used search engine, with more than 3 billion queries per day. In addition to its web search function, Google also offers many specialized services such as Google Scholar, Book Search, Image Search, News Search, and Maps.

Introduction

This handout explains how you can effectively use the Google search engine (www.google.ca) and some of its specialized search tools to find information online.

Points to remember:

1. No single search engine searches the entire Web. For the best results, try your search in more than one search engine.

2. Many scholarly journal articles cannot be found by search engines. This includes Google Scholar. To find and access scholarly journal articles reliably, use the library’s databases.

3. Websites often lack the quality controls that are used in publishing other types of resources (e.g., scholarly journals), so you should always evaluate internet resources for quality and appropriateness for your research. To learn more, refer to the Library’s guide or video tutorial on evaluating internet resources.

4. Just because a result is the top hit on Google does not mean it is credible, reliable or accurate. Google’s sorting is based on relevancy – to you, your search, your location, your past searches... – not quality.

5. Your search results are affected by personalized information such as your location and past search history. Google’s algorithms guess what information you are looking for, which can result in a “filter bubble”.

For example, you may not be shown results that disagree with what Google perceives as your viewpoints or ideologies. To see this personalization in action, try comparing your search results from your regular browser to that of a private or incognito window!

6. Some of your search results may include advertisements (denoted by a small “Ad” to the left of the URL). These are from companies which pay Google to advertise their products or services and are not an indication that the site is a credible source.
Basic Search

Google search has some customizable features and will perform differently depending upon which settings are selected.

Google has a built-in Autocomplete feature that is not possible to turn off. As you are typing your query, Google makes predictions about possible search terms for you. However, it is not necessary to choose any of the predictions.

Another search feature is Google Instant, which provides you with results as you are typing based on a prediction of your search. If this feature is turned on, you will jump automatically from the search page to the results page while you are typing a query. To turn off Google Instant, follow these instructions:

1. Click on Settings in the bottom-right of the Google homepage and select Search Settings from the pop-up menu.
2. Locate Google Instant Predictions and select Never show Instant results.
3. Save your settings.

Searching with Google:

To perform a search with Google, enter your keywords into the search box.

If Google Instant is turned on, you will jump to the results page, and your search bar will move to the upper left-hand corner of the browser window. Hit Enter, click the blue magnifying glass, or select an Autocomplete prediction to complete your search.

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Search terms

Autocomplete predictions

Voice Search:

To use Voice Search, click on the microphone icon in the search bar and follow the instructions.

When choosing search terms:

- Be specific and try to include at least 2 keywords that best describe what you are trying to find. For example, to find apartments for rent in Halifax, you could search:
• **Avoid common words** such as “how”, “of”, and “where” because these stop words will normally be excluded from a search. If stop words occur in a common phrase or title such as *Of Mice and Men*, use quotes to search for the exact set of words:

```
"of mice and men"
```

• **Select appropriate terminology** for your query and be aware that different terms may imply a certain bias:

  e.g., searching “oil sands” will retrieve results from Alberta Energy and other members of the oil industry, whereas a search for “tar sands” will retrieve results from Greenpeace and other environmental advocacy organizations.

• **Word order** can affect your search results. Words should be ordered in the way you would expect them to appear in a search result or how they appear in natural phrases:

  e.g., “world war” retrieves results about the First and Second World Wars, whereas “war world” retrieves results about a DC comic book series.

### Writing a Search Query

When searching, it helps to understand how Google interprets what you enter:

• Google searches for pages that contain as many of your terms as possible. However, it may return results without some of the terms you entered.
  
  o If a result is missing a search term, below its entry you will see: “Missing: term”

• Google searches are not case sensitive.

• Google automatically searches for variations of some search terms, e.g., “knit”, “knits”, “knitting”, etc. To prevent searching for variations of a term, enclose it in quotation marks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Search Operators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., canine OR dog OR puppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>-</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., titanic –movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., biology –site:wikipedia.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“ ”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., “life of pi”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*<strong>”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., “* for an * makes the whole world blind”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Shortcuts:
- **Weather:** type “weather” and then the city and province/state, or postal code/zip code.
  - e.g., weather Halifax NS

- **Time:** type “time” and the name of the city.
  - e.g., time Halifax

- **Stock quotes and market data:** type the ticker symbol into the search box.
  - e.g., GOOG

**Advanced Search**

To use advanced search, click on **Settings** in the bottom-right of the Google homepage and select **Advanced Search** from the pop-up menu. If you are in a search already, **Settings** will appear below the search bar. Or, visit [http://google.ca/advanced_search](http://google.ca/advanced_search).

First, type your search terms into the relevant search boxes:

![Search boxes](image)

Then, refine your search by selecting one or more limit options, which are listed below the search boxes. Limit options include:

- **Language:** restrict your results to pages written in a specified language
- **Region:** restrict your results to pages published in a particular region
- **Last update:** restrict your results to pages updated in the past 24 hours, week, month, or year
- **Site or domain:** restrict your results to a particular site (e.g., www.smu.ca) or domain (e.g., .org or .gov)
- **Terms appearing:** restrict your results to pages in which your search term occurs in the title, text, URL, or links to the page
- **SafeSearch:** filter explicit content from results
- **File type:** restrict your results to sites in a specified format, e.g., .pdf, .doc, .pptx, etc.
- **Usage rights:** locate content that is licensed to be reused, shared, or modified – you must verify the legitimacy of the license and terms of use before using content
Refining Your Search

If your searches are retrieving too many irrelevant hits, use these special operators to increase the relevancy of your results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Search Operators</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intitle:</td>
<td>Restrict your results to documents with a specified search term in the title e.g., forensics intitle:university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allintitle:</td>
<td>Restrict your results to documents with all of your search terms in the title e.g., allintitle:google tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>site:</td>
<td>Restrict your results to documents within a specified website or domain e.g., chemistry site:www.smu.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inurl:</td>
<td>Restrict your results to documents with a specified search term in the URL e.g., book review inurl:library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>define:</td>
<td>Google tries to define the term first using dictionaries or encyclopaedias. e.g., define:deep web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>filetype:</td>
<td>Restrict your results to specific file types using file extensions e.g., syllabus filetype:docx e.g., thesis filetype:pdf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related:</td>
<td>Restrict your results to find webpages with similar content to a specific URL e.g., related:<a href="http://www.smu.ca/">http://www.smu.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: do not place a space after the colon when using special operators.

Google Search Results & Other Search Tools

Your searches could retrieve a variety of content, including links to books, news, images, etc. To limit your results to a particular format, e.g., images, simply select the Images tab located below the search bar on the results page. It is important to note that the placement of these links may change with every search. In the example below, Google Books results are hidden under the More tab.
Google Scholar does not appear in the tab below the search bar or in the More tab. Instead, Google may suggest “Scholarly articles for Your Search”. This link will take you to Google Scholar.

Google Books, Scholar, Images, News, and Maps also have their own dedicated sites and search interfaces. You can use the square “apps” button to access these products. The “apps” button appears at the top right hand side of many Google products, and displays a selection of “popular” apps by default.

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**Image Search**

Not to be confused with Google Photos, which is a tool for syncing, editing and sharing pictures.

This feature allows you to search for images throughout the web. Enter keywords into the search box and if Google finds any matches to your query, it will display thumbnail pictures of the matches. Click on the thumbnails to view the full sized pictures.

You can also upload an image, or paste an image’s URL, to search the web for images that are visually similar to that image. This can be useful for identifying the provenance or original source of an image. To access this menu, click the “camera” icon in the Google Images search bar.

**News**

On the Google News homepage, Google sorts its top news stories into various categories (e.g., Canada, Health, etc.). Thousands of news sources, including traditional news sites, blogs, satire, and press releases are indexed by Google News. While most articles are free to access, some sources have paywalls and will limit the number of articles you are able to view without a subscription.

Google News will also alter its contents based on your past searches and preferences. You may notice your favourite news websites appearing more frequently than ones you click on less often.

**Book Search**

This feature allows you to search the full-text of many books. Google has amassed a collection of scanned books through its affiliations with some prominent libraries, as well as through a partner program with publishers and authors who wish to have their books searchable by the public.

Click on a book title and you will see basic bibliographic information about the book. If available, the full-text of the book will be viewable and available for download as a PDF. For some books you will only be able to “preview” some full-pages of titles. Other titles only offer “snippet” views of a few lines of text, showing full-text search results in context.
If on campus, select the **Find in a library** link and you will be directed to WorldCat Local for SMU. Here you will be able to see if the item is available at the Patrick Power Library or through another Novanet library.

Search within the full-text of the book for particular terms or phrases.

**Maps**

With Google Maps, you can search for maps and directions to various locations (e.g., cities, streets, or restaurants). Browse streetscapes and explore landmarks as 360-degree images in **Street View** or try **Earth** view to see satellite and 3D imagery. Also try out Google’s related service, **Google Earth**, which offers features including a Maps Gallery, along with Sky, Moon, Ocean, and Mars viewing modes.

**Google Scholar**

Google Scholar is a specialized search engine developed for researchers and academics. Its index includes articles, books, patents, court opinions, scientific pre-prints, and government documents from many publishers and academic fields. With Google Scholar, you can search for scholarly literature on your topic – often in full-text – and then retrieve the items from the Patrick Power Library. See the Library’s **Google Scholar Guide** for more information.

**For more help...**

Don’t forget to check out the complete lists of **online tutorials** and **library guides**. You are always welcome to stop by the Research Help desk for further assistance with your assignments.

**Phone:** (902) 420-5544  
**Email:** research@smu.ca

Happy searching!