Google Scholar

Google Scholar can be accessed at scholar.google.com. This handout provides a brief overview of Google Scholar’s features.

What is Google Scholar?
Google Scholar is a useful free search engine that indexes articles from various publishers, professional societies, scholarly repositories, and other sites. It also includes other source types such as patents, books, and case law. Not all results in Google Scholar will be free to access – in many cases you will need to search for or request a result through the WRHA Virtual Library.

Keep in mind that not everything indexed in Google Scholar is a peer-reviewed source – be sure to critically evaluate your results. It also lacks a lot of the functionality of subscription databases with regards to limiting your results to the most relevant articles. However, it can be useful for locating grey literature like presentations and technical reports that may not be included in these databases.

Search tips
Google Scholar is similar to Google but searches a more limited set of sources. It has several additional features that will be explored below, but in terms of basic search the interface is quite similar to regular Google. You can enter simple keywords and expect to see results, but just as with regular Google, the more targeted your search the more likely you are to locate items that are relevant to your area of interest. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your search:

- By default Google looks for all of your search terms, but not necessarily at the same point on a page. If you want to search for a specific phrase – eg. “heart attack” instead of heart AND attack – you should put quotation marks around it.
- You can look for any of a set of words by using OR or a pipe character ( | ) between synonyms
- You can use a minus sign to exclude a word from your search – however, be careful not to exclude potentially helpful terms.
- By default Google will search for synonyms or other forms (eg plurals) of the words you enter. To avoid that, you can put quotation marks around a single word.
- You can use operators to search specific parts of a source – for example, intitle: to search in the title of a result, or author: to look for a specific author.

For more information on search tips for Google Scholar (and Google in general), check out our Effective Googling webinar: https://youtu.be/pPPPCrqUA9s
You can access Google Scholar’s advanced search by clicking on the icon in the top left of the page that looks like three horizontal lines – this will bring up a menu that includes the Advanced Search option. This interface allows you to build a search using many of the techniques discussed above – searching only in the title, search an exact phrase, etc. You can also set a date limit on your results or search a specific author or publication.
Results page

Here’s an example of a search results page:

As you can see at the top of the page, a search for “google” returns 768,000 results. However, be aware that Google Scholar will only let you see the first 1,000 of these – this is one reason why a more targeted search is more useful.

On the left side of the page are some options for filtering results. You can limit your search to more recent results, or use the custom range option to set a specific date range in which you want to search. You can also change the result ranking from relevance to date. You can also choose to include or exclude patents and citation results – these are search results that provide a citation but no link to a source.

For each search result you will see the title of the result, linked to a copy of the source. The right-hand side of the green text under the title tells you where that link goes – for example, the first item on the list links to Elsevier. You can also see in the green text some of the authors and a snippet of the publication title. Authors that are underlined have a Google Scholar profile where you can find other results by them. You also see a brief snippet of the text, highlighting the context of your search term(s).

Underneath the text snippet are a number of potentially useful options. The star icon allows you to save a citation to your personal library (more on that later). The quote mark icon displays the citation in a number of different reference formats (APA, Chicago, etc), and also gives you options to download the reference in formats like BibTeX or EndNote. The Cited By link shows you all articles indexed by Google Scholar that cite this result, while Related articles shows those articles that Google’s algorithms judge to be similar to this one – both of these can be helpful in finding additional results if you find one that closely matches your area of interest. Finally, the All versions link shows other places on the web where this result can be found – this can allow you to discover open-access versions of a particular source.

Other features

One feature of Google Scholar already mentioned is the researcher profile.
This profile brings together search results relevant to one particular author, and also metrics like the author’s h-index and how often each of their papers has been cited. If you are published you can create a profile for yourself using the menu (accessed via the three horizontal lines icon in the top left of the screen). You can customize your profile to include information like your affiliation, a verified email, and your photo.

Another feature already mentioned is My library – this option allows you to collect various results to read later using your Google account. You can also set up an email alert system to let you know about new results in your topic area of interest.