

CS101 Video 4: What about using Google Scholar?

For my last video, I wanted to talk a little about Google Scholar.

I'm sure that most of you have either encountered it, or are already using it, but I want to caution you about that for the following reasons.

It's a bit of a mixed bag.

What do I mean by that?

Well, it is the biggest database in the world, it's obviously convenient and easy to use.

It's good if you need to find a source quickly and you have a citation, and it's good if you're using the feature that's known as "cited by" to follow the citation trail.

I use Google Scholar myself.

However, there are some things that are a little bit problematic with it.

Google Scholar is not limited to scholarly materials. That's the most important thing.

There are course syllabi in Google Scholar, there are academic blog articles, there are links to discussion papers, also sometimes known as white papers or "think tank" papers, and those are not peer reviewed.

There's no way to get only peer-reviewed materials.

I heard once that if you type in "peer reviewed" in double quotes in your search, that that will lead only to peer-reviewed articles, but no, that is not the case.

Using double quotes in a search, in any search engine, tells the search engine only to search for that exact phrase, so that doesn't work.

There are also predatory journal articles. Essentially, those are journals that are not reputable journals, and there's no way of knowing in Google Scholar whether a journal is a predatory journal or not, and you can't really refine the results like you can in one of our research databases.

I say it's weird and wonky because of this, and a lot of the results are also commercial because Google is a for-profit database, website, tool, and it essentially wants to sell you

things. That also has to do with the results that get surfaced to you from a Google search, whether it's Google or Google Scholar.

I did a search in Google Scholar a little while ago, and you'll note at the top we're looking at "ownership restrictions in Canadian media," the search example that we're using.

I did a search just today and the results are pretty similar, so this is not that out of date.

You'll notice there are a lot of results showing up at the top of the page, but the one thing that is somewhat misleading is that it says "articles." Are these all articles?

First of all, the very second result is actually a book. So I don't know why it tells you these are articles when it's giving you books.

Now, four out of ten of our results are books, so again, misleading.

Also, we don't know whether these books are scholarly or not. There's no way of knowing. You'd have to actually go into the book, and it's a little bit more difficult to tell whether a book is a scholarly book. It's easier for peer-reviewed journals, or peer-reviewed articles; much easier. Books are a different story.

The second problem that we have here is that we're finding an encyclopedia article. I know that this is actually a scholarly source. Wiley is a scholarly publisher, but the problem is that once you click on that link, you don't have full access to this article.

We don't have this through our library databases. We don't have a subscription to this particular encyclopedia, so you'd have to pay for it.

Then there's also this. On the second page of results that I found, this is coming from something called HeinOnline. If you click that, it looks interesting, and we could zoom in a little bit.

HeinOnline is a subscription-based legal resource with nearly 2,700 academic and legal journals. It looks good; however, here's the problem.

Again, you have to purchase access to this.

When it's \$30 for access, you don't want to have to do that, and I noticed that 7 out of 20 of our results that we're finding here are limited-access results, like that HeinOnline article.

That's 35% of our results.

Another thing that I found was this. It looks fairly interesting, although it's fairly old—2001.

This is actually a paper written by a student in a class, and I'm assuming that's probably a graduate class. It might be a really good paper, but for our purposes it's not scholarly.

So, to recap: you may find yourself wanting to use Google Scholar anyway.

I would again caution you against it, but if you do, sign out of your account. If you use Google and you have a Gmail account, sign out of it first and clear your browser cache, or use a different browser.

If you're using Google, maybe you want to try Firefox, Safari, Internet Explorer, or Edge. Use a different browser that you don't normally use to get less personalized results.

And if you're off campus, you can go to our resource page, search for Google Scholar in the search box at the top right of the library homepage, and we've got a way that you can set it up. Watch the video on how to set up Google Scholar from where you're at if you're off campus.

My very last tip is this:

If you're in doubt, please don't hesitate to get in contact with me. I'm more than happy to try to answer your questions and get you good sources.