

# What is Google Scholar, how does it work, & how can you get articles for free through UCLA Library?

Google Scholar (GS) is a single database that allows you to search for some books and some articles. I always tell students to use whatever is helpful, but learn the limitations of all research tools and pose questions, including the following:

- Which topics does it cover?
- What types of materials does it index or provide?
- What time period does it cover?

Some people are skeptical about using GS because Google does not reveal the scope of GS—i.e., it does not provide complete answers to the three questions above. Here are some articles about GS:

Jascó, P. Google Scholar's Ghost Authors. *Library Journal* v. 134 no. 18 (November 1 2009) p. 26-7 [NOTE: Available for FREE through the UCLA Library's website because the Library pays for a subscription to this journal.]

Jasco takes off from Geoffrey Nunberg's August 31, 2009 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Google's Book Search: A Disaster for Scholars <http://chronicle.com/article/Googles-Book-Search-A/48245/>

He (Jasco) says that Google ignored metadata provided by publishers and developed their own crawlers to capture data about articles, and as a result, citation counts are skewed. This means that Google Scholar citations may be incorrect in a number of ways.

Example of the problem:

1. Go to GS/Advanced Search
2. In the "Return articles written by" box, type login. On 11/20/10, this search retrieved 9,670 results. Jasco reports similar results from author searches for P Options=Payment Options; from TOCs: B Methods

In addition to the problems Jasco points out, other limitations to GS include the following:

1. We do not know which periodicals it indexes, how far back they go, or which books it lists.
2. We also do not know what its ranking algorithm is—what makes some items pop up to the top in search results.

What we do know is that Google draws some of its periodical results from free databases like PubMed and ERIC, both paid for by U.S. tax dollars, but freely available to everyone. Some UCLA students also do not realize that the reason they can get many articles for free through GS is that the UCLA Library pays for subscriptions to many online periodicals. These are all important caveats to pass along to students.

But, there are some handy tricks and tips you can use with GS to improve your results.

SET PREFERENCES: For off-campus searching—set for University of California, Los Angeles, so you can get articles for free through the UCLA Library, i.e., by clicking on UC-eLinks.

Note: In addition to setting your GS preferences for University of California, Los Angeles, in order to get articles for free, you will also need to set up your web browser for the Bruin OnLine proxy server or download VPN software from the BOL website: <http://www.bol.ucla.edu/services/>

Once you have done this, UC-eLinks will appear in your GS results. When you click on a UC-eLinks link, you will be asked for your UCLA ID and password.

USE ADVANCED SCHOLAR SEARCH:

- Can limit to a disciplinary area
- Can do a more exact search
- Date range; published in particular journal; written by...

Example:

1. Click on Advanced Scholar Search
2. Search for “information literacy” as an “Exact phrase”: 44,700 results
3. In the pull-down menu, change from “Articles and patents” to “Articles excluding patents”: 42,300 results
4. In the next pull-down menu, change from “anytime” to “since 1991”: 18,400 results
5. Now, restrict to “since 2005”: 16,200 results
6. Scroll down through the first page of results, look at each item, and pose questions:
  1. How has GS ranked them—By date of publication? By number of times cited? Alphabetically by title? Alphabetically by author? By an
  2. How accurate and up to date are “Cited by” figures?

Note: GS describes its ranking system as follows:

*“How are documents ranked?”*

*Google Scholar aims to rank documents the way researchers do, weighing the full text of each document, where it was published, who it was written by, as well as how often and how recently it has been cited in other scholarly literature.”*

<http://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/about.html>

- [8 surprising things I learnt about Google Scholar](#) – Musings about Librarianship – June 11, 2014

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