

This is the first installment of a new library blog on information literacy!

Today I'm writing about the popular search engine Google Scholar. Google Scholar is different from library databases in several ways. Library databases utilize key words, titles, authors, and subject terms organized and searchable through Boolean search phrases. This allows the user to search and receive results regardless of their past search history.

Google Scholar uses a different type of algorithm. We can discover their criteria and search methods at "[Search Tips: Content Coverage](#)". This somewhat intuitive search method can return relevant results, often containing materials such as conference notes or dissertations that you don't find on your average library search through edited journals. Google Scholar results are not necessarily reproducible. This means that if the user returns at a later date or has shared their search terms with someone else, the results of that new search will be different. Google Scholar ranks articles according to relevance, but also according to which articles have most frequently been quoted by other published works. This creates an effect where new research is less likely to be read, used, and shared.

Materials found on Google Scholar are not curated. This means that there are no Google Scholar police monitoring the criteria of materials before providing access to them. These materials include articles that can be open source, but of questionable review process. This type of non-curated environment has caused a rise in predatory journals. Publishers can create a website and charge authors a large sum to publish in their journal. Rather than carefully selecting quality materials and promoting the edited collection on its academic merit, these publishers gain an income from authors to avoid charging a fee to users, thus making their material open access. This increases the likelihood that the journal will be read by struggling students and increases circulation of the material. With a selection system based on profit rather than academic merit, articles which should have been weeded out through peer review can be published with little oversight. That's how articles about Star Trek episodes get published in "peer reviewed" journals.

Yes, Star Trek Voyager was in the spotlight once again after an author (who named characters from the TV show as coauthors) used an episode as content for research and submitted the paper for publication. The article was published in a scientific peer reviewed journal and accepted by four others, thus exposing predatory publishing practices and giving notice to the academic community that not all peer reviewed materials are created equal. For more information on the Star Trek paper or predatory journals in general, read this article made available through the National Institutes of Health: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6515480/> , this paper <https://web.archive.org/web/20131011011904/http://www.sciencemag.org/content/342/6154/60.full> or this list created by a librarian at the University of Colorado <https://archive.fo/6EByy> . (This list does not necessarily represent the opinion of Southeastern Oklahoma State University librarians; it is merely information that may be useful to those studying the possibility of predatory journals.)

All in all, Google Scholar is a search engine that will find unique and interesting materials, most of them scholarly. Search results, though, should be treated with the same critical eye as any other web resource. Remember, many articles found on Google Scholar that are not in the library databases can usually be obtained through interlibrary loan for faculty, staff, and students with no extra fee. Let us know if we can provide an article for your research needs on our [interlibrary loan form](#).

For more information literacy news, keep a lookout for my next blog post in November! As always, instruction librarians are available to help faculty and students with information literacy sessions, tutorials, and library guides. Just shoot me an email or fill out the [instruction request form](#) on our [library home page](#) if you would like to schedule instruction for your class.

Thanks for reading!