Welcome to this video workshop on how to Google like a Scholar. After you watch this video, you will be able to explain the relevance of Wikipedia and Google Scholar content for academic research. You will be able to define the elements that make Wikipedia and Google Scholar inappropriate as your only stop for research. We will also look at how to locate resources that have similar features as Wikipedia but are more credible through the library website, and finally how to perform more effective searches using Google Scholar.

Let’s start with Wikipedia. Why do we use it? What are the features that make it so appealing? For starters it is often quite convenient, usually being the first or second result when you search for a topic in Google. It has a table of contents that makes finding information within the article easy, and organizes that information into relevant chunks. It provides context for a topic through dates, references and connections to other information that may also be useful. There is usually a bibliography that can lead you to other sources as well as hyperlinks right within the article itself. Finally, there is content on almost any topic you can think of. However, there is one major problem with Wikipedia, who wrote the article? The fact that we are unsure of the credentials and authority of the writer makes the use of Wikipedia inappropriate for academic research. Since the writer or content provider could be a subject specialist, or your neighbour next door, this makes the credibility of Wikipedia suspect when looking for information. So how can we use it then? Wikipedia is a great place to start and a terrible place to end. It is often really hard to start the research and writing process without having some idea of the context of the topic, which Wikipedia can provide. You can also use Wikipedia to get an idea about some of the background information on a topic such as the main keywords, date ranges and even some sources in the bibliography. The main point is that it should never be used as a source by itself and you always want to check the information with other credited sources whenever possible.

The library has some great resources that have many of the elements we like about Wikipedia without the downside of not knowing the authority. While background sources are often not cited in academic research, they are a good place to check for definitions and dates as well as providing links to other resources. Let’s take a quick peak at one of these.

We are going to be using Credo Reference as an example. To check out what reference sources the library has available you start from the library website under the ‘Find’ column and select Online Encyclopedias etc. Here you will get information on how to search for reference sources in the library catalogue and through the library website. On the right hand side of this page you have a table of contents on different resources that will help you find many types of information. Right now we are going to look at Credo Reference, which is the first option under Encyclopedias etc., by provider. Credo Reference is a multi-resource tool that pulls together lots of information that you can use.
To start, just type in whatever keyword or topic you are looking for. Start with the Topic Page; this will give you many of the types of resources that you can use to understand the context of your topic or keyword as well as leading you to other sources. You will get a summary article, a formal citation, mind map of the word, which can lead you to other keywords, and related topics to search. Below this you will find images, journal articles and books that are all connected to the library catalogue. This is a great place to start your research for all those things like context, keywords, dates and other resources.

Now let’s move on to Google Scholar. There is no denying that the body of information available on Google is enormous. However, there are a few things you want to keep in mind when using Google and specifically Google Scholar when doing academic research. The first is that while it may seem that Google has access to everything it does not. In fact providers will hide their content from Google on purpose so you could be missing out on a huge chunk of information. Also, Google’s ranking system means that the sources that are more academic in nature may be further down the results list, not because they are less relevant or less scholarly, but because they have been outranked in terms of keywords and referral links in other sources.

So how do you make Google Scholar a more effective tool for you? Use the cited by and related articles options to find other content and determine how the article has been used in that area of research. If you are seeing large numbers beside the cited by link, like in this example, you can probably assume that it has relevant information. Since this feature will show you articles that have cited the original article you can see what other research has stemmed from this one that may also be useful to you. If an article is not immediately available in the link provided there may be other versions that are available through the library. We will go over how to access Google Scholar content through the library shortly.

Google Scholar also has an advanced search option that gives you more ways to find specific information. If you know what you are looking for, or are doing a search that needs more detail, this might be a more effective option in terms of finding relevant information. Stop words are all of those extra words that we often type into to Google such as “When was the French Revolution?” In Google Scholar however these extra words are going to make it less likely to return results that are relevant to you. These words send Google more information than is needed and can end up bringing you results that are ranked based on the inclusion of these words rather than the keywords that you primarily want to search for.

A quick glance at the URL of returned sources can tell you a lot. If it is an educational, government or an organizations website this can automatically tell you something about the content. All three of these types of website, but primarily the first two, will generally have to maintain a certain standard for their content versus something that is on a regular website. Using quotation marks will ensure that you find the exact words appearing within the quotation in that exact order within your search results. Otherwise what happens is you will be getting results for each of those words individually rather than together as a whole idea. So for the first example you will get more relevant results by searching “full-day kindergarten” or “mandatory sentencing” than searching for those words without quotation marks. Once more, there are lots of quick ways to use Google Scholar more effectively in order to find content that is both relevant and scholarly.
Now how do you actually get Google Scholar to connect to library resources? If you are using the library computers, Google Scholar will already give you the option of accessing the results through the library on the right hand side of the screen. If you access Google Scholar through the library website it will also provide you with options to connect to library resources on the right hand side, but you have to go directly through the library homepage to connect to Google Scholar in order for this to work. From the homepage, under the Find column you select Articles and Databases, then Articles and Databases by title. The databases are listed alphabetically so you would select the E to G tab at the top of the page and then choose Google Scholar. If you are off campus or you want to connect Google Scholar’s content to the library on your personal computer you can change the settings of Google so that it knows you are a Lakehead student. From the Google Scholar homepage, at the top of the screen select Settings. From settings you will select Library Links on the left hand side of the page. Now you simply type in Lakehead University Library and save. Now when you search Google Scholar from your home computer you will be able to connect right to the library.

The next thing to consider is how do you actually get the article you are looking for in order to read it? To get articles from Google Scholar you click on the “Get it at Lakehead” link. This will take you to a separate page that outlines where the article is available, if it is available in the library. Simply select a link that says “Full text-available” which will lead you to the full text. Often you will have to download the pdf rather than it opening in this new window. Don’t forget there are lots of options to help you with your research.

If you need more help, check out our reference services in person, by phone, by email or chat at any of our Lakehead University Libraries and don’t forget to like us on Facebook and Twitter.