Google Like a Pro

Using open access sources online can be an effective way to start your research. You will want to use these as a launching ground, to propel you into more academic research later.

First, let's talk about Google. Google search engine is built to deliver results based on factors such as the words you type in, concepts related to those words, and even your previous search history. With a few tricks, you can tailor your Google search to return more specific results.

Use quotation marks to search for exact phrases. Use an asterisk as a placeholder to search for a word you don’t know or can’t remember. Use the minus sign to eliminate ideas or words from your search results. You can search a specific website for something you’re looking for, or if you find a website you like, you can search for related websites. You can even use keyword searching techniques much like you would in a library database. We’ll talk more about how to do this later.

While searching on Google, pay attention to the words, conversations, and ideas surrounding your topic. This background information can give you direction when you approach more complex searching in library databases.

Another popular place to start learning about a topic is Wikipedia, which can be used for background research in a few different ways. First, you can narrow your topic by searching for sub-topics within a Wikipedia article. Second, check out linked pages, Wikipedia or other, for topics surrounding your area of interest. This might open up a research path you hadn’t considered before. Third, explore the bibliography section of Wikipedia articles. Open hyperlinks, read documents, and evaluate these sources to see if they lead you to more scholarly, reliable sources you can cite in your paper.

Make sure to use both Google and Wikipedia in conjunction with other searching techniques the library offers to give you a full background picture of your topic.