

RTC Library Search Tips: Google Scholar and Keyword Searches

Additional contrasts between Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) and the ordinary google.com

Last week, when comparing these two databases, we looked at how the *types* of materials differ. This week, we will also compare *search strategies*.

Google.com is, in some ways, a highly unusual database. The huge amounts of money they earn through advertising also gives Google the money to develop some amazing features (and of course, the database also has major weaknesses). However, we cannot take this for granted, since most databases – including Google Scholar! – require more persistence. Let's look at practical examples.

Variant spellings: Color versus colour

You can type either the British or American spelling, and google.com is 'smart' – it realizes you are probably interested in both (and it also even guesses that you may have a concern about the spelling difference – see the top result)

The screenshot shows a search result for "Colour or Color—Which Is Correct? | Grammarly". Below the title are links for "About Featured Snippets" and "Feedback". Underneath is a "People also ask" section with four questions: "What are the 16 colors?", "What is English Colour?", "How do Canadians spell color?", and "What is Colour in simple words?". Each question has a dropdown arrow. A "Feedback" link is at the bottom right of the section.

Videos



MNEK - Colour
(Official Video) ft.
Hailee Steinfeld

MNEKVEVO
YouTube - Jun 28, 2018



The Colors Song ~
Learn the Colors /
Colours ~ LEARN ...

Natural English
YouTube - Apr 14, 2013



What's the Colour?

KidsTV123
YouTube - Jun 22, 2016

In fact, even a misspelling may work: you can type *colouur* and Google will tell you that it is “showing results for **color**” (which will also include *colour*).

At present, this will not work in Google Scholar. A search for *color* will give you a totally different set of results from *colour*! Luckily, there is a solution – you can type this in the search box:

color OR colour

By putting OR in capital letters, it becomes a *command*, telling Google Scholar that we want to see both spellings.

Implications for Bhutan

This is not just a matter of British versus American English, but affects many other areas too, such as transliteration from one language to another. We are just focusing on spellings this week (not other kinds of terminology), but let’s look at an example.

If we do a search for Bumtang, Google Scholar helpfully asks us “Did you mean **Bumthang**?”.

However, Google is not so smart about every dzongkhag. I was quite interested to see how many scholarly articles there are about birds in Wangdue Phodrang. However, I got a different set of results for the following searches:

birds "wangdue phodrang"

birds wangduephodrang

birds wangdiphodrang

(I also tried *birds wangdu phodrang*, but I didn’t find as much)

In search #2, Google Scholar is partly ‘smart’ in realizing that Wangduephodrang is probably the same as Wangdue Phodrang, but on the other two searches, Google is a lot less smart.

Closing Remarks

Humans naturally like shortcuts. If you are used to google.com, it may seem like you suddenly have a lot of new things to think about on Google Scholar and, frankly, nearly all other databases. However, persistence in searching can improve our analytical skills and help us in many areas – not just finding the best research for our papers. Good luck, and if you find any interesting or surprising things when trying different searches, please let us know!

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