

How to Use Google for Research

If you use Google to find online sources, here are some basic “dos” and “don’ts.”

DO

1. Check out **Google Scholar**. You can access Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.com/>. It works just like Google but searches exclusively for scholarly sources written by medical, legal, and academic professionals.
2. Type at least **three or four key terms** in the Google search bar. The more words you type in the search bar, the more manageable your results list will be.
3. Look for websites sponsored by government agencies, universities, and non-profit organizations. These sites typically offer more reliable information. To limit your search results to these kinds of sites, simply type “site:” and then either **“.edu,” “.gov,” or “.org”** immediately after the colon.
 - Example: *school Pennsylvania attendance policy site:.edu*
 - Example: *free speech self-expression site:.gov*
 - Example: *shelter animal rescue site:.org*
4. Put **quotation marks around specific phrases** when you type them in the search bar.
 - Example: *“Bill of Rights” “freedom of speech” “No Child Left Behind”*



DON'T

1. Type in a whole sentence or question. For instance, you’ll find much more about school attendance policies if you type the words “attendance,” “policy,” “school,” and “Pennsylvania” in the search bar than if you type “What are some school attendance policies in the Pennsylvania school system?”
2. Get frustrated if you can’t find anything on your first attempt. Often, it’s a matter of finding the right search-word combination. A few years ago, when I was writing a paper on the Geico Caveman commercials, I found nothing useful when I typed in “Geico” and “Caveman.” But when I tried “humor,” “advertisement,” and “effect,” all sorts of relevant information popped up, including information about the Geico Caveman ads. So don't give up too quickly. Keep trying different word combinations and search terms; eventually, you'll find what you're looking for.

A Word on Wikipedia

Wikipedia is not a bad place to begin looking for information, but you shouldn’t drop anchor here. If you’re unfamiliar with a concept or term associated with your topic, try learning more with Wikipedia. Entries are more carefully monitored now, and information is more frequently checked for accuracy. Unfortunately, not every entry is reliable. Erroneous information occasionally slips through and may go unchecked for months. Moreover, Wikipedia is not considered a credible source by most professors, so I recommend that you NOT use it for any college-level paper. **Use Wikipedia ONLY to get started, and ONLY if you need basic information on your topic.** Use it to learn about people, terms, or concepts

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associated with your topic. Scroll to the bottom of an entry to find hyperlinks to other sources. But as soon as you've gotten a better understanding of your topic, it's time to move on to more credible sources.