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Book Reviews (editorially-reviewed)

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Brown, C. C. (2017). ***Harnessing the Power of Google: What Every Researcher Should Know***. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

The book contains useful information not only on Google Scholar, but also on Google itself (Google Web), Google Books, and Google resources such as Google Images and other “hacks.” As Brown notes in his introduction:

This book is not intended to cover every feature of Google. We intentionally gloss over Google Earth, most of Google widgets, Google personalization features, linkages to Google+ and the other Google properties and even some of the search capabilities that have little to do with academic research. (pp. xiii-xvi)

This is an entirely reasonable focus for a book intended to appeal largely to academic librarians.

The book consists of 10 chapters that reflect its intent: 1. Searching generally; 2. How Google works; 3. Searching Google Web; 4. Power searching for primary sources using Google Web; 5. Google Scholar and scholarly content; 6. Google Books; 7. Google as a complement to library tools; 8. Academic research hacks; 9. Case studies in academic research; and 10. Searching for statistics.

As a Google searcher, my default is Google Scholar, but on occasion, particularly for known item searches, I give Google Web a go. Brown reminds readers that a searcher can use Google Web creatively by restricting searches to site and file types.

As a government information librarian at the University of Denver, Brown is frequently asked to find information produced either by governments or by organizations. One of his best tips is to restrict a Google search by site. For example, site:gc.ca will restrict results to Canadian federal publications (not an example from the book, which uses American examples almost exclusively). While I knew about the use of site:, Brown’s book taught me that if I wanted to search by country, Wikipedia has a list of [top-level internet domains](#). Who would have guessed that in order to restrict a search to material from the Bahamas, all you must do is type site:bs?

The other command Brown emphasizes in the Google Web section, particularly in the chapter on primary sources, is filetype:. Searchers can use this technique to find, for example, PDFs by searching filetype:pdf. This is particularly useful when searching for documents. As Brown notes, “These files tend to be substantive and valuable for research” (p. 40). The book also contains a handy list of other file types that searchers may find useful, such as .ppt or .pptx (PowerPoint), .xls or .xlsx (Excel), .doc or .docx (Word), and so on.

In these early chapters, Brown includes some other information of interest. When a searcher retrieves millions of hits, Google limits the visible results to no more than 1,000. To test this, click on Search Settings after running a search and limit the results to 100 per page to see how many pages of results are available. Here is another feature: after discussing “phrase searching,” Brown notes:

A variation ... is something Google calls verbatim searching. The syntax is *verbatim:your search terms* There is a significant difference between verbatim searching and quotation (phrase) searching. Searching with quotes around terms finds exact strings. But doing verbatim searching finds all the search terms, with the exact spelling, but not necessarily just as a string. Thus, verbatim searching will produce more results. (p.22)

The chapters on Google Scholar searching proved equally informative and provided a useful reminder that Google Scholar searches the full text of documents, when available, not only of articles, but also of books and theses (although, unfortunately, a searcher looking specifically for journal articles cannot exclude these from the results). However, Brown himself misses a couple of important tips for searching Google Scholar. Searchers do not have to click on Advanced Search to use the OR command—they can use OR from the starting search screen as long as they place OR in caps, for example, money OR cash. In addition, when using a string of concepts, such as money OR cash Canada, searchers can use the intitle: command to restrict the search to those results containing the keywords in the title, for example, intitle:Canada. In each example, there is no space following the colon. Still, the section on Google Scholar contains slews of other useful information on, for example, setting up links to local institutions’ content for anyone studying off site (pp. 51-52).

I hardly ever search Google Books, but I think my practice will change. Books published before 1923 are available full-text and are free; books scanned after that date are typically available with only partial full-text, are not normally free, and may not be included in the collection. Nevertheless, Brown observes that when searching in a catalogue, students are restricted to the metadata the catalogue contains: author, title, subject headings, content notes, etc.

The beauty of Google Books is that it searches the full text of the books (and serials), which means that researchers looking for a topic may find it discussed within a chapter in Google Books but not in a catalogue search. The trick then is to go back to the catalogue to see if the library has the book and, if not, request it on interlibrary loan.

The chapter on research hacks, or what Brown refers to as “clever shortcuts for access to information,” (p. 97) does not, of course, cover all that exist—no [Google Barrel rolls](#) discussed here. One hack discussed at some length is the “no country redirect,” which formerly allowed searchers to search as though they were outside the country they were in. Unfortunately, according to Google, this was eliminated in 2017, and now researchers who wish to search Google in other than their home country can limit to a specific region in Search Preferences. Still available and useful are tips on searching Google Images and Google Translate, and on searching for legal cases and patents.

This book references some resources on Google searching that are not findable by simple [Google Searches](#) and, as a book that combines in one place lots of information that will be of use to all academic librarians as they use Google, Google Scholar, and Google Books as research tools, it is a valuable resource. But, as Brown reminds us, Google complements but does not replace other library tools.

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