

# So You Want to Use Google

## Comparing PubMed, CINAHL, Google & Google Scholar

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### Background

This began when a faculty member wanted ammunition to show his students that using Google was not the best choice. He was “appalled” that his students were using Google as their main resource, and asked for information comparing Google with other databases. A search of the literature brought some basic information, but no real comparison. At that point, I decided to do my own comparison searching. The original project was in 2008, These are the results, updated for 2011.

### Methods and Comments

- Each search was done using text words; CINAHL was searched in Basic search mode
- When PubMed and CINAHL were searched in advanced mode, using MeSH, results were different
- When “Pompe Disease” was searched as a phrase in Google and Google Scholar, the results were significantly lower, but still overwhelming
- In all the searches, the top results were relevant; however, Google results tended to be web sites rather than articles
- In Google Scholar, unless it was limited by date, it could take many pages before there was a current citation
- No matter how many citations are retrieved in Google Scholar, it only shows the first 1,000

#### Asthma in Pregnancy (4/15/2011)

	No. of Citations	First Citation
PubMed	2,329 (1,491 in advanced search mode)	April 12, 2011; BMC Public Health
CINAHL	666 (540 in advanced search mode)	March, 2011; Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
Google	15,300,000	1/20/2010; emedicinehealth
Google Scholar	107,000	May 1993; American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology

#### Marijuana and Lung Cancer (4/15/2011)

	No. of Citations	First Citation
PubMed	87 (39 in advanced search mode)	Feb. 24, 2011; Drug and Alcohol Dependence
CINAHL	7 (8 in advanced search mode)	April 2010; Annals of Epidemiology
Google	1,320,000	Jan. 19, 2011; About.com
Google Scholar	14,3000	Jul-Sep 1994; Journal of Psychoactive Drugs

#### Pompe Disease (4/15/2011)

	No. of Citations	First Citation
PubMed	1,176	May 2011; Muscle & Nerve
CINAHL	70	Dec. 2010; Dysphagia
Google	111,000 (8,120 when searched as a phrase)	May 28, 2010; National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
Google Scholar	15,600 (5,480 when searched as a phrase)	May 2004; Pediatrics

### Why use PubMed or CINAHL

- Well-indexed with controlled vocabulary and ability to “explode” terms
- Mainly peer-reviewed journals that are pre-selected; know which titles are being searched
- Can easily select and save/download /print citations
- Ability to sort and limit articles in various ways
- Can save searches for automatic updates

### Why use Google or Google Scholar

- Google may search the entire article, so may pick up obscure topics more easily
- Includes books as well as journals
- Includes journals that may not be included in PubMed or CINAHL
- More grey literature included

### Conclusions

There are times when using Google or Google Scholar is the way to go, especially for information that is hard to find. However, you can almost guarantee that retrieval in Google/Google Scholar will be huge and include a great many non-relevant citations. Using databases such as PubMed or CINAHL, especially when using the controlled vocabulary, will generally result in more relevant citations and fewer non-relevant ones.

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