



Not all places to search for information are created equal!

When it comes to finding information independently and going beyond your reading list of recommended material, you have a range of different information discovery tools to choose from. All will have strengths and weaknesses.

Some search tools are most appropriate for when you first start out and others are designed for more targeted searching. Which one is best for you depends on the context you are using it in. Before you search you need to **think critically** about which tool will best help you to find the information you need.

Card matching activity

Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of different information discovery tools by matching the description of the tool to the relevant tool. The choices each time are either Google, Google Scholar, databases, or the Articles and more tab within StarPlus.

Discovery tools and answers

- 1. This web search engine for “scholarly” materials is easy to access and search, but likely to return a large number of results - some of which may not be relevant**
 - **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! It is available via Google and has the same search box as Google Web Search when you use the simple search. It searches the World Wide Web for “scholarly” materials.
 - **The correct answer is Google Scholar. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google Scholar is available via Google and has the same familiar search box as Google Web Search when you use the simple search. It searches the World Wide Web for what Google calls “scholarly” materials. However, it does not have the same powerful advanced search functionality as academic databases so it often returns thousands of results, many of which will not be relevant.
- 2. Simple way to search for academic e-resources subscribed to by the University Library but it can return a large number of results. Some of these may not be relevant.**
 - **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This index, within StarPlus, is a great starting point for your search for academic information, which allows you to search a wide range of records.
 - **The correct answer is the Articles and more tab in StarPlus. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Primo Central from the Articles and more tab within StarPlus, is a great starting point for your search for academic information which allows you to search a wide range of records. However, it is not as powerful as academic databases and therefore can retrieve unmanageable numbers of results.



3. Not designed for academic research.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! Resources found by this search engine are retrieved from the whole World Wide Web and are not necessarily academic materials.
- **The correct answer is Google. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! A lot of documents used in academic research are subscription based and not available on the World Wide Web and therefore Google won't be able to find them.

4. Contain individual records describing journal articles and other academic documents.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! These academic search tools contain individual entries called records. Each record describes an individual document (e.g. a journal article, book, or book chapter). These records can be searched using your chosen search terms.
- **The correct answer is Databases. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! A database is a file containing individual entries called records. Each record describes an individual document (e.g. a journal article, book, or book chapter). These records can be searched using your chosen search terms. Databases usually have an online interface which you can use to perform your search. These are not accessible to the public but you can access them because the University Library subscribes to them and provides access.

5. This web search engine will return results from a variety of subject areas but it is less useful for some disciplines.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This freely available search engine searches a wide range of materials from different subject areas.
- **The correct answer is Google Scholar. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google Scholar searches a wide range of materials from different subject areas. Some subject areas have lots of articles available, for others (e.g. law) you may need to use a subject-specific database.

6. No publically available list of which sources it searches - key journals from your subject area may not be included.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This search tool is owned by a commercial organisation and they don't want to reveal exactly which documents it searches in case others could use this information to figure out how their search algorithm works.
- **The correct answer is Google Scholar. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google Scholar is owned by Google, a commercial organisation, and they don't want to reveal exactly which documents it searches in case others could use this information to figure out how their search algorithm works. This is problematic in an academic context as it means you can't be sure that Google Scholar is searching all the key information sources in your discipline. This is one reason why the Library wouldn't recommend you rely solely on Google Scholar for searching for academic resources.



7. Results also appear in the 'Everything' tab in StarPlus.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! StarPlus - the library catalogue has three search tabs: 'Everything', 'University Collections' and 'Articles and More'. When you search in the 'Everything' tab, you see a combined set of search results from the other tabs.
- **The correct answer is the Articles and more tab in StarPlus. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Articles and More is one of the search tabs within StarPlus - the library catalogue. When you search in the 'Everything' tab, you see a combined set of search results from the 'University Collections' and 'Articles and More' tabs. However, not every article the Library has access to is searchable through 'Articles and More' so always double check by searching for the journal name in 'Everything' or 'University Collections'.

8. Advanced search functionality to help you retrieve a manageable set of relevant results.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! These search tools, which the University Library pays for you to access, are specifically designed for searching records of academic information. Their detailed records and advanced search functionality are more likely to give you a manageable set of relevant results than free alternatives like Google Scholar.
- **The correct answer is Databases. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Each record within a database contains lots of information about the document it describes including author(s), title of article, abstract, year of publication and keywords which have been manually chosen to describe it. Databases' powerful advanced search functionality enables you to combine search terms to create very specific searches of this information and hopefully retrieve a manageable set of relevant results.

9. Results are ranked by popularity, not quality.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! The most clicked on results move up the search rankings of this search engine.
- **The correct answer is Google. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! The more clicks a result gets on Google, the higher up the rankings it appears.

10. Multidisciplinary search tool - usefulness varies by subject.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This is a multidisciplinary search tool which searches for e-resources on a wide range of topics, all from within StarPlus.
- **The correct answer is the Articles and more tab in StarPlus. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! 'Articles and More' is a multidisciplinary search tool which searches for e-resources on a wide range of topics. Some subject areas have lots of articles available whereas for others (e.g. law) you may need to use a subject-specific database.



11. Can be useful to access articles from journals the Library doesn't subscribe to.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This freely available resource can search the World Wide Web for academic documents.
- **The correct answer is Google Scholar. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google Scholar can search the World Wide Web for academic documents so it may be able to find copies of articles which authors have shared on the Web. If so, you can access them even if the University of Sheffield Library does not have a subscription to the journal it was published in.

12. Find recommended databases for your subject via the subject guides or search for them by name in StarPlus.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! With so many of these you could use for searching for academic information, the Library has drawn up lists of those relevant to each subject area to help you choose wisely.
- **The correct answer is Databases. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! As there are many multidisciplinary and subject specific databases available, the Library has outlined which ones are recommended in your subject guide. You can also access them by searching for them by name in StarPlus.

13. Can be useful to find information such as reports, institutional web pages, Government information etc.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! A lot of governments and organisations make documents such as annual reports publically available on the World Wide Web.
- **The correct answer is Google. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! A lot of this information is freely available on the World Wide Web. Google is one web search engine which can help you find it.

14. Set your 'Library Links' to access articles subscribed to by the University of Sheffield Library.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This freely available search engine won't know you're a member of the University of Sheffield unless you tell it so.
- **The correct answer is Google Scholar. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Under 'Settings' you can link Google Scholar to the University of Sheffield Library's catalogue so you can make sure you access the published version of the article, where available.

15. Be aware of the version of the article you are seeing. Results can include pre-prints, author copy and final copy.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This freely available search engine can retrieve unpublished versions of academic articles from the World Wide Web.
- **The correct answer is Google Scholar. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Before an article is published in an academic journal it will go through a peer-review process and the author may need to amend their original version. However, the author can post their original version, which may



include uncorrected errors, on the Web. Google Scholar will retrieve these, where relevant. If possible, make sure you are reading the most up-to-date, peer-reviewed version of the article. If you can't access this then think critically before including unpublished material in your academic work.

16. This e-resource search tool within StarPlus searches an index containing individual records about journal articles and other academic documents.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This search tool is one of the tabs in StarPlus. It allows you to search an index of individual entries called records. Each record describes an individual document (e.g. a journal article, book, or book chapter). These records can be searched using your chosen search terms.
- **The correct answer is the Articles and more tab in StarPlus. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! The Articles and More tab searches an index of records of e-resources. An index is a file containing individual entries called records. Each record describes an individual document (e.g. a journal article, book, or book chapter). These records can be searched using your chosen search terms.

17. Can limit search by file type and domain e.g. .ppt, .pptx, .pdf, ac.uk, .org.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This search engine has features that allow you to find particular types of files which others have shared online or to limit your search results to websites from particular kinds of organisations.
- **The correct answer is Google. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google has features that allow you to refine your internet search to certain internet domain suffixes or file types. This can be useful if you are looking for specific types of documents or information from certain kinds of organisations.

18. Can be multidisciplinary or subject specific.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! These search tools enable you to search only material which is specific to your subject or, if you use a multidisciplinary one, they can enable you to search for information from across the disciplines.
- **The correct answer is Databases. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Many databases exist and the University Library gives you access to over 400. Some enable you to search records of documents covering a wide range of subjects - known as multidisciplinary; or they may focus on a certain subject and are known as subject-specific.

19. Search formula changes regularly so the same search performed on different days may produce different results.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This search engine uses an undisclosed and constantly updated algorithm to rank webpages, meaning that a web page can appear as the top result one day and on page three the next.



Discovering information beyond your reading list: choosing where to search for information.

Discovering

Understanding

Questioning

Referencing

Creating

Communicating

- **The correct answer is Google. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google uses an undisclosed and constantly updated algorithm to rank webpages, meaning that a web page can appear as the top result one day and on page three the next.

20. The full text articles of search results displayed are not necessarily available. Use the Find It button to check University access.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! These indices of records of academic documents are not limited to content that the University of Sheffield subscribes to or owns. Therefore these may contain records of items that the Library does not have full text access to, but there should always be an abstract which will give you an idea what the item is about.
- **The correct answer is Databases. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Databases are not limited to searching content that the University of Sheffield subscribes to or owns. Therefore these may contain records of items that the Library does not have full text access to, but there should always be an abstract which will give you an idea what the item is about. If you decide you want to read the full text you can request it through interlibrary loan.

21. Results are personalised. Not everybody will get the same search results.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! This search engine uses cookies to track what you look at and will tailor results accordingly.
- **The correct answer is Google. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! Google uses cookies to make search results more personal to you by tracking your activity online and tailoring the results you get accordingly.

22. By default the full text articles of all results are available.

- **Incorrect answer feedback** - Guess again! The Library have set this up so that when you're searching for articles (and more!) by default you only see results which you have access to as a University of Sheffield student.
- **The correct answer is the Articles and more tab in StarPlus. Correct answer feedback** - Correct! When you're searching for articles (and more!) within StarPlus, the Library have made the default search results those which the Library has access to. You can search for articles without full-text by using the options available on the results screen in StarPlus.

Well done! You have completed this activity.

You have reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of different information discovery tools and you should now feel more confident to identify the most appropriate places to search for the information you need.

If you would like further guidance on where to find information for your research project you can:





- Look at your subject guide – <https://sheffield.libguides.com/>
- Book and appointment with your department's Liaison Librarian – <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/libstaff/slist>

You have reached the end of this resource.

Why not look at some related resources. You can:

- Book onto a workshop, such as Questioning and Evaluating Information – <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/infoskillsworkshops/index>
- Take an online tutorial, such as:
 - Evaluating information and critical thinking - <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/idlt/questioning>
 - Successful database searching – <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/idlt/discovering>

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