

Your essential 'how-to' guide to using Google Books

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Google has been the prime force in the development of article-finding, bookfinding and citations-tracking systems free over the internet, having ambitiously declared its mission to 'to organize the world's information.' Less than a decade after its founding, the company's twin academic research engines Google Scholar (for journal articles and other academic papers) and Google Books now dominate the university sector. Here we present a simple 'how-to' guide to using the software.

Step 1: Go to <http://books.google.co.uk>. Alternatively go to the main Google site and pull down the menu tab labelled 'more' on the left of the Google menu bar and go to Books directly in the options menu.

Step 2: Enter the author name in double quotes, as "Firstname Lastname" and search. You can also try it as "Initial Lastname". Search using the 'Listwise' (default) option that shows a snippet about each item found.

Step 3: When the Books search results come back make a note of how many items are returned in the initial count given at the top of the search list. It is generally better to go with the version of the author name that yields most results.



Step 4: Check that the search process is producing a close fit to the author you want and is not cluttered up with works from many other authors. This is easy if the author name is distinctive. If the author name is a commonplace one use 'Advanced Search' to exclude 'confuser' author names and perhaps to require a field-specific word to be present – e.g. entering 'politics' for a political scientist, should capture almost all their work but exclude non-political items.

Step 5: When you have a listing you are happy with, print the citations pages off and go through manually excluding any remaining 'confuser' entries. Unless you have a very common author name or a great deal of citations, this takes hardly any time to do. (You may also wish to separate out and count those references that are to the author as a book editor rather than to the author's own writings).

Step 6: Always click through to the final Google Books page, and you will get a completely different citations count, that is a fraction of the initial count. This appears to be the count of citations excluding multiple cites. You will need to deduct from it a number for the entries you have hand deleted.

Step 7: If the author name is impossible to untangle from a multitude of similar names, even in the same field, you can try repeating the search above using their main book or journal titles as the search items.

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