Where to Look: How to Choose a Search Tool

Discovery Search

- What's in it? All of Virginia Tech's physical collection and most electronic content: books, ebooks, videos, magazine articles, journal articles, newspaper articles, and more.
- How do I access it? Via lib.vt.edu to be authenticated as part of the VT community.
- What's it really good at? Finding books and ebooks, items from many disciplines, or items from a wide range of source types. Preliminary searching when you're just getting started.
- Anything to watch out for? Broad scope can mean a very large number of results. Use filters or advanced search to narrow results.
- Is full text available? Yes. Request non-linked items through interlibrary loan.

Databases

- What's in it? Wide variety of content types depending on database. May be dedicated to a type of content, like newspaper articles, or to a particular subject area.
- How do I access it? Via lib.vt.edu to be authenticated as part of the VT community.
- What's it really good at? Finding items in a specific discipline or narrow scope. Narrowing your search using filters and limiters specific to a particular database.
- Anything to watch out for? Narrow scope of individual databases can mean searching multiple databases.
- Yes. Request non-linked items through interlibrary loan.

Google Scholar

- What's in it? Scholarly journal articles, theses, books, court opinions, and abstracts.
- How do I access it? Via scholar.google.com.
- What's it really good at? Finding items that are freely available in institutional repositories and other places on the web. Finding out who has cited published items.
- Anything to watch out for? Can be difficult to get a manageable number of results because few search limiters are available. Not all results from scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.
- Is full text available? Maybe. Connect Scholar to VT Libraries for most access.

Google

- What's in it? Anything that's available on the internet: newspapers, magazine articles, government documents, blogs, social media, organization homepages, and more.

- How do I access it? Via google.com.
- What's it really good at? Finding freely-available government information, some statistics, and other information that isn't necessarily available in a book or article. Conducting background research.
- Anything to watch out for? Often get a large number of results. Sometimes difficult to discern the context and thus the credibility of items found online.
- Is full text available? Maybe. Some items may be behind a paywall. Check Discovery Search for access.

Need more help? Visit lib.vt.edu/help.