This is a Brief Online Learning Tutorial (or BOLT) brought to you by the LISTEN project, a HRSA-funded project focused on improving the information literacy competencies of nursing students and professional nurses.
Google has become a common word in our vocabularies; but, how can you know the information you find on Google is accurate? Is searching Google for clinical information the most effective and efficient way to search? Is the information you find on Google safe for patient care? This BOLT will give you some tips on how to be smart about searching Google.
Google identifies (or crawls over) the billions of pages freely available on the Internet. Google then records these pages in an index in the Google database. In response to a query, Google searches their index for documents that match the search terms.
So - what’s good about Google? Google has a simple and clear search interface, finds quick answers to your questions, has easy to learn searching techniques, has broad coverage, and has unique limiters (such as file type or site search). Google helps find full text articles freely available on the Web.
Remember however that Google has limitations. Being aware of Google’s limitations is useful for your searching. Google’s limitations include: a lack of quality control in its’ search results (with crawl over and indexing of millions of web pages there may be good pages AND bad pages included in your search results - so sometimes you may get dead links, or you may find irrelevant or inaccurate information); Google also only provides access to full text content freely available on the Internet (so you may miss a good resource that is only in abstract form - or published elsewhere) and Google search results can not be saved for later retrieval/review.
So, in your practice, when can you use Google to search for information? Google is good to find background information and can act as a pre-search for your topic. You can use Google to verify a citation, or a book title, or a journal title. Google can help locate full text articles freely available on the Internet.
Another tip is to use the advanced search page to conduct a Google search. This allows you to ask Google to search for an exact word or phrase. It also allows you to control what not to show in your search and to limit your search to document formats such as PDF, HTML, PowerPoint or Word. In the Advanced Search page, you can also specify your search to only search specified domains such as U.S. government sites (.gov) or university host sites (.edu). There are more options to control your Google search in the Advanced search page such as searching for your word or phrase appearing in the title of the page.
Another tip to make your search more productive is to use Boolean Operators. For instance, if you want to find articles about soldiers’ perceptions about fitness, there are 3 concepts to investigate: fitness, perceptions, and soldiers. To get the most out of your Google search, think of synonyms or related terms for each concept and combine them with the Boolean operator “OR” in parentheses while using the Boolean operator “AND” to combine different search concepts. For further information see the BOLT on Boolean operators.

For example: (physical fitness OR fitness) AND (perceptions OR attitudes OR ideas OR thoughts) AND (military personnel OR soldiers)
There are some keyboarding shortcuts that can aid your search also. Put quotation marks around your search terms if you are searching for an exact phrase. If you want to include not only an exact phrase but also its synonyms, place the tilde sign (~) immediately in front of your search term or exact phrase. Or you use a minus sign to exclude words from the search.
You can do a lot more with Google search than just typing in search terms. There are some Google commands that specifically help you improve your search. In the search box you can add `site: edu` or `site: gov` to your search words to limit the search to a specific domain. You can attach `filetype:` to your search to limit the search results to a particular file format such as PowerPoint, PDF, Word, Excel, etc. You can also use Google to define a term or a word you don’t understand by typing `define:` followed by a word or phrase - Google will generate a list of web sites that define the word or the phrase for you.
Remember how Google functions - when you enter a few words, Google by default uses AND to combine your search terms, so you need to consider your search terms wisely to reflect your topic.

Google doesn't search the entire Internet or all the world's information, so remember that you may find information through other search engines that you did NOT find in Google - try those other search engines too. Don’t forget to cite the source so it can be retrieved later if needed and always remember to evaluate the source for currency, objectivity, accuracy and authority.
Continue to visit the LISTEN website, at listenuphealth.org, for other helpful tips about using technology; and, seeking, evaluating, and applying information in nursing to support evidence-based nursing practice.
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