

# WHAT GOOGLE SCHOLAR CAN ('T) DO : COMPARISON OF THE SCHOLARLY SEARCH IN GOOGLE SCHOLAR AND ECONBIZ

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Google Scholar stands at the beginning of almost every scholarly literature search today. However: EconBiz and other subject specific databases offer advantages that Google can't beat so far.

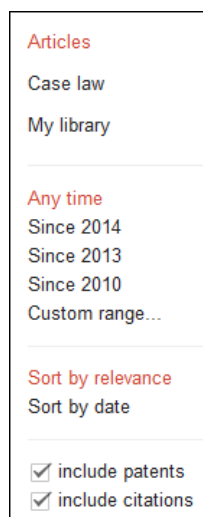
The most important topics discussed below:

- # The search interface of Google Scholar provides only few options to control your topical search. (1)
- # Google Scholar includes huge quantities of full-texts and references of all subject areas. The result lists of subject specific databases might be more precise. (1)
- # With its ranking, Google Scholar influences what search results you get to see. The sorting is not transparent and you cannot change it. (2)
- # Google Scholar is led by commercial interests. It is important that publicly funded search tools provide alternatives in the access to information. (3)
- # Google doesn't always respect privacy and copyright laws. (3)

## 1 Topical Search

Google Scholar is a great tool for searching when you search for known items, since large amounts of titles are available. This positive experience is often transferred to the topical search. But here, Google Scholar offers only very few options to control a search and to specify your needs. Given the growing amounts of information, the possibility of specifying your search becomes increasingly more important. EconBiz therefore offers many ways to filter search results and to use various advanced search options.<sup>1</sup>

Img. 1 / 2: Filter options in Google Scholar (left) and EconBiz (in selection, right)



Google Scholar scores with being a huge machine, a machine that contains masses of data. EconBiz, on the other hand, shows a more personal face. Sources are selected by experts and

<sup>1</sup> See more details on filter and search options in EconBiz and Google Scholar in the attachment.

indexed with subject headings to facilitate the topical search. Moreover, members of the EconBiz team are available via chat and e-mail to support you personally with your search. If you find too much or too little on your topic or if you don't know how to access a publication you need, you can always turn to the EconBiz team with your questions.

Depending on your topic, the use of a specialized database with individually selected, high-quality sources can gain better results than a search engine that contains publications from all disciplines and selects its sources automatically by harvesting. As expressed by Nicola Cecchino: "easy (more) is not always better."<sup>2</sup>

### *Examples – Searches that you cannot perform with Google Scholar:*

- ➔ **Find all possible endings:** In EconBiz it is possible to find a term with all possible endings by using the asterisk (\*). The search for *Swed\** will find Swedish, Sweden, etc. The extension of the term is not determined by the system automatically but can be controlled by you.
- ➔ **Find dissertations / journals / etc. on the topic "risk management":** In EconBiz you can filter your search by publication type on the left hand of the results page. Select „Dissertation“, „Thesis“ or „Journal“, etc. after you performed your search.
- ➔ **Who published most on the topic environmental economics?** In EconBiz you can see which author appears most often in a result list. Search for “environmental economics”; the number of results per author is shown in brackets in the filter option “author / person”.
- ➔ **Find only publications in English and Swedish:** In EconBiz you can select preferred languages of publications in the advanced search as well as in the filter section of the results list.

## 2 Sorting of result lists

The increasing amount of information mentioned above makes a smart sorting of results ever-more important. This is one of the secrets of success of Google and Google Scholar. However, by trusting in the automated sorting of results by intransparent criteria, you will give up a piece of control over your own research results.

Google Scholar writes about its own relevance ranking: „Google Scholar aims to rank documents the way researchers do, weighing the full text of each document, **where it was published, who it was written by**, as well as how often and how recently it has been cited in other scholarly literature.“<sup>3</sup>

Presumably because of the emphasis on the numbers of citations, older publications often are ranked higher than new ones. How Google weights the relevance of persons or institutions is not clear. A sorting without any calculated parameters, i.e. by publication date, is not possible in Google. If you select „sort by date“ you will receive a much smaller result list with „Articles added in the last year“.

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2 Cecchino, Nicola J. (2010): Google Scholar : Reviewed. - In: Journal of the Medical Library Association 98(2010)4, S. 320 - 321. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1324783> [07.10.2014].

3 About Google Scholar: How are documents ranked? <http://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/about.html> [07.10.2014]. (Highlighting by me.)

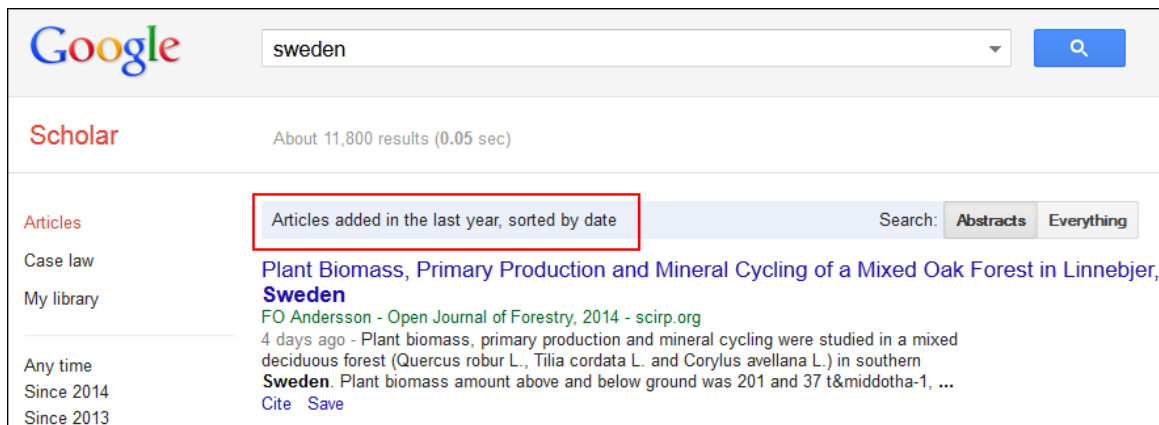


Abb. 3: Sorting by date in Google Scholar leads to a limitation of the result list. (07.10.14)

The relevance ranking in EconBiz is based on more neutral values, such as publication year or position and frequency of the search term within the document. A documentation of the relevance ranking can be found on the website at [Help A-Z: Relevance Ranking](#). You can change the sorting to publication date, title or author name.

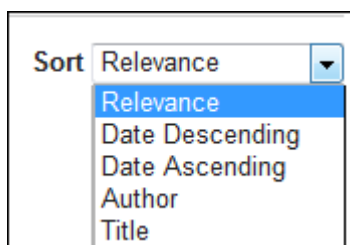


Abb. 4: Sorting options in EconBiz

### *Examples – Relevance Sorting of Result lists*

- ➔ A search for "welfare state" sweden in Google Scholar leads to the following results: 1. 2004, 2. 2001, 3. 1996, 4. 1990 (07.10.14)
- ➔ A search for „welfare state“ swedish in Google Scholar leads to the following results: 1. 2001, 2. 1996, 3. 1990, 4. 1990 (07.10.14)
- ➔ In EconBiz the search for "welfare state" swed\* shows the results: 1. 2014, 2. 2011, 3. 2011, 4. 2011 (07.10.14). It is possible to change the sorting of the whole list to publication date.

### **3 Commercial interests vs. public funding**

With its quasi-monopoly Google Scholar influences the search behaviour of researchers and the results of scientific research. Primarily Google is interested in high usage and return on investment. Data protection issues and copyright law are subordinate to commercial interests of the firm. Therefore it seems important to develop publicly funded alternatives in the access to information, which lay their focus only on the promotion of science.

EconBiz is a service of the ZBW – German National Library of Economics. EconBiz respects data protection, aims at the neutrality of the service and works in accordance with EU copyright law.

### **4 Conclusion**

Presumably no one will completely omit Google Scholar in her or his search for scholarly information. The amount of registered publications, the relevance ranking and the quick access to many full texts are key advantages of the search engine. However, you should not rely on Google alone. As it is not possible to refine your search or to change the sorting of results, you are dependent on the automated rating of publications by unknown criteria.

The best will be to see for yourself. Maybe you can take this text as an occasion for comparing results in Google Scholar with results of EconBiz or other subject specific academic databases.

The author will be glad to answer your questions about this article or on academic literature search at [EconDesk](#). EconDesk is the online reference service of ZBW – German National Library of Economics.

### Attachment: Details on the search options in EconBiz and Google Scholar

	EconBiz	Google Scholar
<b>Search only for the exact term you entered</b>	Default	Place quotation marks around your search term or multiple terms.
<b>Truncation: all possible endings of the term must be found.</b>	Asterisk: Swed* searches swedish / Sweden / etc.	Not possible.
<b>Refine / filter result lists</b>	Options: 1. Year of Publication 2. Topics/Subjects 3. Type of Publication 4. Type of Publication (narrower categories): Dissertation, Statistics, ... 5. Language 6. Authors / Persons 7. Institutions 8. Published in (journal / series) 9. Show open access material only 10. Origin from database	Options: <sup>4</sup> 1. Year of Publication 2. Include patents 3. Include citations 4. Articles or Case Law
<b>Search keys: Search only within title / author name / subject headings</b>	Specification of search keys is possible in the simple search via pull down menu and in the advanced search: 1. Year of Publication 2. Title 3. Topic / subject heading 4. Author 5. Institution 6. ISSN/ISBN 7. Language 8. Published in (journal/ series) 9. Publisher 10. Publication Type	Possible in the advanced search: <sup>4</sup> 1. Title 2. Author 3. Published in (journal / series) 4. Publication years
<b>Use standardized search terms / subject headings for the search</b>	A major part of the publications in EconBiz is enhanced with subject headings from the Standard Thesaurus Economics ( <a href="#">STW</a> ). The thesaurus will show you the best search terms for EconBiz as well as translations, synonyms, broader and narrower terms for your subject.	Not possible.

<sup>4</sup> The metadata in Google Scholar is partially extracted automatically from the publication full text. Metadata might be missing or incorrect.