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How Google Works: Are Search Engines Really Dumb and Should Students Care?

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How Google Works: Are Search Engines Really Dumb and Should Students Care?

Keywords: Information literacy, Google, search engine, search query, webpage ranking, webpage evaluation

Google is the most popular search engine in the world; it processes a billion searches per day, many from students worldwide. When these students are asked how they do research, their first response is likely to be, "I Google the topic. Many of the students have only used Google for research; for them, Research = Googling."

While students perceive themselves as skilled searchers of Google their search queries and research behaviors do not support their assertion. They are not sophisticated users of Google, let alone library resources.

Google's own research confirms students' Google illiteracy. Google's research support of U.C. Berkeley's "Report on the UC Berkeley Library" found that students overused Google and misused scholarly databases. Further the study concluded, "Indeed, they're not even very good at using Google for research purposes. Students are unable to take advantage of the resources that are readily available to those who know how to find them."

The presentation will explain how Google works, how it determines the ranking of the results to a search query. With this knowledge students will be able to take advantage of Google's search features and construct better search queries, find better information, and develop Google literacy.