Searching for Grey Literature

What It is and How to Find It

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June 14, 2019
Grey literature is defined as follows: "That which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers."

(Fourth International Conference on Grey Literature, Washington, D.C., October 1999.)
Types of Grey Literature

- Reports
- Theses/Dissertations
- Conference Proceedings, Conference Papers and Posters
- Technical Specifications and Standards
- Datasets
- Clinical Trial Data
- Non-commercial Translations
- Bibliographies
- Technical and Commercial Documentation
- Government Reports and Documents
Why is Grey Literature Important?

• Vital for developing a more complete view of a specific research topic
• Key when producing a systematic review and for evidence synthesis
• Good source for data and statistics
• More detailed reports due to no publisher-enforced length for the document
• Limits publication lag between production of data and publication in a journal
• Eliminates positive result bias of journals and allows negative results to be made public
Characteristics of Grey Literature

- Non-conventional
- Ephemeral
- Difficult to locate and obtain
- Not generally indexed in conventional databases
- More breadth and depth than typical journal articles
- Increasingly available via the web
- Produced by many diverse organizations/entities
Since grey literature is not generally indexed in conventional databases, your search may start with locating organizations or associations that are likely to publish the type of information in which you are interested. Search the web for:

- Government Agencies
- Advocacy Groups and Private Agencies
- Industry, Trade or Professional Organizations
- Grey Literature Gateways
- Academic or Institutional Libraries/Repositories
There are many sites that act as gateways to grey literature and others that provide access to large datasets. You will find a list of some of these sites on the **Grey Literature Guide**. The guide provides access to a selected list of websites which connect the scholar to:

- General Sources for Grey Literature
- Clinical Trials
- Clinical Practice Guidelines
- Statistics and Datasets
- Institutional Repositories
- Drugs and Devices
Grey Literature Search Tips

To make the most effective use of the grey literature, it is important to narrow your focus. Ask yourself:

- Who is your audience? Who are your stakeholders?
- What kind of material are you interested in obtaining?
- Is there a specific time period for your material?
- Are you limited to a specific population or geographical area?

Once you have determined your specific needs, you can begin exploring the available resources for data and other materials. Each organization or entity will have its own unique search interface, so you will have to adapt to each as you explore the options for locating information.
The Grey Literature Guide does not comprise a comprehensive list of resources, but provides a starting point for further research. You may use search engines, such as Google to do additional searching for grey literature sites.

The rest of this presentation provides instruction on how to use advanced searching features in Google.
Two Modes:

- **Quotation Marks**
  - Example: “diabetes mellitus”
  - Requires that the words appear in the order typed
  - Can reduce the number of results

- **Verbatim**
  - Won’t search synonyms
  - Turns off spellchecking and localization
  - Conduct a search, then select **Tools → All Results → Verbatim**
Using operators and parentheses in Google:

- **AND** is implicit
  - No need to add it between search terms
- **OR** is used to search synonyms
  - Always uppercase
  - Example: “heart attack” OR “myocardial infarction”
- **Parentheses** are used to group keywords together
  - Example: (“heart attack” OR “myocardial infarction”) (”medications” OR “drug therapy”)
Google has some page structure operators that can be used to search. These include:

- **intitle:/allintitle:**
  - Specifies that the keywords are located in the title.
  - Example: allintitle:large b-cell non-hodgkin’s lymphoma

- **inurl:/allinurl:**
  - Looks in URL of website
  - Example: inurl:health system

- **intext:/allintext:**
  - Searches the text of a website
  - Example: intext:cardiac transplant patients
Google allows you to limit your search with several operators. Two of these are:

- **site:**
  - Limits to specific sites based on URLs
  - Example: `site:gov`
  - Example: `site:cdc.gov`

- **filetype:**
  - Limits results to specific file types
  - Example: `filetype:pdf`
  - Example: `filetype:xls`
  - Do **not** use with `intitle:` operator
Other Search Operators

Google also has some other operators which allow you to exclude terms or broaden your search:

- **Minus sign (-)**
  - Excludes terms after the minus sign
  - Example: pregnancy -premature
  - Can be used with site operator to exclude specific sites
  - Example: congestive heart failure –site:uk

- **Wildcard (*)**
  - Searches for variations of word or phrase within 1-4 words/numbers
  - Example: “best practices for health*”
  - Use with or without quotes around terms
Questions?

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