

Transcript: Google for academic research – Alternatives to Google: Bing and DuckDuckGo

Google often seems ubiquitous and has even entered the dictionary as a verb, but there are still alternatives out there. When searching the internet for academic literature it is a good idea to go beyond Google as you may be presented with different results.

So, I would see these as ‘additions’ to Google, rather than ‘alternatives’.

I am only going to talk about 2 other search engines, but there are plenty more out there for you to explore.

In some ways Bing is actually more akin to the library literature database – it does recognise Boolean and can cope with parentheses being used to nest terms.

So, it is worth trying out your search that you have constructed to work in a library literature database, and see what Bing shows you.

Something I used to appreciate in Google is that it would offer you a link to a cached version underneath most results and these cached versions had your search terms highlighted so it was easy to see where they appeared. Bing still does this.

I suspect there is a point to be made here about Bing being less advanced in its development than Google. Quite possibly we will see Bing become more like Google over time as more is invested in it.

But for now, you can make the most of these features, if they prove useful to you.

You can use many of the same techniques, or search commands, in Bing that you can in Google, such as file type and site search.

Intitle: also works in Bing as does a similar command, **inbody:**

Some differences that commentators have noticed between Google and Bing are that Bing's results tend to be more consumer/retail focused – though you can get round this initial bias by adding some of the commands to a simple search.

Bing may also be more up to date than Google – it updates sites more frequently, adds new sites more quickly so if you are researching in area where this is key, e.g. politics, perhaps refugee studies, this could be really handy.

My favourite thing and the only thing I use Bing for is that their maps include proper Ordnance Survey maps.

The country versions and date options are similar to Google.

Annoyingly though, many features and options are available to US users only – there are more and better commands available when you use Bing in the USA.

There are similar problems to Google in that you are not quite sure what it is up to – it may drop search terms, for instance if there are too few results, like Google does.

And the order of terms seems to matter to how many results you get.

Inbody: doesn't seem to work all the time; sometimes it just searches for the word "body"

How much is Bing tracking and personalising?

Bing is also a business, indeed a massive, profitable business – Microsoft.

Bing uses click data from its users to influence their rankings – just one of thousands of parts of their algorithm – as Google does.

There seems to be some feeling that Bing might be slightly better with privacy concerns than Google, but they are running the same kind of business. Bing is tracking and personalising as much as Google – or at least it is trying to. It probably doesn't do it as well, especially if you haven't used it as much as Google.

So Bing is not a search engine to choose for reasons of privacy concerns. It is one to choose for, perhaps, comprehensiveness, a change of results, the ability to use a

Boolean search – something to give you alternative or additional results that you might not be seeing in your Google search.

Given the privacy concerns with search engines such as Google and Bing, an alternative search engine which has become widely popular with those keen to avoid all tracking and targeted advertising is DuckDuckGo.

DuckDuckGo doesn't use cookies to identify you, and it discards information including IP addresses from its server logs. It simply does not have any information on you, not even relating to searches you do one after the other from the same computer.

They do store your search terms, not in a personally identifiable way. The privacy policy states, "We use aggregate, non-personal search data to improve things like misspellings."

Because it does not store or track the searches that you do so obviously it doesn't (cannot) personalise your results. There is a log in option which lets you change things such as the 'look n feel' – this is only what you have set up, it is not tracking your searches, so quite different.

It recognises similar commands to Google and Bing, though as with the other two you can't be quite sure that it is paying attention and exactly which of its sources it is looking at.

You have to be more precise with your searches as, unlike Google, it does not know what you are thinking! It is also worth looking at the 2nd or 3rd pages of results.

The Asterisk does not truncate in DuckDuckGo either. We aren't sure how to do truncation in fact. It seems as if it may be searching for variations for you like Google does, but I am not sure.

The **Region:** command boosts country results in your search. Although, obviously if you search in English it won't really work to ask it to focus on a non-English speaking country.

DuckDuckGo can also search other sites for you, e.g. it will search Twitter for you.

DuckDuckGo makes some money from advertising (based on what search terms you have just typed in, not tracking/personalising) but they try to keep it to a minimum and you have the option to disable ads: <https://duckduckgo.com/settings>.

The CEO of DuckDuckGo once said: “if the FBI comes to us, we have nothing to tie back to you”.

However, they are linked with Yahoo (now owned by Verizon, a big American telecoms company) so I could not say for sure that they are an entirely independent company despite their strongly promoted ethical stance on privacy.

I hope some of those tricks, both in Bing and DuckDuckGo prove useful and that you find exploring two other search engines adds to your literature search.