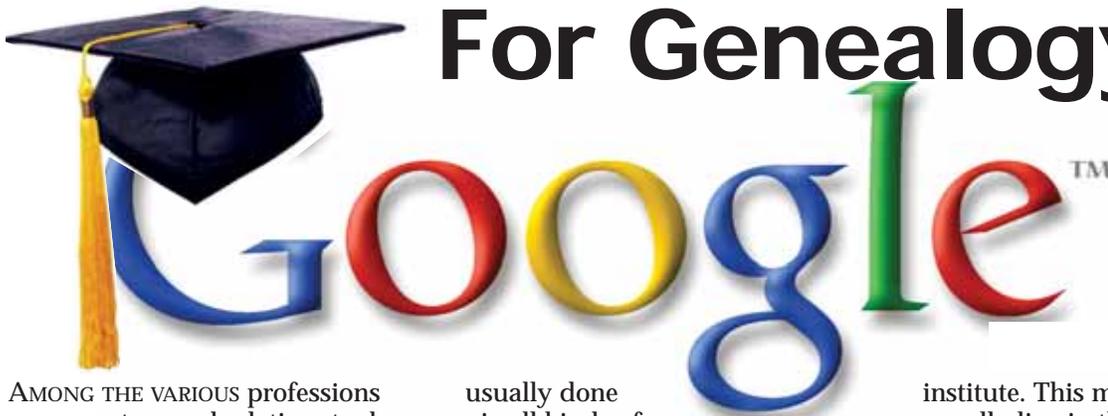


Using Google Scholar For Genealogy!



AMONG THE VARIOUS professions our ancestors and relatives took, academic career is very difficult to track. Academic researchers do not promote themselves by newspaper ads nor are they listed in business directories. Furthermore, academia, mythed as an elitist ivory tower, is in some sense out of reach for many non-native scholars. However, one of the most basic working tools for scholars might be of great help for genealogists tracing their relatives who took academic career. It is academic publication. By their very nature, academic publications are mostly publicly available (usually for a limited degree, if only their very existence) and inter-connected, which makes them a very powerful tool for genealogists.

In this article, we will introduce you to the basic concepts of academia and academic publishing, and then will demonstrate how genealogists can use such a resource for their research. In particular, we will explain how to use Google Scholar for searching academic publications.

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS EXPLAINED
Universities, as well as other higher-education institutes, are often thought of as places where professors teach and students learn. However, this is only half true, as besides teaching and training generations of students, universities world-wide are research institutes and their professors are researchers.

An integral part of the research process is the reporting. This is

usually done via all kinds of academic publications, the major of which are: journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings and dissertations. The main purpose of these publications is to communicate research ideas and research results, hence enabling fruitful discussion within the relevant research community. And here is the best part: as research communities usually spread in different countries, most of the materials are in English.

Only little is common to academic publications of different disciplines, and even within the same discipline, publications often do not share structure, format or length, not to mention research interests or methodologies. However, all of the academic publications share a similar pattern of identification which most importantly (to our needs) includes the name(s) of the author(s) - usually appear in indexes by last name and initials of first/middle names; their affiliation; and the year the work was published.

HOW CAN ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS PROMOTE YOUR RESEARCH?

If you have scholar ancestors or relatives, looking for their publications might tremendously help you in enriching your knowledge about them. In particular, you might be able to answer the following questions:

- **Where did they live?** Academic career is just like many other careers, and in particular scholars have offices or labs at the affiliated

institute. This means that scholars usually live in the university vicinity (exceptions do exist, as for any other case). Placing a person in a certain area in a given period (based on the publishing year) might help in obtaining vital records, and generally will assist you by focusing the research locally. Explicitly having the affiliation information, you might contact that institute's archives, asking for documentation about the scholar career, awards, etc. If the person had moved to different locations over his professional career, you might find clues to that in articles from different periods.

- **What did they do?** Though academic publications are written in a formal and focused way (it's really not like the research news published in *Popular Science*), you might learn about the main research interests of your scholar relatives. If physicians, were they focusing on thermodynamics or quantum mechanics? If engineers, were they civil or electrical engineers? And if historians, Had they studied military history or the history of modern America?

Combining this with the history of the relevant discipline, you will be able to better understand their career and life story.

- **Whom did they work with?** Academic research may be taken independently or jointly with peers. In the latter case, all the collaborators will appear on the publication title. Contacting them, you might get some more stories on your relative, even personal anecdotes.

• How can I find my lost family?

If you look for a long-lost family member who is an academic researcher, you might find their updated contacts within academic publications or by referring to the affiliated institute. Asking collaborators or colleagues about them might also help in locating them.

• **Is there an obituary?** In some academic publications, it is common to find obituaries of the relevant community member. These obituaries then will be searchable just like the rest of that publication's content.

USING GOOGLE SCHOLAR

Google Scholar, <http://scholar.google.com>, released in 2004, has become the most powerful tool for searching academic publications. It covers a range of academic disciplines from thousands of publishers of academic materials. For many researchers, it serves as the starting point for their academic literature searches.

Similarly to its well-known ancestor, i.e., Google search, it offers simple search with special operators (basic Google operators like +, -, OR, "", () , etc. might be used as well) and advance search. The advance search enables to limit search term to the author (equivalent to using the operator author:) or publication (also, you can use the operator intitle: to search only in publication titles), and to filter results by years of publication and subject areas. As usual with Google search engines, corrections to the search query might be suggested.

The search results are sorted by a secrecy ranking algorithm, however it is known that besides text features (e.g., the frequency of the search term in the title or text), it takes into consideration the number of citations of the publications, a standard academic measure for the work importance. Each section in the results summarizes the most important details of the relevant publication. For better understanding the search results we will use the example brought in figure 1, which is a result of searching for Daniel Kahneman (2002 Economics Nobel Prize

Laureate) in google Scholar.

On the first row, the linkable title of the publication appears ("Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk") with the file format (PDF). Then, on the second row, in a smaller green font, appear the name of the author (D Kahneman) — with ellipsis indicating that the article was written by co-authors, followed by the

written jointly with Amos Tversky, submitted in 1977 when the authors were affiliated to The University of British Columbia (Kahneman) and Stanford University (Tversky).

The content of the publication might be available in various formats, and often it is not fully digital (i.e., text search within the publication is not possible). However,

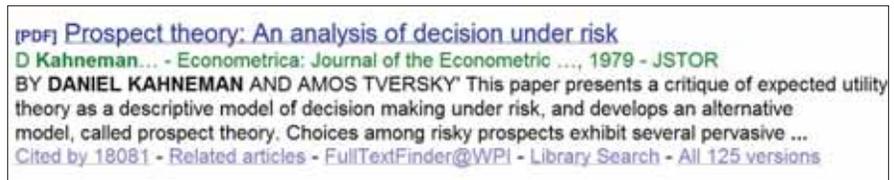


Figure 1. First result on a search for Daniel Kahneman.

publication title ("Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric..."), the publication year (1979) and the publisher ("JSTOR"). After that, a short section from the found text is presented, with the search term bolded.

The bottom row suggests further actions:

- "Cited by..." indicated the number of articles citing this one, and upon clicking it all these articles will be presented as new query's results - this is a great way to get to know colleagues and academic successors;
- "Related articles" will apply another secrecy algorithm by Google for finding related articles;
- "FullTextFinder@<host>" will be visible only in cases your computer is connected to a network in which a full text search is supported (usually, in big libraries);
- "Library Search" will lead you to search results of this title in WorldCat <<http://www.worldcat.org>>, a union catalog of more than 70,000 libraries in more than a hundred countries (the catalogues cover the libraries' holdings, including offline collections);
- "All <number> versions" will present all the search results for that title only (from various sources).
- Sometimes, a "Cached" version will be linked in this bottom line too.

By getting the full version of that article, one learns that it was

in most cases, title and authors are indexed and abstract are searchable.

You might find that eventually the title of the publication leads you to an unauthorized webpage, as many publishers' databases are subscription-based. In this case, check the other versions of the paper, you might find an available copy of the specific publication, or check other publications of the same author. If you still need an unauthorized page, check your local public library or a nearby university/college library, you might be able to access it from there.

SUMMARY

Finding academic publications of your scholar relatives is a great way to learn more about them. Searching Google Scholar, with its intuitive interface for Google users, is quick and easy, and you can find what you want even without being fluent in the academic language.



Arnon Hershkovitz, Ph.D., is a professional genealogist. He is the founder and the leader of an online Jewish genealogy organization (Israeli Family Roots Forum) and served as the Head Genealogy Consultant of the Israeli production of "Who Do You Think You Are?".