Podcast Transcript

In the Classroom 132
Topic Research Using
the Google the Alphabet Technique

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. This certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are, but you're still hanging out with me and it really means a lot to me. Right now we're hanging out in August, hot steamy days, but everything is aiming to the start of the fall term, getting classes ready. That's been my focus. I have my own personal classes to get ready, but I've been working with a lot of faculty to help get their classes ready.

One of the things that I know that's going to come up is we're going to start assigning research papers, and students are going to struggle with how to come up with a topic. Have you ever come up blank while generating ideas for perhaps a presentation, a lesson, a research topic, or maybe you're helping your students generate research ideas, and they're stuck? Also, if you come up with an idea, how do you know it's going to be worthwhile? How do you know it's going to have value?

Well, in this episode, I'm going to share a useful strategy for generating ideas as well as methods for making whatever you are creating more useful to those that are going to consume it. Whether it's a presentation, whether it's an article, a journal article, or a blog post or podcast episode like this. The technique that I'm sharing is called Google the alphabet. It's also known as Google Alphabet Soup Method. If you want to Google that, then we can get started.

I have been using the Google, the alphabet technique, for many years. I didn't realize there was a name for it, but it makes sense once you think of it. I learned this strategy while listening to other bloggers, podcasters, and vlogger pros. These folks constantly share their methods and tools for generating topic ideas and using Google and YouTube, you can generate keywords and topic ideas that you can then flesh out as part of your topic.

Let's talk about how you actually use the Google alphabet technique. Here are the steps that I use. First of all, you need to open up a browser. If you want to control for Google bias, which means Google knows a lot about you, and it already knows the things that you like the things that you don't like, and the search results that you get are tailored to those biases, so you can control for that by using an incognito browser. You can open up Google, click on the three dots in the upper right-hand corner, and there's an option for incognito mode, and if you go to that, you'll be able to use a browser where you're basically not logged in and therefore Google is not using everything and knows about you as part of your search. That's one way to keep it from skewing the results that you're getting.

Open up a browser in incognito mode. You're also going to need a spreadsheet that you're running on the side. It doesn't matter. It could be a Google Sheet, or you can use Excel. Just have a spreadsheet because this is where you're going to capture your ideas. In your browser, go to google.com and enter a keyword or phrase in the search box. Don't type Enter, don't do anything else. Just enter that phrase. You'll notice as you're typing that phrase, you're going to get suggestions from Google on possible search combinations, and we're going to use that. You enter this phrase. For example, I'm going to enter in the phrase "online discussions." Maybe I want to know more about online discussions.

I'll use "online discussions" as my search phrase and enter it in the search google search box. Next, I'm going to type a space and type the letter A, and you're going to see a list of 10 different possibilities related to that word that start with the letter A. As soon as you do this, this list, this particular list, is what other people are commonly searching for that's related to your topic. You're not the only one that's searching on this topic. Other folks are searching, and based on Google, its algorithms, this is the most commonly set of phrases that are being searched for, which is in your benefit because it means individuals want to know more about that particular topic.

If you want to be valuable to your audience, whether it's your students, whether you're writing a journal article, you want to be valuable in that field or if you're writing blog posts, so you want to be valuable to your audiences, or in my case, podcasts, then you're going to pay attention to what others have searched for. You have put in a phrase, you put a space, you put an A, and you got this list of terms.

On your keyboard, you can hit the up and down arrows and move down the list until you find a term or phrase that you like. As you do this, notice that it populates the Google search window. When you find a phrase that you like and you want to keep in that Google search window, highlight it, copy it, and paste it into your spreadsheet. Then you can go back to Google and use your up and down arrows and move to another term and choose all the terms that are of interest to you. Take those terms, put them into your spreadsheet, and so you're building a list of key terms, key phrases, keywords that are going to be useful, as you continue your search.

When you have finished with the A's, you'll basically instead of the As, you'll basically, instead of the A, you put a B, and it will show you your search phrase with anything related to Bs and you'll go through the same capture process. Capture these terms, put them onto your spreadsheet, and you will continue as you go through the rest of the alphabet. You put C in there, you'll put D. Looking at my term, I would put online discussions space D, online discussions, space, E, et cetera, all the way to Z. You can actually do this with numbers too. You can put zero through nine, and you will get search results related to that.

If you don't want to use Google, you have other options. You can also do it with Bing. You can go to YouTube and do the search in YouTube, DuckDuckGo, Pinterest, all types of different search engines, and a lot of the strategy will work for you. Once you have come up with a spreadsheet of search terms, you can actually take that particular search term, pop it into Google and go through the alphabet again. What

this does is it leads you to long-tail searches or searches that are not very common, but people still want to know information for.

Very often, if you're writing blog posts or podcast episodes, these long-tail search terms, you will end up ranking higher if you address those topics. That's a great way of increasing your value and getting known, is by writing content or creating content on things that are obscure, and people still want to know about. It's also a great way to add new life to topics you teach. If you're teaching project management or program management, planning, you could put that term in there and find maybe new strategies that are worth talking about, and just gives you new ideas on what you should be searching and talking about in that particular topic.

Other ways to create this query is starting with a question such as anything, who, what, where, why, which, how, all these wonderful question words that you can start with your topic, how to online discussion, and then do the Google alphabet technique, alphabet soup. That will take you down a different path. You'll get other search terms. As I was listening to all these different podcasters and bloggers, one of the things that stuck out to me was the idea of adding value. When we have to do research, we have a personal interest and that's great. That's scratching our own itch, but if you can also do that and add value to someone else, then you are making a difference.

The nice thing is Google will help you with this if you let it. You can discover what others are searching for. If you can answer their questions, you are increasing the value of your content. Whether it's in the classroom or outside of the classroom, if you can help someone else, you are increasing value. As I said, Google lets you know what other people are searching for if you know where to look. Let's go back to the Google search. You've got all these keywords, take one of those keywords, you drop it into the Google search at google.com. Hit enter and you will get the results for that search term. What articles are ranking high? The first page are the highest-ranking articles. That means they're the closest to answering that question.

As you look at the results for the search term you put in and you find out it's not very close, that is still a great opportunity to write it about exactly what you searched for. As you scroll down the page, one of the sections usually in the middle of the search result page is you will see something that says, "People also asked," and you will see a list of phrases or questions that other people have asked in search queries, and that these are the most common ones that are being asked. If you can answer those specific questions, you will increase the value of your content.

You can grab those questions, put them onto your spreadsheet. This is useful for idea generation. It may serve as a subsection of whatever you're creating. Part of your presentation may be a subsection that you're answering that particular question or in your journal article. This is something that folks are commonly asking. If you click on one of those items that's within that "people also ask," you will continue to get more and more questions are presented to you related to what was asked before, so it just keeps building on each other.

The other place to look is at the very bottom of the page, you will see related searches. Again, these are search terms that you can add to your spreadsheet if they're of interest to you because they are certainly of interest to someone else. Related searches, people also ask, those are two great sections of the website of the Google search results that you can get value-added.

If you want to speed up the process, you can also use different tools out there. In the show notes for this episode, I am attaching a list of different tools that you can use to do some of this keyword research to help you along. These tools, I'm just going to go down the list, one is called Keyword Sheeter. It will build a list of all these different keywords. AnswerThePublic. I've used the AnswerThePublic. It's a wonderful tool. They've changed their model, so you can only use it once per day unless you pay, but AnswerThePublic amazing what it will generate. I encourage you to go check that out. Ubersuggest by Neil Patel, a wonderful tool. Another tool that I use is called Keywords Everywhere. This is a little tool that is part of my Chrome browser, it's an extension. When I do a Google search, it will also produce a list of all these different keywords off to the side and give me an idea of how often they're being searched for, what the competition is, things like that. The last one that I want to share with you is called keyword.io. This is another tool. These are different tools that will help you generate these keyword lists just a lot quicker.

Now that you have put together your list, you have a list of tools that you can do further exploration and research. One of the places that you can do it is, certainly in your library databases, but I always start with Google Scholar. If I'm doing some academic research, I want to see what's out there and start pulling together different articles that grab my interest, and so I'll go to Google Scholar, and I'll start dropping those different keyword phrases in and doing a search on Google Scholar.

When you do this, you may have to put some quotes around different parts of the phrase in order to control your search. That way you don't get garbage, things that are just entirely not related, because it's looking at all the words. In my case, if I was doing online discussions, and maybe one of the phrases from the A's was analysis, I would put quotes around Google discussions and then have analysis as a separate word, and it will go ahead and generate results. Or you can get very specific and say, "Online discussions analysis," but I think that's too restrictive and that may bog things down. If you go into Google Scholar, you'll find lots of results that you can then add to your spreadsheet or other tools. One of my favorite tools is Zotero. That helps guide a place to collect research articles that I would be using.

There you have it. This is a strategy that has been of great service to me over the years. I didn't realize it had a specific name. I have used it to support professors and instruction to generate blog posts, do article research, and create podcast episodes. I just use it quite often. It's a strategy that helps me generate a lot of ideas for topics that I want to present on. This is a useful strategy that you can use to get ideas for your own content. Maybe you're developing a lesson plan, you can go out there and use this technique to beef up an area that you think is weak, or it's a way that you can help students develop their own topic. I put a lot of different links in the show notes that will also show you how to do this, so I encourage you to go check it out. Until we get together again, I want to share a plug for my book.