

Western Sullivan Public Library

Using Library Databases



Using Library Databases

As many of us know, the Library provides a vast array of books, videos, reference materials, and plain old information. But did you know much of that information can increasingly be accessed through online sources via the Library's Databases?

This course is built more like a workshop. We'll provide some basic facts about the information available through the Western Sullivan Public Library (WSPL) and the Ramapo Catskill Library System (RCLS) databases. Then we'll let you loose to search those databases to see if you can find some basic information using the search techniques we've taught.

During this course we will look at:

- Library Databases
- Basic Search Facts
- Refining Searches
- Tips for Better Searches
- Database Questions
- Question Review
- Wrap-up



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

Library Databases

At the top of the WSPL webpage www.WSPLonline.org you will see a tab labeled "Databases".



Clicking the "Databases" tab will bring you to the following Databases which are sorted by high level categories. This list is subject to update by RCLS, so check the website for specific information.

General Resources

Britannica Online - Start with the encyclopedia. Move on to current magazines, recommended Web sites, an atlas, the classics, biographies, news, and more.

Grolier Online - Includes two learning environments, eight curriculum-aligned databases and over 500,000 links to academically-relevant articles, Web sites and periodicals.

General OneFile - More than 7,100 general interest periodical full-text titles and 3,600 refereed journals, and hundreds of newspapers. Also more than 500 travel guides, including Fodor's.

MasterFILE Premiere - Contains full text for nearly 1,700 periodicals covering general reference, business, health, education, general science, multicultural issues and much more.

Biography in Context - Biography in Context delivers outstanding research support with nearly a million biographical entries spanning history and geography.

Academic OneFile - More than 13,000 titles, including more than 7,300 peer-reviewed journals and more than 5,000 in full text with strong coverage of hard sciences, medicine, engineering and business.

Directory of Open Access Journals - This service covers free, full text, quality controlled scientific and scholarly journals.



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

JSTOR Early Journal Content - Content in JSTOR published prior to 1923 in the United States and prior to 1870 elsewhere includes discourse and scholarship in the arts, humanities, economics, politics, mathematics and sciences. Nearly 500,000 articles from more than 200 journals.

Education Resources Information Center - ERIC provides ready access to education literature to support the use of educational research and information to improve practice in learning, teaching, educational decision-making, and research.

News Resources

Infotrac Newsstand - More than 33.5 million full-text articles from more than 1,100 newspapers, including Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Christian Science Monitor, The Financial Times (London), The New York Times, The Times (London), USA Today and many others.

New York State Newspapers - Full-text of 7 New York state newspapers: Buffalo News, Syracuse Herald American, Syracuse Herald-Journal, Syracuse Post-Standard, New York Observer, New York Post, and New York Times (2000-present).

National Newspaper Index - National Newspaper Index gives you quick access to the indexing of America's top five newspapers in one seamless search: The New York Times; The Wall Street Journal; The Christian Science Monitor; The Washington Post; and The Los Angeles Times.

Literature Resources

Twayne's Authors - This series spans the literary tradition through hundreds of years and includes 600 authors from around the world — from Aeschylus to Iris Murdoch.

Literature Resource Center - More than 850,000 full-text articles, critical essays and reviews from over 390 scholarly journals and literary magazines.

LitFinder - Over 100,000 full-text poems, including 10,000 under copyright. Plus Story Finder with thousands of full-text short stories.

Business Resources

Business and Company Resource Center - This comprehensive database offers a dynamic research opportunity, providing accurate, up-to-date company and industry intelligence for thousands of firms.



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

Brainfuse JobNow Live Assistance - JobNow, powered by Brainfuse, provides live interactive online help combined with online resources to guide you through the necessary tasks to get a job.

Science & Health Resources

Health Reference Center Academic - Millions of articles from full-text nursing and allied health journals, newspapers, magazines, newsletters; and select consumer health information sources, full-text reference works and hundreds of health-related multimedia.

Medline Plus - MedlinePlus brings together authoritative information from NLM, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and other government agencies and health-related organizations.

PubMed Central - PubMed Central (PMC) is the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) free digital archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature.

History & Genealogy Resources

Biography in Context - Biography in Context delivers outstanding research support with nearly a million biographical entries spanning history and geography.

Annals of American History - Read the original words of more than 1,500 authors who made and analyzed American history through their speeches, writings, memoirs, poems, and interviews.

Hudson River Valley Heritage - HRVH provides access to historical materials from digital collections contributed by colleges, libraries, archives, historical societies, museums and cultural organizations from the following counties in New York State: Columbia, Greene, Dutchess, Ulster, Sullivan, Rockland, Orange, Putnam, and Westchester.

HRVH Historical Newspapers - Provides access to digitized copies of historical newspapers from the Hudson River Valley region of New York State. As a first step toward this vision, The Kingston Daily Freeman has been completely digitized for the years 1903 to 1912.

Rockland County Messenger - Published Weekly from Haverstraw, 1847-1898



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

Resources for Students

Grolier Online - Includes two learning environments, eight curriculum-aligned databases and over 500,000 links to academically-relevant articles, Web sites and periodicals.

Britannica Online for Kids - Start with the encyclopedia. Move on to current magazines, recommended Web sites, an atlas, the classics, biographies, news, and more.

21st-Century Explorer - online reference and learning tools for students who read below grade level, are dealing with specific learning problems, or are at risk of falling behind.

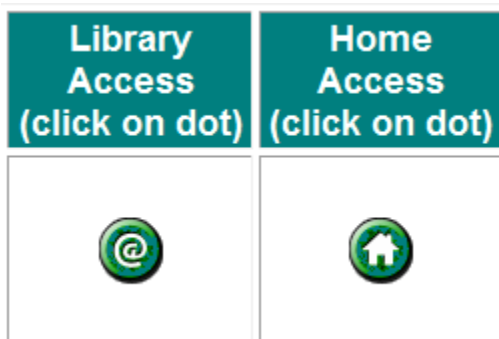
Middle Search Plus - Contains full text for more than 140 popular, middle school magazines. All full text articles are assigned a reading level indicator (Lexiles).

Searchasaurus - Searchasaurus is an exciting and easy way for young researchers to experience online searching. It is an animated interface with a dinosaur theme that encourages young researchers to enhance and develop basic search methodologies.

Kids Search - EBSCO has created a search interface designed specifically for elementary/middle school students according to their needs and search abilities.

Biography in Context - Biography in Context delivers outstanding research support with nearly a million biographical entries spanning history and geography.

As you can see the list is quite extensive. Once you have identified the database you wish to search, you will see two options to the right. Click the dot



for "Library Access" or "Home Access" based on whether you are in the library doing your search or outside of the library. Once you click one of the options, you will be directed to that particular website. Each website works a little differently, but they all have a "Search" box which you can use to type in your search. Some also



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

have drop down menus or other options that allow you to narrow your search or do a more advanced search. Read these options carefully, as they can help reduce the time it takes to find what you're looking for.

Basic Search Facts

- Every word matters. Generally, all the words you put in the query will be used.
- Search is always case insensitive. A search for [new york times] is the same as a search for [New York Times].
- Generally, punctuation is ignored, including @#\$%^&*()=+[]\ and other special characters.

Refining Searches

- Using a plus [+] symbol before a word ensures that both words appear in the results. For example, in some instances [George Washington's dog] might return results that don't mention a dog, but [George Washington +dog] will ensure that all results have the word dog in them.
- The minus [-] symbol before a word in a search will ensure that the word is not included in the results. If trying to research Abraham from Bible, Searching for [Abraham] might give results primarily about Abraham Lincoln. [Abraham -Lincoln] would make sure that no results had the word Lincoln included.
- Surrounding search terms with quotation marks requires that results have the words used in the exact order. Searching for [Tom Cruise] might give results about a man named Tom who took a boat cruise, while ["Tom Cruise"] should only return results for the actor Tom Cruise.

Tips for Better Searches

- **Think about how the page you are looking for will be written.** A search engine is not human, it is a program that matches the words you give to pages on the web. **Use the words that are most likely to appear on the page.** For example, instead of saying [my head hurts], say [headache], because that's the term a medical page will use. The query [in what country are bats considered an omen of good luck?] is very clear to a person, but the document that gives the answer may not have those words. Instead, use the query [bats are considered



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

good luck in] or even just [bats good luck], because that is probably what the right page will say.

- **Describe what you need with as few terms as possible.** The goal of each word in a query is to focus it further. Since all words are used, each additional word limits the results. If you limit too much, you will miss a lot of useful information. The main advantage to starting with fewer keywords is that, if you don't get what you need, the results will likely give you a good indication of what additional words are needed to refine your results on the next search. For example, [weather Cancun] is a simple way to find the weather and it is likely to give better results than the longer [weather report for Cancun Mexico].
- **Choose descriptive words.** The more unique the word is the more likely you are to get relevant results. Words that are not very descriptive, like 'document,' 'website,' 'company,' or 'info,' are usually not needed. Keep in mind, however, that even if the word has the correct meaning but it is not the one most people use, it may not match the pages you need. For example, [celebrity ringtones] is more descriptive and specific than [celebrity sounds].

Questions

Listed below are a series of questions which will help familiarize you with the library's databases while honing your search abilities.

1a. In the 2002 Election for Governor in New York State, who was George Pataki's Running mate?

1b. Did they win the election?

1c. Which database did you use to find the result?

1d. What query did you use to find the result?



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

2a. When did the poet Andrew Marvell write "Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland"?

2b. What year was Andrew Marvell born?

2c. Which database did you use to find the result?

2d. What query did you use to find the result?

3a. Who was the mayor of Poughkeepsie in 1903?

3b. Which publication did you find the answer in?

3c. Which database did you use to find the result?

3d. What query did you use to find the result?

4a. Who was the first person to receive an artificial heart?

4b. How long did he live after receiving the artificial heart?



Using Library Databases

Western Sullivan Public Library
Public Computer Center

4c. Which database did you use to find the result?

4d. What query did you use to find the result?

Wrapping Up

Hopefully we've given you a better understanding of the databases and wealth of information available through the library. Learning how to search these databases effectively can make researching information much more enjoyable and efficient.

The PCC also offers a course on refining your Google Search. Most of the techniques we've described here will work in any search engine (like Google, Yahoo, or Bing) as well.

Happy searching!