THE “INFORMATION MATRIX”

Information Types and the Right Tools to Search Them

Loring Prest
Electronic Resources Librarian
Louis L. Manderino Library
California University of Pennsylvania

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Hi, I’m Loring Prest.

I’m the Electronic Resources Librarian and Library Webmaster at the Louis L. Manderino Library of California University of Pennsylvania.
NO SHORTAGE OF INFORMATION

- One thing we have plenty of today: INFORMATION!
- There’s so much, it can be overwhelming.
- When you start your research, you need to ask yourself...
- What kind of information do I need?
INFORMATION COMES IN MANY FORMS:

- Books
- Articles
- Web Sites
- Reference Materials
- Laws – Federal and State Statutes & Codes
- Laws – Federal and State Court Decisions
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- **BOOKS:**
  - Usually **many pages** long
  - Longer length often results in **broader coverage** of the topic
  - All that length takes time to write, edit, and publish! So, there can be a **long “time lag”** from idea to publication...perhaps years
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- ARTICLES:
  - Come in a variety of “flavors”
    - Magazines (popular)
    - Journals (scholarly)
    - Newspapers (news reports, editorials)
  - Each “flavor” has slightly different characteristics
  - Compared to a book, however, all articles will be much shorter
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- **ARTICLES – Magazines:**
  - Refers to popular magazines, like...
    - Newsweek, People, Sports Illustrated, Motorcyclist
  - Written and marketed to the general public
    - Short articles for short attention spans!
    - Usually **no** documentation, citations, or bibliographies
  - Shorter length and popular audience = **shallow coverage** of the topic
  - Typically published **weekly or monthly**, so “time lag” is shorter than a book
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- **ARTICLES – Journals:**
  - Refers to *scholarly* publications, like...
  - Written and marketed to *researchers*
    - Longer articles for longer attention spans!
    - Presents new research and analysis
    - Expect documentation, citations, and bibliographies
  - Longer length and specialized audience = *focused coverage* on a specific topic
  - Journals are usually *published 4 times a year*, so “time lag” is shorter than a book, longer than a popular article.
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- ARTICLES – Newspapers:
  - Refers to news publications, like...
  - Written and marketed to the general public
    - Reports the news and gives opinions (editorials) about events
    - Very brief articles for very brief attention spans!
    - No Documentation, citations, or bibliographies
  - Articles = news coverage on an event
  - Daily publication is most up-to-date, but also most prone to errors, since written very quickly to meet deadlines.
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- WEB SITES:
  - Cover all kinds of subjects
    - Can be very brief, or in-depth
    - Can include documentation, or provide **no** documentation
  - Written **FOR** all kinds of people:
    - Children, general audience, specialists
  - Written **BY** all kinds of people:
    - Children, general audience, specialists.
    - How do you know? Better find out before you cite the Web page!
  - **Wide range** of resources, but accuracy is also quite varied
  - Some terrific sites, some awful ones.
    - Your job is to choose carefully!
  - Can be the **most up-to-date** resource, since publication is almost instantaneous. But many old, outdated pages live on the Web too.
  - All in all, Web sites come in every flavor imaginable!
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

**REFERENCE MATERIALS:**

+ Resources that provide content and information
  - Encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, etc.
  - Resources that provide statistics, analysis, etc. For example: CQPress Electronic Library
  - Databases where you can find “nuggets” of information
+ **Length can vary** from a short dictionary entry, to a very long encyclopedia article
+ May—or may not—include documentation, citations, or bibliographies
+ Typically a **very long “time lag.”** Many reference sources are based on other sources. Collecting this information can take some time.
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- **LAWS – STATUTES:**
  - The laws passed by the legislature at the federal or state level (House and Senate)
  - The “official” laws of the land, these are primary source materials.
  - Paper versions have a long “time lag” between passage and printing. Legislative Web sites, however, provide more current information.
EACH TYPE HAS ITS OWN CHARACTERISTICS:

- **LAWS – COURT DECISIONS:**
  - The judicial court decisions at the federal, Supreme Court, or state level
  - The “official” interpretation of the laws of the land, these are primary source materials.
  - Paper versions have a long “time lag” between decision and printing. Legislative Web sites, however, provide more current information.
Now that you know the range of resources available, we need to ask the all-important question:

- How do I find information in these resources?
FINDING INFORMATION IN THESE RESOURCES

- Before you start clicking and searching, you need to know...
- Different SEARCH TOOLS work best for each type of resource.
- Think of...a tool box.
  - Sometimes you need a hammer...to pound a nail.
  - Other times, you need a saw...to cut a board.
  - They aren’t very interchangeable!
  - You don’t use the same tool for every situation.
- Learn to use the **RIGHT TOOL** for the **RIGHT JOB**.
THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

To FIND: BOOKS

USE:

- Library Catalog (ours is called: “PILOT”)
- WorldCat.org
- Google Book Search
  - Allows full-text searching of millions of books
  - Complete full-text for books published before 1923
  - Limited full-text of many newer books
THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

- To FIND: ARTICLES (all kinds)
- USE:
  - General Indexes:
    - Academic Search Complete (scholarly and popular articles)
    - LexisNexis Academic (newspapers)
  - Subject-specific indexes:
    - SocINDEX with Full Text
    - Social Work Abstracts
  - Google Scholar
    - Finds scholarly articles, Web sites, and more
    - Use the link on library’s Web site to ensure you get all the free full-text articles you have coming to you!!
THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

To FIND: WEB SITES

USE:

+ Search Engines
  - Google (still the best!)
  - Yahoo!
  - Ask
  - Etc.
THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

To FIND: REFERENCE MATERIALS

USE:

- Various Tools:
- Find them by going to:
  - Library Home Page > Find Resources by Subject >
  - Choose your Subject
  - Look for reference resources (which may include selected free Web sites)
THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

To FIND: LAWS – STATUTES and COURTS

USE:

+ Legal Tools, especially:
  × LexisNexis Academic
  × WestLaw Campus Research
  × Legal Information Institute (Cornell University site)

+ Find them by going to:
  × Library Home Page > Find Resources by Subject >
  × Choose Law & Legal Studies
I’ve got lots of tools in my toolbox, because I can’t get by with just one. Neither can you.

You have **LOTS of resources** available to you!

Your job is to decide **which TYPE of resource** you need.

Then, decide **which TOOL** will work best to help you find the information in that resource.
If you need help finding the right tool, contact the library or me.

We will be happy to help you! THANKS!

Loring Prest
prest@calu.edu
AIM: LibLoring
724-938-5769

Reference Desk
reference@calu.edu
AIM: CalULibrary
724-938-4094