

Free Range Databases

Library professionals are already aware of the free online bibliographic databases maintained by U.S. government agencies: ERIC, PubMed, Agricola, and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Those esteemed databases of education, medicine, agricultural sciences, and criminal justice, respectively, are the go-to databases when helping patrons locate information in those topics.

However, there is another species of freely-available bibliographic databases roaming the Internet; they may not be as well known as ERIC or PubMed, but they are worth knowing about if only for the sake of having another tool in your Swiss Army knife of online resources.

Many of these free bibliographic databases are maintained by scholarly societies, college or university departments in various subject areas, academic libraries, or not-for-profit organizations. The *Raison d'être* for these databases is often described as a concentrated subject access point to research literature for researchers in particular fields and also as a 'value-added' service to professionals in that field or area. For instance, there is a database for research on freshwater mollusks [<http://bit.ly/8YkgjT>], astronomy education [<http://bit.ly/6UQ5MD>]; the sociology of religion [<http://bit.ly/9FzzOG>]; Beethoven [<http://bit.ly/9BXFwj>] and the Creation/Evolution debate [<http://bit.ly/9DLVyS>].

For the purposes of this discussion, I'm focusing on databases that provide access to the same kinds of sources as library subscription databases: journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, 'grey literature', and research reports. Also, there must be free access (no registration is required) and they must be searchable (i.e. not just a list of items arranged alphabetically or by subject.)

I'm omitting any online sources with these characteristics:

- Databases that index scholarly web-sites.
- Databases that index mostly or solely foreign-language materials.
- Bibliographic databases from scholarly publishers like Elsevier, Springer, Sage, Emerald Insight and others. Many of these services are already indexed by Google Scholar and/or appear in the full Google index.

When to use them:

- Tracking down obscure citations, or citations with incorrect info. Patrons like knowing you have looked *everywhere*. This is a golden opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of sources and prowess at using them.
- When you have no access to the tried-and-true subscription databases for the subject area AND/OR you get questions in subject areas you have never dealt with before.
- You are helping an especially intrepid user with their research and are confident they can make good use of the database. It is sometimes challenging to search some

of the free tools because of the unusual syntax required and it is often difficult to refine search results.

- Serving small academic departments that do not warrant the expenditure on the requisite subscription databases. For instance, you may only have one or two anthropology instructors on your campus, and they only teach basic survey courses where the students are not required to write research papers.

Drawbacks:

- May not be updated as often as subscription databases. Many of these tools may not even include information on frequency of updates. Some tools have not been updated in several years.
- Requires fairly sophisticated library skills to get from citations to library holdings. Search results are often in plain HTML format so identifying the citation elements requires some previous experience (i.e. which part is the article title and which is the journal title?).
- May be little in the way of search tips or technical support.
- May not have value-added features like the ability to email citations, export to bibliographic management software, or save to social networking sites.
- May not be stable and enduring due to funding, or technology issues. The server that the bibliographic tool resides on may not be as robust as that of the vendors libraries typically deal with, so “Page not found” messages might occur. You might find that one day the database has disappeared completely with no explanation.
- May require users to create a free account to use extra database features. Not many tools found in the research for this article required users to create an account.

How to find other free bibliographic databases?

- Do an advanced search of the InfoMine website (<http://infomine.ucr.edu>) and limit to “article databases.” InfoMine is a subject-based database of pre-selected websites, much like the Internet Public Library and Librarian’s Index to the Internet.
- Query your favorite search engine with term *bibliography* and *database*. Be sure to use the keyword *searchable* so that you exclude bibliographies that just list sources alphabetically or by subject.
- Subscribe to librarian’s Gary Price’s ResourceShelf updates. Price is known for his expertise on the so-called “Hidden Web.” While Google is increasingly getting better at indexing sources, there is still a wide swathe of websites that are not included in its index.
- Check subject guides of libraries at research universities. Larger universities serve diverse academic departments but may not have the resources to provide subscription databases for all of them.

How to remember them?

- Use the bookmarks or favorites on your reference desk computers or post links in your library’s Intranet

- Set up a delicious.com account for your reference desk. As you add items to your delicious.com account be sure to add the tag *databases* for each one. That way you can create a link to all of the tools in your account that have the tag databases. You can then save a link to that URL Example:
<http://delicious.com/yourlibrary/Databases>
- Have links on your research by subject pages. Before doing this, you will want to ensure that the tool is a viable option for researchers. Have your faculty colleagues or subject-specialists look at the tool for feedback.

Below I list some databases that are fairly broad in scope. For each database, I'll also mention whether or not it is part of the "hidden web" and, therefore not indexed by the search engines, and some suggested uses for each database. A full list of the over 110 databases I have found are listed at my Delicious.com account:

<http://delicious.com/shoresmle/databases>

Anthropological Index Online - <http://schapera.kent.ac.uk/aio/> - An index to the current periodicals held in the Anthropology Library at the Centre for Anthropology, The British Museum. **Suggested for:** Those without access to JSTOR, AnthroSource, or Anthropology Plus. **Indexed by Google?** No

EconPapers- <http://econpapers.repec.org/>

A decentralized database of working papers, journal articles, book abstracts and chapter listings, and software in economics. Access to full text is limited to the subscription databases like EconLit, where the citations also live. **Suggested for:** those with no access to EconLit. **Indexed by Google?** Yes

The University of Minnesota's Forestry Library maintains several free bibliographic databases on forestry topics, at [<http://bit.ly/ddeR1j>] which include the topics **Urban Forestry, Social Sciences in Forestry, Trail Planning, Construction and Maintenance, Tropical Forest Conservation and Development**. **Suggested for:** Those needing references in environmental studies topics. **Indexed by Google?** No

POPLINE - <http://www.popline.org>

POPline claims to be the "world's largest database on reproductive health, containing citations with abstracts to scientific articles, reports, books, and unpublished reports in the field of population, family planning, and related health issues. **Suggested for:** those looking for scholarly demographic or reproductive health research; librarians trying to verify citations. **Indexed by Google?** No.

Project CORK Database of Substance Abuse Research - <http://bit.ly/9NjfYy>

An inter-disciplinary database of professional literature on all aspects of substance abuse. Includes journal articles, books, book chapters and reports. **Suggested for:** Those without

access to databases in sociology, social work, and psychology, and those needing a narrow access point to substance abuse research. **Indexed by Google?** No.

Environmental History - <http://bit.ly/cM1M97>

An inter-disciplinary database of items on all aspects of environmental history, from soil conservation to herbal medicine. Created by the Forest History Society. **Suggested for:** Those needing a focused resource on environmental history ...**Indexed by Google?** No.

Myers-Briggs© Bibliography Search - <http://bit.ly/9Ejivs>

The famous personality test used in academia and in the business world has its own searchable bibliographic databases. Maintained by the Center for the Application of Psychological Type, this tool includes books, journal articles, conference presentations, doctoral dissertations, master's theses. **Suggested for:** Those without access to PsycINFO, the major index to behavioral sciences literature. **Indexed by Google?** Yes and no. Individual citations are not indexed by Google, but the ready-made searches (on topics like Stress, burnout, and trauma to name a few) are in the Google index.

Searchable Steinbeck. - <http://bit.ly/cYotmS>

A great tool for literature students wanting an especially tight focus on the famous American author. Includes journal articles, books, reference works, newspaper articles, and more. Each citation is annotated, which is not a common feature for free bibliographic tools. Maintained by the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University, San Jose, CA. **Suggested for:** Steinbeck researchers who like an annotation before deciding whether or not to chase down a citation. **Indexed by Google?** No.

Adoption Institute Database - <http://bit.ly/9cA0F4>

A service of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute Offers the ability to run ready-made searches (recommended) or a keyword search. Includes journal articles, master's theses, dissertations, conference papers, reports and other 'grey' literature on all aspects of adoption. **Suggested for:** Students or researchers who need a more focused look at the research of adoption or for those without access to the subscription database Social Work Abstracts. **Indexed by Google?** Yes and no. Individual citations appear to be not indexed by Google, but the ready-made category searches are in the Google index.

Collection of Computer Science Bibliographies - <http://bit.ly/960X4L>

Over 3 million references to journal articles, conference papers, and technical reports in most aspects of the computer sciences. **Suggested for:** Researchers without access to the ACM Digital Library (Association of Computing Machinery) IEEE Xplor, INSPEC and others. **Indexed by Google?** No.

Conclusion: Free bibliographic tools are an interesting outgrowth of scholarly communication on the Internet. While they are never going to replace the tried-and-true subscription databases that libraries purchase, they can be a good fallback strategy when no other options exist. If you know of others, please contact the author at shoresml@muohio.edu.