

OCLC Searching: Harder, Better, FasterII

by

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Finally, we get to the really fun stuff! Keyword searching on OCLC lets you get to information that was previously inaccessible (or so deeply buried in an extended search as to be inaccessible). But your first question, as always, should be: is a full MARC record from OCLC what I really need? Maybe you can find what you need in your own catalog (are you online with a sophisticated keyword searching capability) or through FirstSearch (whose keyword searching offers many more combinations)? Since I catalog, almost every time I search for bibliographic information, I need it in MARC format. There is no keyword searching available in the Authority File (although you can search for subject headings on bibliographic records).

The only operator in OCLC keyword searching is AND. You cannot use OR, NOT, or search by proximity. There are stopwords in keyword searching, but they are different from those you know from constructing derived searches for conference or corporate headings in the OLUC or AF.

The index labels are different--so spend some time with your documentation to determine which tags and which subfields within those tags are searchable with each index term. For example, the author (au) label will search the n, d, & c subfields of a conference heading--imagine being able to go directly to a particular numbered conference!

You can search series (traced and untraced) with the series (se), title (ti), or subject/title/contents (st) label--but are you sure you want to pick your way through every hit on a term that is also used in the contents or title when what you really want to search is going to be in one of the series tags?

You can mask a single character or a string of characters at the end of a word. You must, however, have three characters in your keyword before you can begin masking. The pound sign (#) masks 0-1 character within a word or at the end of a word (and you can use it as many as 5 times). The question mark (?) masks 0-any number of characters at the end of a word. You can search for both the American and British spelling of color (colour) by using the keyword colo#r. You may qualify your search by format and date, but NOT by source (dlc). A qualifier counts as one of the maximum of eight keywords you are allowed in your search. A keyword search must be sent while you are in the OLUC--you will not automatically be moved into the proper file. A keyword search is more expensive than a phrase search or a derived search--but it's cheaper than retrieving a bibliographic record by beginning with a phrase search or two derived searches (if you get too few or too many hits on the first attempt).

So when should you use a keyword search? Whenever you have too little information to construct a derived search! Soon after I

learned about keyword searching, an undated edition of Moby Dick came to me for processing. It was an older book from our backlog, so I had no clue concerning publication date. It was published in New York by Books, Inc. and was in the series "The World's Popular Classics". I was looking for any kind of copy there might be in the OLC--not just LC copy. I also didn't want to spend a big chunk of my time wading through all the records that a name/title search would bring up (close to 900 at the time).

So I set up the following search: fin au melville and au herman and ti moby and ti dick and pb books and se popular and se classics. OK, so it was overkill--but I wanted to try out as many labels as I thought would help. The series label and publisher label were particularly useful. I had two hits: one had an estimated date of publication in the 20th century and one in the 1940s--a date qualifier could easily have excluded one or both of these.

By using so many labels I almost got too cute: I nearly searched Inc. as another part of the publisher's name, but that would have excluded one of my hits. Remember, zero hits on any one term will mean zero hits for your entire search key. Each word you use increases the chance that you will misspell something (hermann, melvile, mody, bick) and ruin your search. I have messed up a few times by trying to search for the publisher Springer-Verlag with the search: pb springer. The hyphenated form is the most common, so use the search: pb springer? (that will retrieve Springer, Springer Verlag and Springer-Verlag). I've also missed a record when I correctly spelled a publisher that appeared on the title page in Fraktur--only later to find a OCLC record where the publisher had been badly misspelled.

Another use of keyword searching helps you avoid an otherwise very time-consuming search by allowing you to zero in on distinctive words that are buried deep in the title. There is a Festschrift in honor of A.S. Hall entitled: Studies in the History and Topography of Lycia and Pisidia. If you try to use the derived search key: stu,in,th,h--you'd better send out for pizza, because you'll have a very long wait (or a very short one because you've exceeded the system limit). And a common Hall won't be very helpful in creating an effective search key. But you can set up a keyword search: fin au hall and ti lycia and ti pisidia. This takes you directly to the correct record (hall being a personal name added entry)--no fuss, no mess, no tipping the pizza guy!

If you're given only partial information, you can mask what you don't know and still search. I was asked to hunt down a book by Carl (or Karl) Richard (or Richards) that had something about classic (classics, classical?) and founder (or founders) in the title. I skipped the Carl part (can't mask characters at the beginning of a keyword) and constructed my search: fin au richard# and ti founder# and ti classic? and retrieved The Founders and the Classics by Carl J. Richard.

Say you need to search the OLC to find which libraries own a

copy of a particular play--but the only information the patron remembers is that it was made into a movie starring Anthony Hopkins, and that it was about C.S. Lewis. OK, the Anthony Hopkins information is only interesting trivia, but you can search for records that have C.S. Lewis as a subject heading. Throw in the subdivision Drama, and you've got yourself a workable search: fin su lewis and su c and su drama. This search also brings up dramatized works written by C.S. Lewis, but you'll have several hits on William Nicholson's "Shadowlands"--just what the patron ordered!

Notice that c is a searchable word (check out that stopword list again). I wasn't paying attention to that list when I looked for a German translation of Thomas Wolfe's You Can't Go Home Again. I tried: fin au wolfe and ti you and la ger. Result: zip, nada, nichts, nothing! Whoops--you is a stopword! A successful search key is: fin au wolfe and ti home and la ger. You'll find his Es Führt Kein Weg Zurück, and KU owns it (lucky us!).

One final use for keyword searching is to check how libraries are using certain subject terms. I once spent some time trying to find out how the subdivision Concordances, [language] was being used--was it only with sacred works and English or were other combinations being used? My research was inconclusive; but without keyword searching I would not have found any examples.

I have tried to point out in these articles for ASSOCIATES that the cheapest search may not be very efficient. There are times when one type of search will be more effective than the others; I have tried to give you tips from my experience to help you pick which search strategy will most likely retrieve exactly what you need most quickly. These musings grew from a series of in-house training sessions my supervisor and I put together for our staff. I hope you've found something useful (or at least something amusing) in them. Now get back to work, keep your wrists straight, your forearms and thighs parallel to the floor, and don't forget to take a stretch break!