

Search and Retrieve

Search Tools

When you have chosen a topic, the next step is to find the appropriate tool or tools necessary to find information on it. There are three primary searching tools: the library's online catalog of holdings, also known as the OPAC; databases; and the World Wide Web.

The OPAC is the gateway to a number of information sources including books, journals/periodicals, videotapes and DVDs and microform. The databases are electronic indexes of journals/periodicals with abstracts of the articles. Full-text content is available in most databases. The subject matter of a database can be very broad or extremely specific, depending upon the particular database. The Web contains a number of search engines such as Google and directories such as Yahoo. A search engine is a keyword searchable database of Internet files collected by a computer program. A web directory is a service that offers a collection of links that are organized into subject categories. It is very important to note that there is no such thing as quality control on the Web.

Accessing Search Tools

You can utilize these tools using these major points of access: keyword, subject, title, and author.

A **keyword** search is best when you only have a word or basic phrase to work with. It is possible to search all fields by keyword, including title, author, subject, abstracts or even the full-text of a document. The downside of keyword searching is that you might retrieve a lot of irrelevant information as well. The next point of access is **subject** searching. The OPAC and most databases use special or controlled vocabulary called *subject headings* to describe what each item in the database is about. It is necessary to know the actual subject heading for this search to be fruitful. **Title** and **author** searching is fairly self-explanatory. It is possible to search for a journal/periodical or book with a partial title. Be sure to drop any "The" or "A" at the very beginning of the title. When searching for a particular author, always search by the last name. If that retrieves too many results, you can add the first name or first initial but it isn't necessary.

Retrieving Information

From the OPAC: Once you find an item of interest, you will see the bibliographic record which will tell you the author, title, publishing information, etc. At the bottom of the record you will see **location**, **call number** and **status**. The location tells you if the item is in the Sawyer Library or at another Suffolk library. The call number will tell you where the item is located on the shelf. The status tells you if the book is available (on shelf), non-circulating or if it is checked out (due date is given).

From a database: Once you have found an article, you have a few options regarding retrieval. If the full-text is available, you can either read it online or print it out. If the full-text is not available through that particular database, you can check the OPAC to see if the Sawyer Library has the article in a print journal, in microform, or has an electronic subscription to the journal containing the article.

From the Web: Most Web sites enable the visitor to read the information via the screen, print it, save the Web page as a file using the browser's "save file" capability and "copy" parts of the page to a text editor. Sites may also enable users to e-mail a Web page's content to their e-mail account.