GETTING THE MOST OUT OF WORLDCAT

SEARCHING SUBJECTS COMPREHENSIVELY

Sometimes you are doing research for a project and you need to see what has been published on the topic. Let’s say you are thinking about doing research on gender roles in Shakespeare’s comedies and you want to see if any scholarship has been published on the topic. You can use WorldCat to identify LC subject headings relevant to your project, as well as locate and identify rare books that might exist on the subject.

Subject headings and specific descriptors will be found inside the record of each item. Finding relevant subject headings can really transform your searches, so it is good to look for these early in the process. You can either incorporate them as phrases in the subject field search (which isolates your search to this one area of the record) OR you can reincorporate the subject phrases into a keyword search, which still searches the entire record. Either way, your results will be more focused.

Remember that, as with most searching, finding results takes time. Searching is an iterative process. While there are strategies that make our searches more effective, the act of searching itself takes a lot of creativity and problem-solving. If the research was easy to do, it would not be valued as much.
IDENTIFYING ALTERNATE EDITIONS

There are occasions when you will find the need to identify trends in publishing or compare editions of a work. WorldCat is an excellent tool for these kinds of tasks because it contains records from over 72,000 libraries. Identifying editions of a work is more difficult than you might expect. Some presearch/search preparation that you might want to complete includes identifying alternate titles and alternate spellings for author’s personal names, and also determining any scope limitations that you might want to apply to your search (for example, only items published in English; only items published between certain years).

The first step is doing an advanced search for author and title. This will give you a good overview of everything that includes your title in the “title” field connected to the personal name that you included in the author field.

These results are still imprecise, but they are getting closer to what you are probably looking for. Now you can use limiters and sorting tools to explore even further.

With larger datasets (more than 1000 results), it is always a good idea to explore the refining limiters in tandem and then also in turn. So for example, by combining two, and the looking at each separately.

As with most searching, the process will take you on a journey. It’s good to have an idea of what you are looking for before you begin your search, if for no other reason than to give you boundaries to keep you from going off on rabbit trails. Keep track of your search terms so that you can reincorporate them into your search, and allow yourself enough time for your tasks. Identifying unique and important editions of certain works can take days, weeks, and maybe even longer than that!
CONFIRMING BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA

Sometimes the bibliographic information for an item is incredibly important. Which edition was published first? Did this author publish this specific item before this other item was written or published? We all know how important citations are. You can use WorldCat to help sort everything out.

Make sure you are using the right edition. WorldCat will help you differentiate between editions, publishers, editors, format and mode, etc.

MANAGING YOUR CITATIONS

Finally, you will want to save your citations in RefWorks, which will allow you to keep your research organized. WorldCat exports citations into RefWorks, and once your items are exported you will want to go in and add notes and make sure your important details are documented. RefWorks helps you document your research process, but it can’t replace your brain, so make sure you have a strategy to your folder organization!