

Research the Old–Fashioned Way: Why the library is not obsolete

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By Kelly Garbato

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By Kelly Garbato, author of "13 Lucky Steps to Writing a Research Paper"

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Although researching and writing a college paper has never been child's play, it was a bit more straightforward and less complicated before the advent of the Internet. Aspiring student researchers simply visited their university's library, where they could easily check out a few relevant books after consulting the card catalog and use a periodical index to find a journal article or two. Nowadays, there are many more choices in addition to those regular, "old–fashioned" standbys. Still, the Internet has yet to render the library obsolete!

The World Wide Web has become a boundless source of information, bringing knowledge to the homes of millions. Yet, despite the tens of billions of pages available online, it's a mistake to conclude that everything is available (somewhere!) on the Web. Contrary to popular belief, the entire world's wisdom is not online and free for the taking. Some information will cost you, while other resources are nowhere to be found.

Additionally, the Web is rife with misinformation. Unfortunately, many students not only turn first to the Internet for their research needs, but they are also handicapped by their inability to distinguish reputable resources from unreliable ones. While use of the Internet can make research more convenient, it may also result in carelessness. Students are better served by beginning their research at the library and using the Web as a secondary resource.

Fortunately, the Internet has also changed the way in which the supposedly passe library functions. While you may still see drawers upon drawers of card catalogs, most libraries have also made their catalogs available online. Computers have facilitated interlibrary loan (ILL) as well. Likewise, paper journals and microfiche persist, but these resources are supplemented with subscriptions to online

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academic databases. Ultimately, libraries have used the Internet to provide the best of both worlds – the reputable resources available at the library, digitalized for greater accessibility.

1. Online Catalogs

In all likelihood, you've probably already used a card catalog, even if it was way back in elementary school. While catalogs do still exist, the good news is that most of them have been digitalized. Now available online, they're much easier to access and search. If you can connect to your library's computer system remotely, you can even browse their holdings from your dorm room!

Online catalogs generally consist of records of the library's holdings (books, journals, dissertations, manuscripts, etc.), as opposed to the holdings themselves. A record can include any of the following information: author, title, publisher, date and place of publication, journal title, subject, and keywords.

You might be tempted to dismiss catalogs since they don't provide instant gratification – immediate, full–text access to all available resources. However, you can access many of the holdings either via online academic databases or in the library itself – all it takes is a little detective work!

Other libraries offer access to their catalogs as well. WebCATS (

<http://www.libdex.com/>

) is an index of

over 18,000 libraries' catalogs. You can browse them by geographical location or search the index by keyword. Each entry provides a direct link to the library's online holdings.

2. Interlibrary Loan (ILL)

Some libraries partner up with others and form groups called consortia. These consortia provide access to one another's holdings – this is where ILL comes in. When you search your library's catalog, most likely you're simultaneously searching the catalogs of your library's consortia as well. These libraries include not only university libraries, but also public, school, government, corporate, and institutional libraries. If you find a resource that isn't available at your "home" library, you can either borrow it or obtain a copy from the library that houses it.

Many libraries offer this service online, but if you have any questions or are unable to locate an online form, it can be done at your library's reference desk as well. If you aren't affiliated with a library (or if you need a resource that belongs to a library that your own library isn't associated with), you might be able to borrow or order it for a fee.

3. Academic Databases

Academic databases are privately owned or proprietary databases that charge users a fee to search their holdings or retrieve full–text documents. While members of the public can pay to use these

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services online, students have ready access to dozens of proprietary databases that their libraries subscribe to. These academic databases can cover a wide range of subjects, from business to the humanities, and offer everything from citations and abstracts to full–text documents. A single company may produce several different databases, and different databases may include some of the same materials (including journals, articles, or even smaller or more specific databases).

Before you can choose the right database, you need to have a general idea of what subject you'll be researching. Then, browse your library's site for a database that covers your desired topic. Most likely, you'll have several promising databases from which to select. Don't be discouraged, and don't rely on just one – try them all out! Although some of their coverage may overlap, you'll probably be able to find unique resources in each of them.

While students veer towards databases, especially those that provide instant access to full–text articles, this is a grave mistake. As expansive as they may be, academic databases don't usually include books, dissertations, or multimedia materials. Their coverage generally only dates back to the 1970s, and they don't provide exhaustive coverage of most disciplines. Even worse, the full–text articles sometimes contain mistakes, including typographical errors and omissions of sections of the article – or even the entire article itself! Ideally, you should supplement your use of full–text databases with databases that only provide citations or abstracts. Then, you can use your library's online catalog to locate hard copies of the materials. If the sources you're interested in aren't available at your library, it's very possible that your librarian will be able to help you track them down.

The next time you need to do some research, make the first stop your library as opposed to your laptop! Far from being supplanted by the Digital Age, libraries have integrated new technologies into their services, making them more useful than ever.

Copyright Kelly Garbato, 2005 Kelly Garbato is an author, ePublisher, and small business owner. She recently self–published her first book, "13 Lucky Steps to Writing a Research Paper," now available at Amazon.com (

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The Old Fashioned Books Vs. Free Audio Books

By Paton Jackson

In the last two decades a new concept has arisen – The concept of listening to a book instead of reading the book. The audio book technology is still developing but audio books are getting more and more popular. However, the old fashioned book is still the much more common than any other method. In this article we will elaborate on the differences between these two book methods:

1. Size and Weight - The audio book does not have the limitation of the the size and the amount of the printing words. The advance in technology imposes the size of the audio book. The newest audio books could be stored as an audio file in mobile electronic devices as Ipod or Palm pilot.

2. Convenience – The audio book has the limitation of listening only from certain predefined points or from the exact point one stopped listening the last time. Reading an old fashioned book is much more flexible of course. If you only want to go through a book without reading it from start to end, do not even consider having an audio book.

3. Listening to an audio book could be done anywhere anytime - while exercising in the gym, driving through the heavy traffic to work etc. It helps you make the most of your time. Reading the old fashioned book requires certain conditions like concentration and quiet and relaxed surroundings.

4. Price - Surprisingly, in general the old fashioned books costs less than audio books. Depending on the different titles and different methods of audio books it can vary. Among the audio books, audio books on MP3 files are the less expensive ones.

5. The experience - the experience of reading a book is unique and can not be the same as listening to audio books. In addition, audio books do not have paintings in them like some of the old fashioned books.

Summing up, we believe that audio books and the old fashioned books could exist together one besides the other and not one instead of the other.

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