

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
Online Encyclopedias
February 2011

In 2005, *Nature* magazine reported that *Wikipedia* came close to *Britannica* in terms of the accuracy of its science articles. At that time, *Wikipedia* was less than one-sixth its current size. In January 2011, *Wikipedia* celebrated its tenth anniversary, is growing at an exponential rate, and is, as yet, freely available courtesy of financial donations from its readership. *Wikipedia* is not without its problems. There is even a *Wikipedia* article titled "Criticism of Wikipedia." Many articles are overly long and poorly written. The style, even within an article, is often inconsistent, due to the many editors that have touched it. Long articles are often poorly organized, meandering, repetitive and contradictory. It has been claimed that *Wikipedia* is better at compilations of facts than it is in their interpretation. And for these reasons, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a hands-on study of three online encyclopedias that are also commonplace in community colleges: *Encyclopedia Americana*, *Britannica Online*, and *World Book*.

Review Highlights

- The content of all three encyclopedias is solid and each would be an appropriate resource for a community college library, but each has its strengths and weaknesses.
 - Both *Americana* and *Britannica* have EBSCO supplements, but *Britannica's* is more robust, with full text. Neither offers an effective sort of EBSCO material. *World Book* also contains a complementary collection of ebooks and media.
 - *World Book* has the best search interface.
 - We had strong reservations regarding the *Americana* search interface.

ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA

Americana consists of more than 100,000 articles covering history, science and the arts. There are also thousands of maps, flags, tables, and illustrations, though they're not easy to find. Articles in *Americana* are well-written, concise and scholarly, but still accessible to most community college students. Grolier combines the traditional *Americana* content with a few interesting tools and additional information resources. Unfortunately a difficult user interface makes it hard to get at the content.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION for COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

- #1 --- Not recommended
- #2 --- Recommended with reservations as noted
- #3 --- Recommended
- #4 --- Outstanding offer

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION: 3.0

The *Americana* welcome page offers four browsing options

- Browse: very broad subject areas
- Journal: current events from news sources
- Editor's Picks: a few featured topics
- Profiles: a few selected biographies

Most users will go directly to the *Find it Fast* search box. When a user enters a search, the results open in a new window or a tab, for browsers that support tabs. This can be confusing for users. When an article is retrieved, every instance of the search term is highlighted in red. This is visually distracting and serves no useful purpose. The default search appears to be an implicit Boolean OR between search terms, leading to large search result sizes but many irrelevant articles being retrieved. For example, a search for *domestic violence* without quotes yields nearly 2000 hits, nearly all irrelevant, although the first listed is a solid match.

[1788] document(s) found [25 returned]

[NEXT >](#)

1 [Domestic Violence](#)

Domestic Violence, the physical abuse of women (usually) by their intimate partners.

2 [Cat, Domestic](#)

Cat, Domestic. The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is a small member of the cat family (Felidae), which also includes lions, tigers, cheetahs, lynxes, and many others (see Cat Family).

Figure 1. Search results for domestic violence. Note irrelevant article on cats.

The user is also given the option of Boolean searching via the *Advanced Search* button

on the upper-right hand corner of most search screens, yet the functionality of this option is inconsistent.

Articles in *Americana* rarely include hyperlinks or images within the body of the article. While this gives a clean look to the article text it does not encourage browsing or discovering content. There actually are links to other *Americana* articles and outside websites, but the user must look to *Americana*'s Article Toolbar to find them. The *Article Toolbar* is a small box off to the right of the article that is easy to overlook. But many of *Americana*'s most interesting features are hidden there.

Not all articles have all of the content that could be listed in the *Article Toolbar*, so buttons from the toolbar appear and disappear accordingly. This inconsistency in display is confusing to users who expect things to be in the same place every time. The default behavior for the buttons varies; some buttons open their results in a popup window and others open in the same browser window, requiring the user to use the browser's back button to get back to the article text.

If the *Article Toolbar* for an article has a *Related Articles* button this means that there are links to additional *Americana* content. If there is a *Web Links* button this denotes that there are links to outside websites.

Some articles in *Americana* have accompanying material such as maps, flags or tables, that is not included in the body of the article. The user must click on buttons labeled *Maps*, *Flags*, or *Tables* to view this content. Photos and other images are also not usually in the article, but only available via the *Article Toolbar*. Unless a user seeks them out, these pictures, graphs, links and resources will go unseen and unused.

There is a *Library Resources* link on the toolbar that will do a search in OCLC Worldcat for books with the same keywords that the user provided in his initial search. Worldcat apparently determines the user's location based on IP address, showing holdings for titles in libraries in the general area where the user is located. This is an interesting feature, but it might be more useful if it were a link to a search in the subscribing library's own online catalog.

The *Magazine Articles* link on the toolbar provides access to selected periodical content licensed from EBSCO. Grolier claims it is from 1,300 periodicals, ranging over a six year period. However the full text of each issue is not included, nor is there the ability to search for specific issues. Also the search interface is very limited and search results are limited to 50 articles per search. Considering the small size of the database being searched and the limited search functionality, a user would be well-advised to use a general periodical database, if one is available at his library, than rely on the *Magazine Articles* feature.

The *Journal* is a news and events database written by the *Americana* editors. It is not selected from the *Article Toolbar*, but from another button bar above the text of the article. However for one reviewer, several searches resulted in no results found.

In summary, *Americana* articles are of very high quality but the ancillary content is sadly hidden. Grolier should consider redesigning the user interface to show off the content of this legacy product.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Remote access is available via IP address authentication, referring URL, and username and password and EZproxy server.

Usage statistics are available online.

ADA/Section 508 Compliance

Grolier online has been "committed to supporting ADA-compliance for all of its encyclopedia databases since 2002." *Americana* is accessible.

BRITANNICA ONLINE

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION: 3.0

DATABASE CONTENT/FORMAT: 3.0

Britannica Online comprises original, authored articles, links to over 500 journals and magazines from EBSCO databases, and links to eBooks that are provided through Project Gutenberg. The CCL-EAR package also includes the separate *World Data Analyst* database. This package also includes supplemental journal and magazine articles from EBSCO as well as a collection of over 20,000 ebooks, although many of these are also available freely on the Internet without subscription.

SEARCH INTERFACE: 2.5

Most users will opt for the quick search option on the welcome screen.

Search results for a potentially overwhelming topic, such as global warming, are returned in a tabbed format so the user can choose from the content rich *Dictionary* (a concise definition), *Encyclopedia* (an authored article), and *Magazines* (an unsorted collection of EBSCO articles) or the less useful Web Search (a link to Google) or Ebooks & Primary Sources (for the topic of *global warming* this comes up empty).

For the topic of global warming, over 100 full text articles are collected at the Magazines tab, but it's not possible to discern how they are ranked or sorted. The Ebooks & Primary Sources tab is a disappointment. A search on *medical marijuana* retrieves only two ebooks, both from the freely accessible Project Gutenberg: one is an essay by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; the second is an essay by Oliver Wendell Holmes. One would hope that a search on *Title IX* would retrieve the legislation. Instead, the sole Primary Source retrieved is a story by L. Frank Baum.

Search results under the Encyclopedia and Magazines tabs may be viewed online, emailed, and shared with colleagues.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES: 2.5

Demo videos on how to search the database are accessible from the welcome page. Technical support is available by both phone and email, Monday- Friday. Usage statistics are counter compliant. What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?

COST: 2.5

The cost of *Britannica Online* is comparable to that of *World Book*.

OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT

Bernstein, A. (2006, March). Britannica Online School Edition. *Library Media Connection*, 24, 89-89. Retrieved from *Academic Search Premier* database.

Brisco, S. (2008, November). Britannica versus World Book. *School Library Journal*, 54, 79-82. Retrieved from *Academic Search Premier* database.

Britannica Online. (2006, September 15). *Booklist*, Retrieved from *Academic Search Premier* database.

Britannica revamps its online encyclopedia. (2004, October). *T H E Journal*, Retrieved from *Academic Search Premier* database.

California Community Colleges, Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access and Review Committee. (2005, January). *Review Of Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.

WORLD BOOK ENCYCLOPEDIA COMPLETE SUITE
OVERALL RECOMMENDATION: 3.0

This package contains five databases: *World Book Advanced*, *World Book Discover*, *World Book Student*, *World Book Enciclopedia Estudiantil Hallazgos*, and *World Book Kids*. Taken as a whole, the “suite” covers basic encyclopedia needs from K to 12 and beyond.

Home | My Research

WORLD BOOK ADVANCED


RESEARCH TOOLS

- [Dictionary](#)
- [Atlas](#)
- [Explore California](#)
- [World Newspapers](#)
- [Explore the world](#)
- [Today in History](#)
- [Teaching With Documents](#)

Search

Keywords
 Full Text
 Images

[Advanced Search](#)



YOUR MOST-VIEWED ARTICLES


Pleistocene Epoch Pleistocene Epoch was a time in Earth's history that lasted from about 2.6 million years ago to about 11,500 years ago.

Lebanon

Gas chamber

Capital punishment

Prehistoric people



CREATE AND SHARE

- [My Research](#)
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- [Citation Builder](#)
- [Timelines](#)

E-BOOKS CENTER

World Book Advanced includes thousands of fiction and non-fiction e-books, with selections in nine languages.

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PRIMARY SOURCES


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Primary Sources

Selected Poetry of William Cullen Bryant

No Extension of Slavery (1860–1861)







E-books

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More Letters of Charles Darwin—Volume 2

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Of the five databases in the “suite,” *World Book Advanced* is the more appropriate product for community college libraries; therefore this review focuses on this product.

This resource provides some 100 videos and animations; articles from 96 magazines; 400 special reports; 750 maps; 2,000 tables; 7,000 Web sites; 10,000 images; 14,000 articles from the World Book Year Books; 26,000 encyclopedia articles (from World Book Advanced); 250,000 dictionary entries; 5,500 Ebooks; “hundreds” of timelines; an unspecified number of sounds, and RSS feeds from Reuters News.

Searching via the home page is intuitive and quite simple. Results are presented in three commonsense columns, with links to encyclopedia articles, primary sources, tables, special reports, web sites, etc. Encyclopedia articles are concise and well written, and most contain additional links for up to 25 periodical articles.

Home | My Research

WORLD BOOK ADVANCED

Global Warming

Keywords Full Text Images

Advanced Search

SEARCH RESULTS

You Searched for "Global Warming"

Search in:

- [Encyclopedia Articles](#)
62 items
- [U.S. Presidential Papers](#)
11 items
- [Tables](#)
1 items
- [Dictionary](#)
1 item
- [Pictures](#)
4 items
- [Back in Time](#)
112 items
- [Special Reports](#)
20 items
- [Web Sites](#)
2 items
- [Research Guides](#)
1 items

ENCYCLOPEDIA

Encyclopedia Articles
1 - 15 of 62 items | [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [Next](#)

[Check All](#) | [Clear All](#) | [Save to My Research](#) ▼

-  **Global warming**
Global warming is an increase in the average temperature at Earth's surface.
- Kyoto Protocol**
Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement whose underlying purpose is to limit global warming.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change**
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a United Nations committee that provides scientific information to world governments regarding the impact of human
-  **Inhofe, James Mountain**
Inhofe, James Mountain (1934-...), a Republican from Oklahoma, has been a member of the United States Senate since 1994.
-  **Craig, Larry Edwin**
Craig, Larry Edwin (1945-....), a Republican, represented Idaho in the United States Senate from 1991 to 2009.
- Revelle, Roger**
Revelle, Roger (1909-1991), was an American oceanographer and a pioneer in deep-sea research.
-  **Climate**
Climate is the weather of a place averaged over a length of time.
-  **Greenhouse effect**
Greenhouse effect is a warming of the lower atmosphere and surface of a planet by a complex process involving sunlight, gases, and

PRIMARY SOURCES

U.S. Presidential Papers
1 - 11 of 11 items

[Check All](#) | [Clear All](#) | [Save to My Research](#) ▼

- Public Papers of William J. Clinton -- Joint Statement on Cooperation To Combat Global Warming.**
William Jefferson Clinton
- Public Papers of Ronald Reagan -- Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Federal Greenhouse Effect Research**
Ronald W. Reagan
- Public Papers of Ronald Reagan -- Message to the Senate Transmitting the Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Substances**
Ronald W. Reagan
- Public Papers of Ronald Reagan -- Message to the Senate Transmitting the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer**
Ronald W. Reagan
- Public Papers of Ronald Reagan -- Statement on Signing the Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Substances**
Ronald W. Reagan
- Public Papers of William J. Clinton -- Memorandum on Implementation of Revised Air Quality Standards for Ozone and Particulate Matter.**
William Jefferson Clinton
- Public Papers of William J. Clinton -- Message to the Senate Transmitting the Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Substances**
William J. Clinton
- Public Papers of William J. Clinton -- Message to the Senate Transmitting the Montreal Protocol on Substances**

As a basic encyclopedia *World Book Complete Suite* is a good choice for college libraries serving a large population of under-prepared students. However, due to reviewer concerns about entries for Ebooks and primary sources, some libraries may wish to make *World Book Student* as the default home page, as this interface does not have links to the problematic features.

It may be interesting to note that the Ohio public school system holds this product in such high regard that it uses state funding to provide free World Book access to all K-12 students and teachers.

DATABASE CONTENT/FORMAT: 3.0

Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

While the article entries for the databases included in the “suite” may appear to overlap, the content is unique and is written for an age-specific audience. *World Book Student* and *World Book Advanced*, however, share identical encyclopedia entries. And, the majority of their articles assign credit to contributors, who are often affiliated with major universities, or national organizations.

World Book Advanced provides access to 5,500 Ebooks. While the majority of these are presented in the English language, 64 titles are in German, and 27 titles are in French. The remaining languages -- Dutch, Flemish, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, and Spanish -- each have less than 14 titles. Seven genres are available: American Literature, Australian Literature, Canadian Literature, Classical Literature, Juvenile Literature, and World Literature. Though the home page boasts that “thousands” of fiction and non-fiction titles are available, there is no way to limit a search by either classification. Nor is this information provided in the book’s *Document Contents* or on its first page. Furthermore, many of the titles do not provide an original publication date.

The primary sources contained in *World Book Advanced* include documents, letters, books, speeches, records, interviews and images. It is very likely that the links to these sources will cause confusion for some students. For example the entry for the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* shows two links; one leads to a photograph of the treaty along with a summary of its importance in history; the other link provides a different photograph and a transcript of the document. For the student needing more than just the images, there is no way to identify which link contains the primary source text.

Most search results link to a multitude of content types; for example, a dictionary, maps, tables, sounds, pictures, videos/animation, study aids, special reports, U.S. Supreme Court cases, and websites. EBSCO Content Solutions provides relevant magazine articles published during the last three years. However the full text of each issue is not included, nor is there the ability to search for specific issues. Considering the small size of the database being searched, if a library has a general periodical database a user would be well-advised to use that resource instead of the Magazine Articles feature.

A *World Newspapers* link located on the home page takes readers to official web sites from newspapers around the world. Drop-down menus allow the user to select which country or state he would like to view. Most results feature both English and foreign languages. Archival access is limited by the policy set by the individual newspaper.

According to the vendor, web content is continuously updated. Home page features are refreshed daily; the periodicals collection is updated on a weekly basis; and new encyclopedia articles, images, and multimedia are added each month. However, it would be of considerable benefit to the user if the encyclopedia articles bore a publication date or a “last modified date” as appropriate. Retrospective coverage is nicely presented in the “Search Results” through a heading called *Back in Time* which takes the researcher to relevant articles from World Book Year Books dating back to 1922.

SEARCH INTERFACE 2.5

Though the *World Book Advanced* home page features a very simple search interface, it would be better if the search term box were a bit larger. Optional radio buttons allow for keywords, full text, or image searching. The number of encyclopedia articles retrieved will be the same using either the keywords or the full text button. However, placing a phrase in quotation marks combined with the full text button retrieves primary sources and a higher number of U.S. presidential papers. Regardless of the search strategy employed, the relevancy listing of the results sometimes seems strange. For example the results for a search on “global warming” positions a ten-line article on the infamous senator Larry Craig, who is credited for having opposed “many environmental laws,” higher on the page than the entries for *climate* and *greenhouse effect*. Though not an interface issue, it is bothersome that the main article on *global warming* assumes the meteorological phenomenon as fact.

An *Advance Search* link provides an overwhelming set of options. While the browsing feature is simple to navigate, the other two advanced search options – *Search for Words or a Phrase* and *Boolean Search* are frustrating. A seemingly narrow search yields results for ALL the content types. For example a search on *oceans* with a check mark at the box for *web sites* retrieves results for everything – encyclopedia articles, primary sources, presidential papers, maps, etc., rather than a clean list of 17 web sites. In effect, there is no difference between conducting a search from the home page and conducting a search through *Advanced Search*.

Another annoyance occurs when using the *Ebooks Center* from the home page. Links are provided for author, title, language, and genre searching; however they all take the user to the same screen. If these links cannot be altered to function as true shortcuts, then it would be better to eliminate them in favor of the one link, *Go to the Ebooks Center*.

Each encyclopedia article is equipped with a much improved “Tools” box. The “Translate” tool, powered by Google, gives students the ability to read the text in 31 different languages. Regardless of which language is selected, the read-aloud feature is only available in English. Translation and audio tools are also available for ebooks and primary sources.

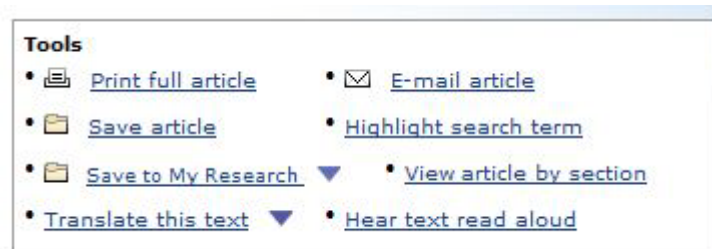


Image searching is another general search option. The images presented are limited in number but are of high quality. While there is no option to email an image, it may be printed. It would be helpful if an image could be enlarged without having to rely on one’s browser.

The user can select what other users are reading by selecting “most viewed,” provided at the top right side of the home page. Popular encyclopedia articles are listed from the combined readership of the entire customer base. Listing for ebooks and primary sources appear to be from use of the individual subscribing institution.

According to the vendor, World Book supports federated searching with WebFeat, Pinpoint, and Serials Solutions; this function, however, was not tested by the reviewers to verify the claim. World Book has recently introduced a mobile search application with a downloadable QR code. The reviewers have not yet tested this new feature.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES 3.0

What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?

While there are no vendor/product listservs available at this time, World Book appears to be genuinely committed to customer support. Various links – *Online Tutorial*, *Customer Training Guide*, *Site Contents*, and *Help* – all provide clear and useful information about the products within the suite. Technical support is available by phone Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Central time, and by email. Once a subscription has been activated, in-person training and one-hour webinars are available for free. Certificates for webinar attendance are also available.

MARC records are available for each of the main databases; however, records for the Ebooks in *World Book Advanced* are not.

A library administrator module provides access to usage reports, which do not claim to be Counter Compliant, but they do allow the administrator to view the number of searches conducted by month and database.

COST 2.5

When comparing numbers -- the 26,000 *World Book Advanced* encyclopedia articles against the 105,000 encyclopedia articles offered in *Encyclopedia Americana*, *World Book Advanced* seems over-priced. However, if one considers overall ease of use and cost per student, then *World Book Advanced* may be the better choice for most libraries.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 3.0

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?

Overall access is stable and boasts an extremely quick response time on campus, and off-campus with a DSL connection.

An [accessibility statement](#) affirms the vendor’s commitment to adhering to federal guidelines, but also admits that some of the database features are not fully compliant.

Though improvements have been made over the last year, some concerns remain. Form fields do not contain proper markup (i.e., label or title attributes), which is problematic for blind users. Another problem for blind users is that they must listen to all the navigation and heading information before they are able to hear the main content of the information they need.

OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT

Yusko, S. (2008, September 15). "Encyclopedia Update, 2008." *Booklist* 105.2: 68-75.