

**Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee review of
Encyclopedia Americana
December 2004**

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed the Encyclopedia Americana. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member(s) only and not transferred to others. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus. Attributes of the information resources were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the “least value” and 4 representing the “most value.” The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE
SEARCH INTERFACE
USER SUPPORT SERVICES
COST
ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

INFORMATION DATABASE 4

Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the community colleges as a whole.

This encyclopedia is targeted to high-school and lower-division college students. The Encyclopedia Americana contains 45,000 full-text encyclopedia articles contributed by over 6,000 specialists, over 100,000 full-text periodical articles (provided by EBSCO Publishing Company), 9,000 bibliographies, and 155,000 continually updated links to Web sites.

Encyclopedia Americana online advantage over the print edition is the currency of articles and linked resources. Articles provide a good amount of information and there are additional links to journal articles and web sites. For instance the encyclopedia article on John Kerry was updated mid 2004 before the Democratic Convention, however, one can link to journal articles of which the most recent is November 2004.

Encyclopedia Americana has good quality color maps. The maps open quickly in a separate browser window and are easy to print.

SEARCH INTERFACE 3

Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

From the splash page users have three general options to browse, to search, and advanced search. The four browse options are:

1. To browse encyclopedia articles by topic.
2. To browse a list of editor's picks.
3. To browse feature articles and topic based teachers' guides.
4. To browse profiles (biographies) of popular and/or frequently accessed personalities.

In addition to the browse option, one can search for information by encyclopedia article title (default), encyclopedia article full-text, or journal full-text. All three queries use keyword to perform the search. The see and see also references imbedded in the articles are picked up in the full-text search. The search feature is easy to use and yields relevant results.

The advanced search uses a "Query Builder" utility. Users can select categories from various menus to search within or can browse broad topic areas. I found this feature cumbersome to use and in most cases would prefer to use the non advanced search options.

The interface allows users to email and print articles. One can print from the browser or use the vendor's interface. The vendor's interface allows user to print the entire article or selected sections, plus most of the extraneous graphics are eliminated.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES 2

If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone helpline available?

There is a link to help at the top of the screen. One can browse selected help topics. There are three sections to choose from: Basic Encyclopedia Functions, The Americana Journal, Additional Information. Within each section there are between 5-7 general topics. These topics cover basic questions there is no in-depth help available. Unfortunately, there is no searchable index for help information.

Additionally, the help screens are not context sensitive. One is taken to the introductory help screen from any section/place in the encyclopedia.

Finding contact information for technical support was difficult. To find a toll-free phone number one needs to click the link to the parent company's (Grolier Online) page and click the link for "about Grolier online". That page lists all the contact information for technical support (hours, email, and toll-free phone number).

Overall, the help section is the weakest area of the encyclopedia.

COST 3

If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

At this time, consortium level pricing is under negotiation.

Currently, my District (three colleges 11,515 FTE total) purchases the Encyclopedia Americana and Grolier MultiMedia bundled together directly from the vendor for \$4092.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 4

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

I experienced no problems with the connection to the database. The response time was adequate.

Remote authentication is supported by referring URL'S and IP authentication and individual remote user accounts. The remote user accounts are used only occasionally by Grolier. This requires individuals to supply their names, email address, and zip code.

The text-only version of the encyclopedia is engineered to support assistive technologies, such as screen readers and adaptive web browsers. This version is compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) section 508 and conforms to level AA of the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 4

- #1 ---- No Support
- #2 ---- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon enhancements noted below in Comments Section.
- #3 ---- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in Comments Section.
- #4 ---- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries or their acceptance or rejection.

The Encyclopedia Americana is a solid online encyclopedia. The Encyclopedia Americana was straightforward to use and contained timely accurate information. The addition of a fully compliant ADA version gives this product an advantage over competing products.

What would your rating be if product was evaluated based on utility for your home campus only? 4

My campus subscribes to the Encyclopedia Americana in lieu of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The Encyclopedia Americana meets our students' needs very well.

Additional Reviews

Grolier Online. (Encyclopedia Americana) *Booklist* Sept 15, 2004 v101 i2 p270(1)

Encyclopedia Americana Online. *Booklist* Sept 15, 2004 v101 i2 p270(1)

Grolier Online's Encyclopedia Americana. Enrique Diaz. *Library Journal* Nov 15, 2002 v127 i19 p111(1)

Grolier redesigns Encyclopedia Americana. (Newsline). *Computers in Libraries* Oct 2002