

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
Credo Reference
March 2010

Credo Reference (CR) is an online reference library, providing access to the full text of 463 highly regarded and popular titles. Among these are *Marquis Who's Who*, *CIA Factbook*, *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, *Mosby's Medical Dictionary*, and the *McGraw Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms*. The database includes dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, quotations and atlases, and a wide range of subject-specific titles covering everything from accounting to zoology. To date this database contains over 3.2 million entries.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION for COMMUNITY COLLEGES: 3.2

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

RATINGS for SPECIFIC ASPECTS of the DATABASE:

The following features were examined and rated on a four point scale (1=Poor; 2= Needs Improvement; 3=Good; 4=Excellent):

DATABASE CONTENT/FORMAT: 4, 4, 4

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

Credo Reference provides access to full text reference books from authoritative publishers across the entire subject spectrum. Since nearly a third of the publishers are located in the United Kingdom, *CR* does not completely suffer from an American bias.

The General Reference Collection contains 400+ titles. Each title, whether single, or multi-volume, is counted as one title. Subscription options include *Credo 100*, *Credo 250*, and *Credo Unlimited* (427 titles). The administrative module allows subscribers of *Credo100/250* to manage a collection of any 100 or 250 titles of their choice with the freedom to add or drop titles at any time. An average of five titles is added each month to the unlimited collection. All customers will automatically receive the latest edition of an updated title at no additional cost.

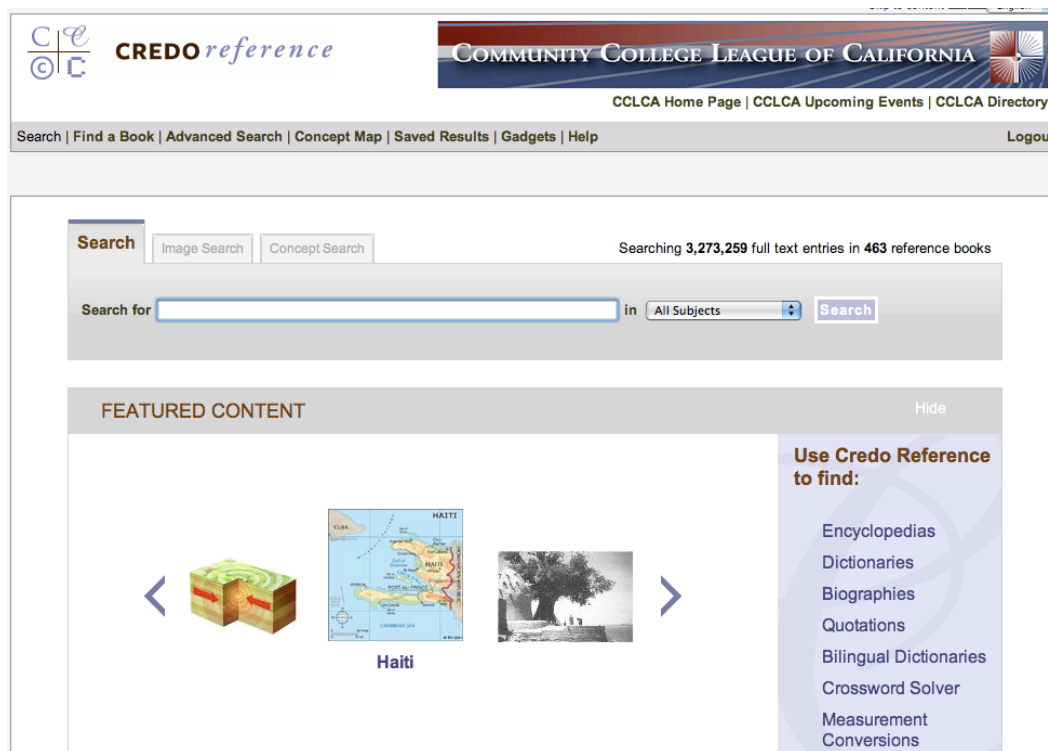
Using title count as a measure of *Credo's* collection strengths, the subject Social Science ranks highest with 82 titles, followed by Science (47 titles), and then History (44 titles). Though Medicine consists of only 29 titles, the quality is impressive with the inclusion of such standards as *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, and *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*. View the current title list at <http://corp.credoreference.com/title>. Note that another subscription option, *Credo Publisher Collections*, requires a separate subscription, which is presently not offered through CCL.

By taking advantage of *CR's* custom resource links, subscribers can encourage patrons to seamlessly link to their campus library's other electronic content -- the OPAC, and selected online databases. From the results screen in Credo a user can select the "continue searching in" function from a pull-down menu and the exact search phrase will automatically be repeated in the selected database. The browser's back button can then be used to return to Credo. The link function is also available at the left margin if the user is viewing a single article. Overall, the reviewers found *Credo's* content to be excellent. The database is more robust than *Oxford Reference Online Premium*, and is a very good complement to *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.

SEARCH INTERFACE: 2, 2.5, 2.5

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?

Credo's librarian administrative tool enables subscribers to customize the public interface by adding a library logo, external links, or even a link to the library's *Ask-a-Librarian* service. Administrators can set the default search to *Basic, Find a Book, Advanced or Concept Map*. At first blush, *CR's* home page appears simplistic, but there are numerous access points available from the toolbar for conducting more efficient, sophisticated searching.



A user may enter terms to search across all the *Credo* subjects or choose to limit a search to a single topic such as Art, Literature, History or Psychology by selecting from the pull-down menu to the right of the search box. The other prominent search option is to select one of the reference types shown in the *Use Credo Reference to find* blue box to browse through a list of clickable titles.

Results obtained from the main search box are presented in two sections. The smaller column on the left allows the user to narrow his search by *Subject*, *Entry type*, *Media*, *Person*, or *Publication date*. This feature helps a user to know what information to expect before clicking.

The screenshot shows the Credo Reference interface. At the top, there are logos for Credo Reference and the Community College League of California. Below the logos is a navigation bar with links for 'Search', 'Find a Book', 'Advanced Search', 'Concept Map', 'Saved Results', 'Gadgets', and 'Help'. A search box contains the text 'eating disorders' and a dropdown menu is set to 'All Subjects'. To the left of the search results is a sidebar titled 'Narrow your search by' with expand/collapse options. It lists categories: Subject (362), Entry type (380), Media (24), and Person (100). Under 'Subject', there are sub-categories like 'general reference', 'medicine', 'psychology', 'social sciences', and 'food & beverage'. The main search results area shows '362 results for "eating disorders" in All Subjects'. The results are sorted by 'Relevance'. Three results are visible: 1. 'EATING DISORDERS AND SEXUALITY' in 'Contemporary Youth Culture: An International Encyclopedia' with a snippet about addressing issues of eating disorders. 2. 'EATING DISORDERS' in 'Encyclopedia of Special Education: A Reference for the Education of the Handicapped and Other Exceptional Children and Adults' with a snippet about disturbances in eating behaviors. 3. 'Eating Disorders' in 'Encyclopedia of Women's Health' with a snippet about classification in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

Results from the larger column on the right present the user with more detailed entries listing the title of the article, the name of the reference source, a few sentences in which the term(s) have been highlighted, the word length of the entry, the number of images, and publisher's name. Since phrase searching is not the default, "eating disorders" with quotation marks yields 362 hits while eating disorders without the quotation marks yields 590. Notice that relevancy does not always make sense. Why does a general article about eating disorders rank below an article titled "Eating Disorders and Sexuality"?

Other search options, *Find a Book*, *Advanced Search*, *Concept Map*, and *Gadgets* are located from the toolbar. **Find a Book** allows the user to discover reference titles in four different modes: subject, title (via an A to Z list), browsing by Dewey or LC classifications, or by clicking on desired reference types which is the identical "blue box" search offered from the home page. While librarians may appreciate these features, students who select *Find a Book* may become confused and think that they are searching their college library's book catalog.

The **Advanced Search** tab takes the user to guided search boxes which provide for Boolean and phrase searching, though the operators are not visibly evident. A user would need to scroll down to bottom of the screen and click on *Power searching Credo Reference* in order to learn about pre-fix operators, field searching, and other advanced techniques. Some novice researchers may find it easier to begin the hunt from *Advanced Search* as the search terms and operators established here automatically copy onto most of the other *CR* search options.

Advanced Search Searching 3,273,259 full text entries in 463 reference books from 65 publishers
Build an advanced search. Entries returned will match all of the requested criteria.

With all of the words

With the exact phrase

With any of the words

Sounds like the word

Without the words

Sort results by

Relevance

Publication date

Length

Fields

Search only within headings

Search

Limit your search to...

Selected subjects or titles...
Art, Business, Geography, History, etc...

Selected publication dates...
2009, 2008, 2007...

Entries with the following features...
Entries with images, Entries with audio, etc...

Any entry

Article

Biography

Entries with images

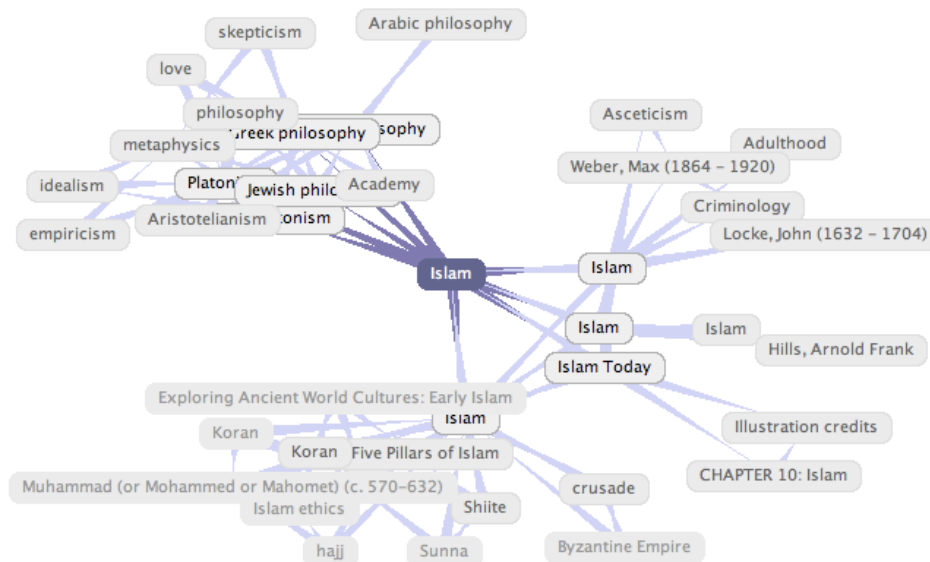
Entries with maps

Entries with audio

[Power searching Credo Reference...](#) (Opens in separate window)

Reviewers loved the field option, *Search only within headings*, as it quickly retrieved highly germane results. Students accustomed to the audible articles available through aggregators such as H.W. Wilson and Gale, will find *Credo's* limit to *Entries with audio* very misleading, as these audio files are only for the pronunciations within dictionaries. And, finally, reviewers found the *Sounds like the word* criterion to be largely useless.

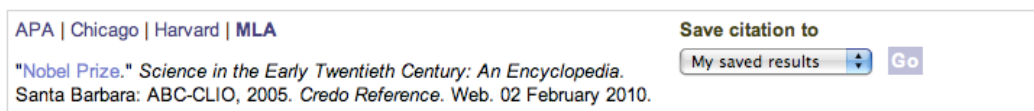
According to the search interface, the **Concept Map** “enables you to quickly find information when you don’t know exactly what to look for or want to expand your knowledge of a given area.” Here is the result from a search on Islam:



Navigation tools allow manipulation of the map (e.g. zoom, rotate, hide). One of the reviewers thought the *Concept Map* was an excellent teaching tool, while the other reviewer found it confusing. It seems strange to include bibliographic notes (e.g. chapter references, and illustration credits) along with thematic content. Note that the *Concept Map* will not work unless JavaScript is enabled. Enabling JavaScript in Firefox 3.6 will not display results from the *Concept Map*. Safari 4.04 is much better; however, the *Open Entry* option, which appears while right clicking on any term on the map, would not link to the full text of the entry.

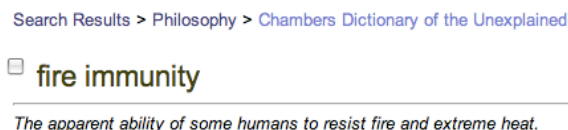
Gadgets is a ready-reference tool that can appear or disappear upon command. It offers tiny search boxes for looking up definitions, persons, images, pronunciations, quotations (by person or topic), holidays, conversions; also included is a curious box labeled *Crossword*, which is an aid for solving crossword puzzles and anagrams. *Gadgets* is another advanced feature that requires JavaScript enabling. Though a bit confusing at first, it seemed to work fine in either Firefox or Safari and enabling this function did not affect results or speed.

No matter how one obtains his results, articles can be emailed, printed, saved and shared (linked) to social bookmarking or networking sites like Del.icio.us or Facebook. A tabbed-like citation generator found at the bottom of entries allows students to toggle onto the desired format standard – APA, Chicago, Harvard, or MLA. Citations may be exported to third-party bibliographic citation tools such as EndNote.



There are two serious problems with the citations. One, the citation is NOT included with the article when one selects email, print, or save; therefore, the user must remember to email, print, or save the citation under separate cover, resulting in two documents one with the article and the other with the citation. Furthermore, the article arrives in plain text in the body of the email, without images, and not as an attachment. A link to back to the original article is included, and can be accessed without logging in again, but it is not easily spotted at the bottom of the email. The other major problem is that the citation generator does not correct those entry headings that are captioned in lower case lettering.

Sample entry with a lower case heading:



Sample entry cited in MLA:



Despite *Credo's* numerous search tools, the interface has some notable shortcomings. For example, spell check is not available; though on occasion the user will receive a "Did you mean?" message followed by as many as five similarly spelled words. Other times, *CR* will conduct the search with the misspelling and retrieve those articles where the publisher has also misspelled the term. For example typing "steriods" yields 5 articles, leaving the reader oblivious to the 837 entries available under the correct spelling. Nor is there a built-in thesaurus, but a perseverant researcher could conduct a *Find a Book* search to access *Roget's II: The New Thesaurus*.

Image Search does not always make sense. A search for "green tea" including the quotation marks retrieves three results with the first entry titled "Belly Dancing," followed by two entries that are in fact germane to tea. Since the phrase "green tea" is not highlighted in the text accompanying the belly dancing images it is difficult to see any connection. The reviewers conjecture that "belly dancing" with 6 images outranked the tea entries as they only contained one image each.

Other drawbacks include, no easily identifiable link back to the results list once the user has retrieved an article, inconsistent highlighting of search terms (search on "body image"), and no immediate error message when sending to an invalid email address. And though a vendor survey indicates persistent links to articles, the reviewers could not find them.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES: 3, 3.5, 3.5

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

Credo offers rather extensive help but unfortunately none of it is help in context. Readily available are step-by-step tours and user guides for end users, and free webinars, tip sheets, and video links for administrators. Administrators have access to a wide range of usage statistics, collated monthly and can create customized reports.

Technical support is available via email or toll-free phone number. According to a vendor survey, *Credo* seeks to respond to all support queries within a $\frac{1}{2}$ business day; and the majority of technical issues are resolved within 24 hours. A monthly email alert provides subscribers with content updates for all new and updated titles and links to download free MARC records. Update information is also announced via *Credo's* blog, Twitter, and Facebook

COST: 3, 4, 4

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

Compared with the pricing of similar products, (e.g. *Oxford Reference Online Premium*, or *Gale Virtual Reference Library*) the cost of subscribing to *CR* is reasonable. Available options include subscribing to 100 or 150 titles from a [list of reference titles](#). *Credo Unlimited* offers access to all the titles in the general reference collection plus updated at no additional charge. Pricing/access plans offer an institution some flexibility.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE: 2.5, 2.5, 3

Credo Reference allows access to unlimited simultaneous users and 24/7 delivery of content. For remote access, libraries can choose to access Credo via library card login, referring URLs, Shibboleth, Athens or proxy server. The database can also be read on small, hand-held media devices, (e.g. iPhones).

According to the *Credo Reference* license agreement “authorized users” include every member of staff employed by or otherwise accredited by an institution; all full-time or part-time students; and individual members of the public or walk in users. Single copies of entries from Credo Reference can be distributed through interlibrary loan.

Because access to the content is through subscription rather than through a purchase model access to content does not continue beyond expiration if a subscription is cancelled.

According to the vendor, CR is ADA compliant. Specifics of this product’s compliance with Section 508 can be found at <http://corp.credoreference.com/vpat>. In general, all non-text images have associated text equivalents. Some very limited inherently graphical content, however, does not provide text equivalents. Another criteria for compliance concerns captioning of multimedia content: but relatively little multimedia content exists through this application and according to the vendor, this content does not currently include captioning.

Disabled researchers using JAWS software should not have many difficulties as JAWS often does a remarkable job of compensating for poorly written code. For the benefit of users without JAWS, Credo is encouraged to fix the errors with tables and form fields as soon as possible.

OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT

LaGuardia, Cheryl. “Credo Reference.” *Library Journal* 1 Feb. 2009: 130. Print.

Quinn, Mary Ellen. “Focus: Credo Reference.” *Booklist* 1 May 2009: 98. Print.

Roncevic, Mirela. “Q & A: John Dove.” *Library Journal* 1 Sept. 2009: 144. Print.