

## ART INFO TIPS FOR TEACHERS FROM HENRY

[This document is available as a blog at: <http://henrysartinfotips.wordpress.com>. Use it there and the hotlinks will work.]

This is some information I have selected for K-through-12 teachers in relation to the workshop "Teaching World Culture Through The Visual Arts." Like my presentation on that panel, this post focuses on tips for teachers for locating good quality art information on the web.

When we start investigating a new topic, we need two kinds of information at once: we need something to read, so that we can learn about the topic, and we also need lists of options for further information. Having too much of one without the other can lead to poor choices or to a dead end. Having both types of information helps make a fast start. In practice, fast starts usually come from search engines, but sometimes there are advantages using the digital forms of reference books, now found in reference databases.

### WEB SEARCH ENGINES (FAST STARTS)

Web search engines became the most popular tools for finding information because they are convenient, can be used without much skill, and frequently produce useful results. But remember these 5 important points about search engines:

1. *Search engines cannot see the contents of most databases.* They are mainly designed to find html and similar "pages." They usually can't retrieve the contents of databases such as the dozens of good-quality subscription databases (covering 100s of 1000s of publications) that the public library and the State College Area School District (SCASD) libraries provide for you.

2. *Most web resources are self-published and vary widely in quality,* so you have more work to do in evaluating them than you would with other publications. Trade and academic publishers put effort into assuring the quality of their books and magazines in order to assure that they are profitable. Only a very small percentage of web sites attempt those standards. Checklists of considerations (such as the ones posted at [http://www.vuw.ac.nz/staff/alastair\\_smith/evaln/evaln.htm](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/staff/alastair_smith/evaln/evaln.htm)) can be helpful reminders for you or for your students. SCASD librarians often post similar guides. A good example is The North High School Library's suggestions: <https://docs.google.com/document/preview?id=11L5hk4z5jwLRG5zb-AduSBHmAHX0ZmZZBVi2AkkCWEY&pli=1>

3. *Discourse communities can be difficult to identify on the Internet.* Some resources attempt to capture the writings of the key people who contribute to the knowledge of a particular discipline or topic. A source like the **BHA: The Bibliography of the History of Art** (see "PERIODICAL INDEXES, below) focuses on the publications where artists, critics, and art historians publicly and formally contribute to their field of study. While excellent contributions can also be found on the Internet they can be difficult to identify there because of the mix of hobbyists, entrepreneurs, and others contributing information.

4. *Using search engines well requires skills.* Because search engines scan millions of items, they almost always return some results even if poor search statements are entered. But search engines usually have powerful features that are not invoked unless you specify them. Use the most unique terms that relate to your topic and learn how to search phrases – usually surrounded by quotes "like this". Learning to read and shorten URLs (web addresses) is an important skill. Another is choosing the right search engine for the right job. One easy way to learn these tricks quickly is to use the guide posted by a non-profit group called Infopeople. Their **Search Tools Chart** (<http://www.infopeople.org/search/chart.html>) selects a small number of good search engines

and web guides, explains what they are searching, and describes the search features of each. A more inclusive guide to search engines, and what jobs they are suited for, is **Noodle Tools' Choose the Best**. (<http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/5locate/adviceengine.html>) Try opening the **Search Tools Chart** or **Noodle Tools** in one window and experiment with different search engines and techniques in another. See also the little table of search techniques I handed out in the workshop: . *Never settle for just one search!* Experimentation is very important in web searching. For example, type any 3 unrelated search terms (frog metal wheat?) as a search statement in **Google** (<http://www.google.com>) then change the order of the three terms a few times and see how the results of the search change. Or try Googlewhacking! (It's a sport. Look it up.) Trial-and-error learning is especially important with search engines since search engine companies tend to be so secretive about their workings and features change frequently.

5. **Google is not the best choice for every task.** Some new search engines have specialties which can make them much more effective than **Google** for a particular need. Here are some examples related to academic research:

### **Google Books.**

Available on the web at: <http://books.google.com/>.

This is a very important project. Google has been working with large research libraries to digitize books in their collections. Google has also been working with a number of publishers regarding the texts of their books. Millions of books have been posted with Google-style searching of their complete texts. Usually you can read a passage from the book that contains your keywords. Often you can read all of the passages in the book that contain the words. With older titles you can sometimes read and download the entire book. Once you discover a book that you want, click "Find in a Library" and **Google Books** will find copies of the book in nearby libraries. (This works for most public libraries but not for the SCASD libraries.) **Google Books** is a great tool for finding a needle in a haystack (like mentions of someone's name) but less helpful for searching broader concepts.

### **Google Scholar.**

Available on the web as: <http://scholar.google.com/>.

Also important. Uses the technology of the **Google** search engine but tries to concentrate on reliable sources that meet scholarly expectations for quality. It uses a protocol for searching the contents of some databases of electronic journals. Once you have found an excerpt from an article that seems to be of interest, click on "Cite" for the details about the article and use this info to consult your library or librarian.

### **Yippy (formerly Clusty.)**

Available on the web at: <http://yippy.com/>.

This search engine clusters the results into groups based on their similarity. So the hundreds of results from a term like "creativity" are grouped into categories such as: children, ideas, education, innovation, problem solving, study, book, management, etc.

## **REFERENCE DATABASES (ALSO FAST STARTS)**

The best of these provide encyclopedia-style information electronically. These types of authoritative summaries provide a helpful overview and usually recommend key readings for a topic. The good ones hire a well-qualified specialist to write each article and to select the recommended readings. What a great way to start! I have a strong distrust of the free-or-cheap versions of reference databases. (Sources like *Ask ART*, *Artyclopedia*, and *Archive*.) They tend to cut-and-paste from other sources, often without proper credit. Since facts cannot be copyrighted, this may be legal, but it leaves us trying to use the information without understanding its normal context. For example, I have often found biographies for artists that were copied entirely from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, which was published in 1913 and no longer protected by copyright. While it was a great source of information in 1913, we now know a

lot more about most of the topics it covered. But I have had the luxury of using more expensive reference databases. *Ask ART*, *Artcyclopedia*, and *Artchive* are probably among the best of the free-or-cheap reference databases for art. The public libraries and school libraries subscribe to some good general-purpose reference databases and these can often yield good arts information. One example available via the SCASD libraries is:

**Gale Virtual Reference Library.**

Check with your school librarian or start at: <http://www.scasd.org> .

This is a collection of more than 1000 published encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, handbooks, and similar reference books. The full texts may be searched or the articles may be browsed. The audience levels of the publications vary. Some were written with your students in mind, some for you.

**PERIODICAL INDEXES (THE DISCOURSE COMMUNITY)**

Periodical indexes (sometimes called "abstracts") are designed to direct readers to articles and reviews in magazines and journals. They can be used to find articles on a particular topic or by a particular author. Abstracts are simply a few sentences summarizing the contents of each article. Periodical indexes and abstracts sometimes provide the entire text of the article but sometimes only supply the citation details for the article. In the latter case, ask your librarian how to obtain the article. It might be in their collections on paper or digitally, or might be obtainable through inter-library loans. Although periodical indexes always emphasize journal articles, some of them also index a selection of dissertations, exhibition catalogs, collections of essays, and other types of books. The SCASD Libraries and the public libraries offer you a selection of good, general-purpose periodical indexes but none that focus on art. This is an excellent free one for the professional discourse of art history:

**BHA: Bibliography of the History of Art.**

Available at: <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/bha/index.html>

Indexes and provides abstracts for articles from 4,300 periodicals as well as some books, conference proceedings, dissertations, and exhibition catalogues. Covers Western Europe and the Americas from Late Antiquity (4th century A.D.) to the present, though treatment of contemporary art is minimal.

**WEB GUIDES (or METASITES) FOR BROWSING**

Web guides usually aim to help you determine which Internet sites might be most useful for some particular topic. These are great ways to browse the web for highly recommended sources. The arts sites listed below are almost all rich in good-quality, well-identified illustrations. However, most of the web-based guides tend to ignore the many still-useful printed resources.

**Brown, Jeanne. Architecture and Building.**

Available on the web at: <http://www.library.unlv.edu/arch/rsrce/webresources/>

This web site selects, briefly describes, and links to web resources (electronic publications, databases, picture sites, discussion groups, guides, etc.) for all aspects of the built environment. It does not refer to paper resources. This site has been kept current for many years by a small crew -- a rare feat on the web.

**Whitcombe, Christopher L.C.E. Art History Resources on the Web.**

Available on the web at: <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/ARTHLinks.html>

A web site pointing to other web sites. Fairly extensive and well selected. Updated frequently. This site also sports surprisingly good coverage of contemporary art.

**Young, Patrick. Mother of All Art History Links Pages.**

Available on the web at: <http://www.umich.edu/~hartspc/histart/mother/>

A web site pointing to other web sites. Fairly well selected and seems up to date, though dates are not posted. The offerings are more scant and less well-organized than Whitcombe's similar site but this is useful as a "second opinion."

**SOME OTHER GOOD STUFF**

**Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.**

Available on the web at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>

A multi-media presentation of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art using chronological, geographical, and thematic explorations of global art history.

**Europeana.**

Available on the web at: <http://www.europeana.eu>

Easy access to the digital contents from thousands of European museums and libraries.

**OAister.**

Available on the web at: <http://oaister.worldcat.org/>

A bit geeky, but this site gathers information on more than 12 million digital items (pictures, sound files, etc.) held at nearly 900 sources worldwide. Searches retrieve catalog records with links to the item in the contributing institution's database or web site. Digital library collections are included with many other types of sources.

**Flickr.**

Available on the web at: <http://oaister.worldcat.org/>

This famous photo sharing site has a surprising number of art images to offer. Stronger on architecture and urbanism but also contains some great shots from museum collections. Quality varies but many people seem to post the largest files their camera saved. Rights and permissions vary, but if you want to use Flickr images to illustrate lectures or student projects, you could play it safe by limiting searches to "Creative Commons" images. Groups may be created to limit access to a list of participants -- like maybe your students, etc.

Henry Pisciotta  
Arts and Architecture Librarian  
Penn State University Libraries  
[henryp@psu.edu](mailto:henryp@psu.edu)  
814-865-6778

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