Search Strategies for www.loc.gov

A note about the Library, its collections, and what's NOT collected:

- The Library has in its collections more than 100 million items, in hundreds of different languages and virtually every format (e.g., prints, drawings, government documents, photographs, films, sound and video recordings).
- The Library **does not** have every book ever published.
- While virtually all subject areas are represented in the collections, the Library does not attempt to collect comprehensively in the areas of clinical medicine and technical agriculture, which are covered by the National Library of Medicine and the National Agricultural Library, respectively.
- The Library of Congress is distinct from the National Archives, the major repository for the official records of the United States government, and the Smithsonian, the world's largest museum and research complex.
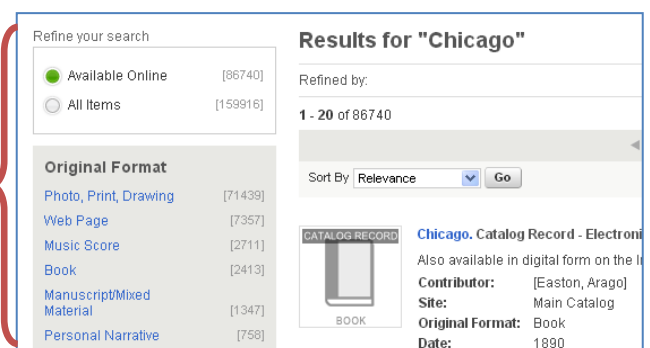
Navigating loc.gov from the homepage:

You can search the loc.gov website and collections from the main page using **Search box** or browse using the **toolbar** above it. All formats are displayed by default, but you may also select to limit your search by format (e.g., audio, book, film, video, legislation, etc.)

Navigation Toolbar

Search Box

Print/Save Page

Searching loc.gov:

1. Type a search term in the **Search** box.
2. Select a **Format** from the drop down and click **GO**
3. Refine your results using the left column of the Search results page.

Browsing loc.gov via the toolbar and homepage:

Browsing can be done by any format of media in the LOC collection, via collection, or by catalog/finding aid. It is important to remember that browsing via the toolbar will NOT return all the collections or records in the LOC collection. Instead, the toolbar provides a quick overview of more popular/accessed materials.

For more specific collection browsing, consider using the "collection highlights" and "topics" navigation in the center of the homepage, or the materials linked from the teacher resources page.

Search Tips:

- **Think like a historian** when selecting search terms. Start by brainstorming or researching some terms that were popular during the time period you are studying. For tips on search terms, visit http://www.loc.gov/search/help/.
- Whenever you enter a search string of more than one word, **Boolean searching** is happening in the background:
  - Your results will return items with the **exact phrase first**, followed by items with **all the words**, followed by items with **any of the words** in the search string.
  - **Capitalization and quotation marks are ignored**, but **word order affects the order of results** displayed.
  - **Spelling counts**; misspellings will result inaccurate or poor results.
- Remember to **save sources** via **the green "share/save" button on each page**:

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Searching American Memory

- The Library is converting American Memory pages into a newer format, so some collections within American Memory will look different.
- As with the main page, Boolean searching is always happening in the background:
  - Your results will return items with the **exact phrase** first, and then items with **all of the words** in the item's records next in the results list.
  - **Punctuation marks, including quotes, are ignored**.
- Some more **advanced search features** are available within individual collections, such as limiting to certain search fields, or including word variants
- For more tips, visit http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/help/search_help.html.

Locating the Search Box in American Memory Collections

Old format:

New Formats:

Search

Other Collection-Specific Search Guides:

- Congress.gov: http://beta.congress.gov/help/search-tips-overview/
- Prints and Photographs: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/help/#tips
- Veterans History Project: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/html/search/help-advanced.html