Advanced Catalog Search Functions

After Sammy Bearkat has some experience searching SamCat, the library’s online catalog, he’s going to want to begin to use the more advanced search functions so his searches can be more precise and focused.

This module of the online instruction series will discuss advanced catalog searching functions, such as field searching, limiters, proximity operators, special characters, and subject searching. Lastly, we’ll take a look at the Reserve Desk function of the library catalog.

Let’s begin at the library homepage at http://library.shsu.edu.

As we discussed in the module “Find a Book,” you can perform keyword searches of the library catalog from the center of the library’s homepage, or you can use the link Search the Catalog under the Research heading on the left sidebar. Sammy will click on this link to go to the Advanced Search Page of SamCat. [Note: the menu is now on the left, but you will still find “Find Books & More: Search the Catalog” under the Research Tools heading.]

By the way, anyone anywhere can search and use SamCat to determine what items the library owns. You do not need to be affiliated with the university to use the online catalog.
Notice all the boxes? Let’s take a closer look.

Each row is made up of three items:

1. the default field of the dropdown menu;
2. the dialog or search box, where you enter the search terms; and
3. Boolean operators with a dropdown menu.
If you look at the ‘words or phrase’ dropdown menu, you will see you can search the following fields: words or phrase, author, title, subject, series, and periodical title fields. Searching the ‘words or phrase’ field searches all the fields, including ones not listed here, such as notes and publisher.

Searching the other fields listed here searches only their specific field: Author searches only the author field, title searches only the title field ... you get the idea.
The Boolean operators default to ‘and,’ but you can select and combine terms with ‘or,’ ‘Xor,’ or ‘not.’

So if you enter ‘physical fitness’ in the first search box, and ‘Cooper’ in the 2nd box, the terms are automatically linked with the Boolean operator ‘and,’ giving results that contain both the phrase and the term. However, ‘Cooper’ will only be searched in the author field. The resulting items are about physical fitness or mention the phrase physical fitness, but only things that have the name Cooper in the author field.

You can also change fields and search ‘physical fitness’ and Cooper, but this time change author to ‘words or phrase’. Now we pick up Cooper in other fields such as the Publisher name field.

Field-specific searching offers a lot more flexibility to use ‘and’. Also, if you’re interested in more information on using Boolean operators there’s a module of this online instruction series that provides in-depth discussion on Boolean operators.
There’s another way for Sammy Bearchat to focus his searching, and that’s by using the limiters that SamCat provides.

See the area below the Search and Reset buttons? There are boxes labeled language, format, type, location, item category 1, match on, pubyear, and sort by. These are limiters. They place a limit on the types of results you receive from the search. Let’s take a look at each one to understand what they are and how they can be used to aid in searching the library catalog.

The language limiter is fairly self-explanatory: you can select to search in any number of languages. This does not mean the item will necessarily be in that language, because the results may be a translation. Let’s look at an example.
Type “weight training” in the words or phrase search box. Then open the dropdown menu in the language search and select French and click on search. Let’s look at the details of the first record.
#1

**Strength training anatomy** 3rd ed.
Delavier, Frédéric.
Champaign, IL : Human Kinetics, c2010.
3rd ed.
Then click on the catalog record tab.

Notice there’s a French language uniform title. That means that the original of this book is written in French, but our copy is a translation into English.

If we click on the New Search Button to take us back to the search page, and this time enter ‘physical fitness’ in the search box, and then scroll down and select Spanish as our language. Click on search.
You can see the first items are books in Spanish. You probably also noticed they are electronic books or e-books. But you and Sammy will need to view the online instruction series module on e-books for information about their use. [Note: There is no e-book module at this time.]

Let’s go back to the advanced search page using the new search button.

Format is a limiter that you need to ignore, as it refers to the bibliographic format of the records and it is not something you would want to use.
However, type refers to item type and can be very useful when searching. Open the dropdown menu, there are over 50 item types you can use to search, such as play, theses, videocassettes, music scores, reference book, digital images, to name only a few.

Sammy is writing his paper on physical fitness; are there any videocassettes he can use for his presentation? Scroll down the list to videocassette. Enter exercise in the search box and click on search.
There are several videocassettes about exercise that Sammy can choose to use.
Let’s go back.

And this time, Sammy wants to see if there are any theses about his topic.
We found theses on exercise. Using the limiter ‘type’ can help Sammy find many types of items.

Next, let’s look at the limiter ‘location.’

Location limits the search by specifying a particular area in the library. If Sammy Bearkat, is looking for a children’s book on physical fitness, he could limit his search to the Juvenile/Young Adult collection on the 3rd floor.
Note we have found books in the Juvenile collection that have something to do with physical fitness.
Of the last 3 limiters, leave ‘match on’ at keywords, and ignore ‘sort by.’ However, the limiter ‘pubyear’ can be very helpful. You can search by a year or by a range of years.

Let’s say Sammy is searching for books on physical fitness from 1940 to 1950.
We found 5 books published between 1940 and 1950.
Proximity operators and special characters can also be very helpful as you search the online catalog.

In SamCat, you can keep a phrase together by placing it in single quotation marks. This is called precise phrase searching.

In the search box, enter ‘strength training’ but place it in single quotation marks.
Clicking on search, we find over 90 records for the phrase ‘strength training.’

The catalog also allows the symbols ? and $ to be use to represent substitution and truncation.

These two symbols can be used together or separately and at the beginning, middle, or end of a term.

The ? symbol is used as a substitute for a missing character in a search term, usually when you’re unsure of a spelling or you want to find 2 forms of one word.

For example, Sammy wants books on women and fitness. So, we use wom?n and fitness in the search box to have results that mention both the words women and woman.
The $ symbol is used to truncate search terms and can represent a single character or many characters, and is used when looking for variations on the word. For example, Sammy wants information on trainers and training. So he enters physical train$. This will bring up physical trainers and physical training.

And we have over 1100 results.

The proximity operators allow for location of records in which the search terms are in close proximity within the same record.

Proximity operators can be used to connect words or phrases within a search field but not between search fields.

- You would use ‘same’ to locate books in which a single record contains all the terms.
- ‘With’ locates books in which a field contains a sentence with all the terms.
- ‘Near’ locates records in which the terms are next to each other.
- And ‘adjacent’ locates records in which search terms are next to each other and in the order they were entered.

For example, Sammy is looking for a book on physical fitness and weight training. Let’s enter physical fitness SAME weight training.

We found 30 titles that mention both terms in the same record.
Being the good Texan that he is, Sammy is interested to know if there are any books that mention physical fitness and Texas. So he searches physical fitness WITH Texas.

And indeed, he found 12 titles.

Let’s try entering weight NEAR training.

We found over 100 books with weight and training next to each other. But remember, it could be in the order training weight.

If we search weight ADJACENT training, which should look like: weight ADJ training, we will have results with weight and training next to each other, but only in that order weight training.

Another valuable tool in searching is the subject field. Subjects are the assigned Library of Congress subject headings.
The Library of Congress is the classification system that the library uses to organize books and periodicals.

Let's search exercise in the subject field.

There are over 1000 results.

Let's click on the details of the first item, and then on the catalog record tab.

The catalog record contains more information about the item in the item record, including subject headings or subject terms. Note that the subject terms include exercise.

You can also click on a subject term to search all the records held in that particular subject term.
There are 6 items that have the subject term ‘exercise addiction.’ You can see that searching subject terms or subject field provides an easy way to locate books on a narrow or focused subject.

You can access the Reserve Desk on the gray toolbar at the top of the catalog screen.
The reserve desk allows you to search and see if your professor has placed some print material on reserve for your use.

Print reserves are located at the library circulation desk, that’s the large area on your right as you enter the library.

Using the reserve desk catalog function, you can look up material by instructor’s name, course number, and course name.

Please be aware there’s also a course reserves link on the library’s website from which you access electronic reserve material.

In this module of the online instruction series, we’ve shown you and Sammy Bearkat the advanced catalog searching functions of field searching, using limiters, proximity operators and special characters, and subject searching, and lastly we looked at the Reserves Desk function of the library catalog.

If you’re in the library and have questions, please stop by the reference desk, or if you are off campus, you can use the local telephone number or the toll free telephone number to reach the reference desk.
You may also choose to use the Ask A Librarian service and select then to either send an email or chat online during library hours with a reference librarian. [Note: Ask a Librarian now allows you to get assistance through live chat, text message, email, or phone.]

From all the faculty and staff at the Newton Gresham Library, we wish you great success as you search SamCat, the library’s online catalog.