Using WorldCat to Find Items in Libraries

Background Information

In general, libraries are organized by either the Dewey Decimal Classification System or the Library of Congress System.

- Dewey Decimal Classification System is used in 200,000 libraries in at least 135 countries. Public Libraries and K-12 School libraries use this system. This system is not a good system as far as genealogy goes.
- The Library of Congress Classification is used by most research and academic libraries in the U.S. and several other countries. Brigham Young University is a WorldCat library but the Family History Library is not.

If you want more in depth information about these two classification systems there are interesting articles on each on Wikipedia.org.

From a library patron’s perspective there are problems with just trying to find books by their Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress classification number.

- The information in the book may span multiple classifications.
- There may be information in the book about topics other than the main topic.
- The classifications are done by humans so they may vary from one library to another or even from within the same library, depending on who did the classification.

As a result catalogs were created which allowed many entries for a single work. There can be entries for:

- Author(s)
- Title and title variations
- Topics covered in the work
- Locations covered in the work
- Etc.

Every library developed their own catalog and through the years there have been many catalogs which combined information from more than one library. One of the best known is the National Union Catalog. A union catalog is simply a catalog containing entries from more than one library. These catalogs were published in book format so they were essentially out of date before they left the printer. Still, they offered a way to find materials in libraries other than the one in your home town. From a genealogical perspective the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC pronounced nuk muk) is one the best known catalogs. The following information about NUCMC comes from Wikipedia.org.

It [NUCMC] is a national-level program based at the Library of Congress that seeks to promote free access to the documentary heritage of the United States. It does this by providing cataloging for archives and historical societies around the country that do not have access to national online databases. The program started in 1959 and published bound volumes of cataloging records until 1993. As of 1986, the cataloging records were input into RLIN, the Research Libraries Information Network, an international online database. As of September 2007, all cataloging records in RLIN have been migrated into the OCLC database (WorldCat), since RLIN was merged into OCLC. All cataloging since that time has been input into OCLC.
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**WorldCat** is a union catalog which has developed through the years. It began its life as OCLC (Ohio College Library Coop) which, as computers became more and more widely used, morphed into the Online Computer Library Center. The following information about WorldCat comes from Wikipedia.org.

WorldCat is a union catalog which itemizes the collections of **72,000 libraries in 170 countries** and territories which participate in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) global cooperative. It is built and maintained collectively by the participating libraries.

Created in 1971, it contains more than **246 million different records** pointing to over **1.77 billion physical and digital assets** in more than **470 languages**. It is the world's largest bibliographic database. OCLC makes WorldCat itself available free to libraries, but the catalog is the foundation for other fee-based OCLC services (such as resource sharing and collection management).

WorldCat was founded by Fred Kilgour in 1967.

There are several tools that can be used to Access WorldCat, each with advantages and disadvantages. The information in the following table is directly from a talk on WorldCat given by Dave Brazier from the Fiske Library.

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<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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| FirstSearch        | • Searches ALL records.  
                     | • Returns ALL results.                                                      | • Available only through a member library.  
                     |                                                                             | • Dated/Aging interface.                                                      |
| Open WorldCat      | • Open to all via the internet.                                            | • Searches only a small percentage of the records.  
                     |                                                                             | • Does not return complete results.                                           |
| WorldCat.org       | • Searches ALL records.  
                     | • New interface with many features.                                        | • Limits holdings results to those owned by supporting members unless you are accessing from a member library. |
| WorldCat Local     | • Offered to member libraries by OCLC as a way to use WorldCat to “Give your users access to a single search experience that eliminates the need to consult many separate resources and interfaces. One search provides instant access to your library’s materials – digital objects, electronic materials, databases, ejournals, music, videos, audio, eBooks, maps, journals, theses and books – in addition to materials in group and consortial catalogs and thousands of OCLC member libraries worldwide.”[1]  
                     | • It “looks like part of your library’s online experience and feels like other search and social sites they use regularly.”[1]  
                     |                                                                             |                                                                             |
| Connexion and CatExpress | • These are library cataloging tools used to put records into WorldCat. |                                                                                   |

From a user’s perspective the two key methods to access WorldCat are:

- **WorldCat.org** – when at home because it searches ALL records even though it doesn’t return them all. If a search returns the message “No libraries hold this item” it’s the same thing as saying “No libraries who are actively paying members of OCLC hold this item.” In other words, the item exists in some library in WorldCat.
- **FirstSearch** – when at a member library because it accesses and returns ALL records.
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To Access WorldCat from home the link is: www.worldcat.org

Click on the ‘advanced search’ option to bring up a more useful search window.

You are given 3 search fields, all of which can be changed to different search fields to suit your needs. Other possibilities are: Accession number, ISBN, ISSN and Journal Source. Note: A keyword search searches all fields in the WorldCat database. You can search on one, two or all three fields.

The options in the lower half of the window provide additional ways to narrow down your search.

- The Content option provides a means to look for fiction, non-fiction, biography or thesis/dissertations
- The Format option provides a means to look for a wide variety of media from books to maps to newspapers to DVDs, etc.
- The Languages option provides a means to narrow your selection to a specific language.

Some special notes about searching

1. You can enter words in upper or lower case.
2. If you use multiple words you can enter them in any order.
3. If you are searching for one word or another word use the word OR between the two words.
4. If you want to exclude a word from your search use the word NOT followed by the word you want to exclude (e.g. Paris not France)
5. Parenthesis can be used to create a more precise search. (ex. dog (walking or feeding or grooming))
6. Wildcards can be used to represent additional characters in a search term. They are useful when you are unsure of spelling, when there are alternate spellings, or when you only know part of a term.
   - The Pound sign (#) represents a single character. (e.g. Sm#th will search for Smith, Smyth as well as other possibilities.)
   - The question mark (?) represents any number of additional characters. You can include a number if you know the maximum number of characters the wildcard will replace (e.g. bu?2er will yield results for buzzer, burner, butler, butter, butterfly, etc.)
   - The asterisk (*) placed at the end of a word, represents any number of additional characters at the end (e.g. securit* will yield security, securities, securitization, etc.)
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The advice from the Fiske librarians is to “Use simple keywords as you would on a Web search site. Try using words from a title; the name of the author, artist or director; or words that describe the subject matter.”

If I want to find the closest library which holds a specific book I would put the title information across from the Title search field then click on Search. The result is displayed on the following page.

In this case two items are displayed. If you look under the Type column you’ll see that there are two formats. Book format and eBook format.

Since there is an online version of the book that’s where I’ll look first. Click on the title link for item #2.

On this screen you get basic information about the book followed by:

1. The location of the online copy
2. The locations where the book can be found. If you enter your zip code you can see how far each library is from your home.
3. For each library there may be from 1 to several options in the far right column. One of them may be “ask a librarian.” If you click on this option you’ll be taken to the library’s website where you’ll
find information on how to contact one of their librarians. Don’t be afraid to ask them to send or e-mail you copies from the index of a book showing specific surnames or locations. Generally they are very happy to help people. You may be asked for a small donation but at least you’ll have the information you seek.

(4) Details about the book, including the OCLC number. You’ll need this number if you want to try to get the book via interlibrary loan. (see below.)

Having this number will help your local librarian with interlibrary loan requests.

If I click on the link to the online copy I get the following screen. In this case I cannot see the entire book due to copyright issues but it gives me some options to help me decide if the book would be worth looking for.
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Normally FirstSearch is only available from an OCLC member library. However, you can access FirstSearch though the Fiske library’s website. The link is: [www.fiskelibrary.org/firstsearch](http://www.fiskelibrary.org/firstsearch).

FirstSearch’s big advantage is that is searches ALL WorldCat records and returns ALL results, regardless if the library holding the item is a paying member or not.

The search options are very similar to those for WorldCat.org. By doing the same search I did on WorldCat.org I get the following results.

It is interesting to note that item 1 shows there are 63 libraries worldwide which hold this book.

Item 2 shows there are 4 libraries worldwide with microform (film or fiche) copies of this book.

Item 3 shows there is one library with a computer file (i.e. digitized copy) of this book.

For more information click on the ‘Libraries Worldwide’ links to find out where you can find a copy.