

Researching History Topics

Finding Articles

Journal articles are not listed in the library catalogue. To search for journal articles by keyword or subject, you will need to use a journal index/database.

Some of the most popular databases to search for articles on history topics are:

- America History and Life (Canadian and American history)
- Historical Abstracts (all other geographic regions)

You can search these databases from home as long as you have a valid U of T student/staff/faculty library card. To access these databases as well as a more complete list of potential sources, visit www.library.utoronto.ca, and select “find articles” from the “Resources and Research” tab.

① Tips on using America History and Life and Historical Abstracts

- Use “and”, “or” or “not” with your keywords to expand or limit your search.
- A keyword search looks for terms in the title, subject, author, and abstract of an article – it does not search the article full text
- Use the ? or * to search for variations in spelling
 - E.g. wom?n finds articles whose title, subject headings, or abstract contain the terms contain the terms “women” and “woman”
 - E.g. econom* finds articles whose title, subject headings, or abstract contain the terms economy, economies, economic, economics, etc.
- To search for a particular phrase, enclose it in quotation marks
 - E.g. “” or “”
- Limit your search to articles that discuss a particular decade or century – click on the magnifying glass next to the “time period” search box to see the list. Check off the items that interest you and select “paste items” to include them in your search. Centuries end in H, and decades in D.
 - E.g. 19th century = 1800H or 1960-1969=1960D

Using the Library Catalogue

Searching by subject is one of the best ways to find relevant sources on your topic. The University of Toronto uses a set list of words to describe what an item is about.

[Nation/geographic region] history [time period] – e.g. Russia history 19th century
[war/event] – e.g. Crimean War

- Please note that events may fall under the name of the country
e.g. United States history revolution 1775-1783

last name first name – e.g. Washington George

[nation] biography – e.g. Canada biography

[topic] sources – England history 17th century sources

① Useful sources may be lurking under more than one subject heading.

Primary Sources

Definition: "A primary source is a document that was created at the time of the event or subject you've chosen to study or by people who were observers of or participants in that event or topic... The medium of the primary source can be anything, including written texts, objects, buildings, films, paintings, cartoons, etc. What makes the source a "primary" source is when it was made, not what it is." (Professor Elspeth H. Brown, Department of History, University of Toronto. <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/history.html>)

Primary sources can include:

- Books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers or journal articles written and/or published during the time period you are studying
- Memoirs, letters, interviews, autobiographies or diaries
- Government documents from the period (e.g. parliamentary debates or census records)
- Audio, film or video recordings produced during the time period you are studying
- Maps or photographs from the time period
- Artifacts from the period (e.g. clothing)

① Quick tips on finding primary sources

- Add the term "sources" to your subject search in the library catalogue
 - e.g. Canada History 19th century Sources.
- Collections of primary source documents are often available on microform or microfilm, but can be difficult to find through subject searches of the library catalogue. Visit the Microtext library website at http://www.library.utoronto.ca/robarts/microtext/collection/pages/microform_search.html to search the microtext collection using an expanded list of subject headings.
- Some manuscripts, government documents and early publications have been digitized and made available online. The library's research guide on "Full Text Book and Text Collections in the Humanities and Social Sciences" provides a helpful list of sources and tips on how to navigate them. The guide is available online by visiting www.library.utoronto.ca. Select the "Resources and Research" tab then click on "Research tools" and choose "Find book reviews: humanities & social sciences" to access it.

Need Further Assistance?

In person

- Visit the reference desk on the 4th floor of Robarts library. The reference staff would be happy to assist you at any point in your research process. The list of hours are available online at www.library.utoronto.ca.

By phone

- Telephone service is available at 416-978-6215 during our hours of operation.

Online

- Visit www.library.utoronto.ca and click on the "live help" icon to access our email and live chat reference services.