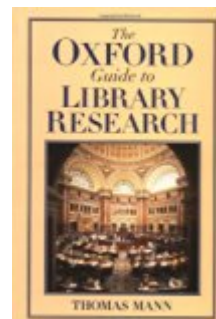


Thomas Mann. *The Oxford Guide to Library Research.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. xx + 316 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-512312-8.



Reviewed by Heather E. Ward

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Thomas Mann, a Reference Librarian at the Library of Congress, has produced an updated version of his work *A Guide to Library Research Methods*, originally published by Oxford in 1987. The intended audience of *The Oxford Guide* is unclear. Some of the advice presented here would prove most useful to undergraduate students beginning their research, while other suggestions would be of most value to professors or advanced graduate students. However, researchers at all levels can improve their search methods by delving into this rich resource, provided they have the time to invest in such a substantial volume.

Mann offers a highly detailed guide in an effort to produce better informed, and thus more efficient and productive, researchers. In his preface he outlines nine different methods of subject searching. They are "controlled vocabulary searching; browsing and scanning subject-classified bookstacks; keyword searching; citation searching; related-record searching; searching through published bibliographies; Boolean combination searching...; using the subject expertise of people sources; and type of literature search-

ing."(p.xvi) The author follows this scheme throughout the book, thoughtfully examining the advantages and disadvantages of each method. He provides sample research questions to illustrate each technique as well as specific titles to use in identifying additional sources for more information. He emphasizes the importance of using a combination of techniques in order to be comprehensive.

A recurring theme of the book, and the one to which Mann dedicates an entire chapter, is the distinction between "virtual" and "real" libraries. Rejecting the myth that everything can be found online, he describes trade-offs between the types of libraries in terms of the who, what and where of access, noting that copyright and licensing agreements limit many electronic resources to particular users and specified places.(pp.xiv-xvi) (This is an important point although he neglects to mention remote access as an extension of place, stating that researchers "...must go inside the walls of a real library...." to use products such as Project Muse's electronic journals (p.75)). Mann points out that electronic indexes often do not

contain the full retrospective content of the print version and that there are millions of books that will simply never be transferred into an electronic format, but that will always be available in physical libraries.

The most useful section of the book may be the "Appendix: Special Cases," which allows researchers to quickly pick up tips and sources on specific types of literature. It covers such topics as book reviews, illustrations, psychological and educational tests, out-of-print books, primary sources, genealogy and local history, etc.

The first of the nine methods, controlled vocabulary searching, is discussed in Chapter Two. In this chapter Mann describes the conventions of Library of Congress (LC) cataloging in great detail, explaining the structure of the "big red books" and their potential uses and enumerating several rules to help guide the researcher. He instructs researchers to begin their search of the library catalog with the most specific heading appropriate to their subject. This is due, he explains, to catalogers' use of "scope-match specificity" and "specific entry," that is, using the fewest, most specific subject headings for the book as a whole. While this is sound advice, the author might have chosen simpler terminology. Mann refers to the move in the early 1990s by LC to accept copy cataloging from other libraries as "a major problem," saying "one hopes that a blunder of this magnitude will ultimately be corrected in the future...."(p. 42) This statement is rather strong considering that the Library of Congress would not be able to keep up with the current publication rate if it were cataloging all materials on its own. In 1995 "LC processed 54,000 titles on the basis of bibliographic records created by others--up from only 1800" five years before.[1] This is a significant number of titles that might not have been cataloged otherwise.

The theme of controlled vocabulary searching continues in Chapter Four, which is dedicated to subject headings and indexes to journal articles. Mann makes an excellent point that instruction

and reference librarians often try to convey to beginning researchers: that the library catalog does not provide access to journal contents because "it is not cost-effective...to duplicate a means of access that is already available elsewhere" (p. 59).

Chapter Three covers the second research method, browsing and scanning subject-classified bookstacks. Mann describes the chief advantages of a classified shelf scheme as the ability to discover materials by serendipity and to access subjects at a greater depth than the catalog allows (p. 50).

In his discussion of keyword searches, Mann emphasizes the importance of controlled vocabulary while recognizing the complementary nature of keywords, which allow more specific and up-to-date terms to be used. They provide an additional way to cross-reference important subject terms by finding an article citation using keywords and then working off of the subject headings assigned to it. He refers to these subjects as "tracings" (p. 32). Some indexes also allow searching within the full text of articles. In addition, he describes important print and electronic indexes that do not provide subject searches and therefore necessitate keyword searching.

In the subsequent two chapters Mann extols the virtues of citation and related record searches. These can lead researchers from a known source to other related and more recent scholarship by pointing to publications where the original source has been cited or to publications which share citations with the original source. He also points out the role citations can play in matters of promotion and tenure. He concludes "while most researchers pursue footnote chasing as a matter of course, the same students routinely overlook both citation and related-record searching, which often can be equally as useful" (p.108).

Searching published bibliographies, the sixth method, is another option that is often overlooked by researchers. Mann emphasizes their benefits, reminding the reader that bibliographies are of-

ten produced by experienced scholars and therefore can provide a concentrated set of high quality citations and can save duplication of effort by the researcher. Bibliographies are rich resources, bringing together citations that might not otherwise be identified by databases. He mentions some of the difficulties in locating bibliographies including separate shelving in the Z's in the LC Classification system. Here again, he believes researchers approaching a subject armed with this information will be better able to find appropriate sources.

The seventh method, Boolean combination searching is discussed in Chapters Eleven and Twelve. Mann points out that this kind of searching is not limited to electronic databases, but this may be where the technique is used most often. Electronic indexes do allow searching of additional fields that might not be searchable through print indexes. He divides the chapters into types of sources and types of searches, discussing the functions of specific vendors' databases along with Internet sources. He describes a variety of search options, including the ability to combine multiple subjects and shared terms between subject headings.

Chapter Fourteen deals with people sources. Mann encourages researchers to draw on knowledgeable people who will point them to sources they might not find otherwise. He suggests specific resources for locating experts. He mentions using online discussion groups, but warns against neglecting the telephone as a means of communication. Here he makes another important point, advising researchers to do some homework and formulate specific questions before contacting experts.

The final method, type of literature searching, discusses types of publications used to answer reference questions as opposed to research questions. It defines such sources as almanacs, catalogs, dictionaries, gazetteers, etc. Mann draws on his main theme, explaining that "a foreknowledge

of the existence of this structure of reference-source options can greatly increase the efficiency of your searches by enabling you to focus your inquiries, to begin with, in the types of literature most likely to answer them" (p. 251).

One concern I have with the book is that it provides too much information. Mann goes into minute detail about specific products, such as giving the precise number of years covered by the backfiles of Information Access Company's databases. This information is already out-of-date and the author might have anticipated that it would be at the time of publication. At another point Mann dedicates ten pages to the *National Union Catalog: Pre-1956 Imprints* (NUC). Although this is a vital resource particularly for retrospective searching, to my mind it does not merit ten pages in a general guide to research.

The attention given to *NUC* prompts another concern, the author's emphasis on the collections or products of the Library of Congress and on resources located in Washington DC. In general, amateur genealogists will not be able to attend classes on genealogical research at the National Archives as the author suggests. On the other hand, there may be classes available locally from a public library or from a Latter Day Saints (Mormon) Family History Center, options Mann fails to mention.

Additional chapters discuss hidden treasures such as microform sets and government documents, and locating materials in other libraries. Although it would be beneficial for researchers, especially graduate students, professors, and librarians, to read this volume cover to cover, I suspect many will not do so. Mann introduces techniques that many people will best learn by doing rather than by reading. The extensive table of contents and the index, however, will assist researchers in locating specific information at the point of need.

The Oxford Guide to Library Research goes a long way in the effort to produce more informed

researchers. As Mann states in his conclusion, "the moral of the story is brief: The more you know of what your options are, the better searcher you will be..." (pp. 253-54).

Note

[1]. Winston Tabb, "Program for Cooperative Cataloging: Mission, Goals, and Potential for International Cooperation." Cataloging Section Open Program, IFLA Conference, Beijing, China. 27 Aug. 1996. 6 Oct. 1999 <http://lcweb.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/tabbpaper.html>.

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