Library Vocabulary

Abstract: A brief summary of an article, book or document accompanied by a bibliographic description. The word abstract also refers to a special periodical index that includes short summaries of the items discussed (see Index).

Bibliography: A list of books or other print or non-print materials systematically arranged and having some relationship to each other (e.g. a particular subject, period of time, etc.). Frequently found at the end of a research paper or book.

Boolean Operator or Boolean Logic: Boolean operators, otherwise known as logical operators, are used to construct complex searches in a database. They help make a search more accurate. There are 3 logical operators: AND, OR and NOT.

Call Number: This is the book’s address on the shelf. It denotes both the subject matter and author, according to the Library of Congress Classification system or Superintendent of Document System used in Oboler Library. The call number is printed on a label on the spine of each book.

Catalog: A catalog is a compilation of records describing the contents of a particular collection or group of collections. For example, the library catalogue has records for most of the items held by Oboler Library.

Circulating Materials: Any library materials, which can be checked out of the library. (e.g., the type of books you normally check out of the library and take home).

Circulation Desk: This desk, located at the entrance to Oboler Library, is where you check out library materials, including readings that your instructor may have put on reserve for your class.

Citation: Is a written reference to a specific work or portion of a work (book, article, dissertation, report, musical composition, etc.) by a particular author, editor, composer, etc., which clearly identifies the document in which the work is to be found.

Database: An organized collection of computer records, standardized in format and content, that is stored in any variety of computer-readable modes. These can be thought of as being equivalent to a paper index (database). They can refer to a collection that is either within the library or that is external to the library.

Encyclopedia: A useful place to begin your research. Provides an overview and various aspects on a topic.

Entry: The heading under which information is located in indexes, catalogs, bibliographies, encyclopedias, etc.

Field: When looking at a citation from an index or database, each piece of information is a field. For example, many citations are made up of an author field, a title field, a publisher field and a date field. What fields are called and what is in them can vary from database to database.

Full-text: Electronic, online version of text usually found in a periodical or book.

Holdings: The books, periodicals, and other materials in the library collection.
Index: An alphabetical list of topics, names, etc., treated in a book, group of books, magazine or newspaper, with references to the pages on which the topics or names are discussed. A periodical index, which treats items appearing in periodicals, is one type of index.


Keywords: The important words of your search topic that should be used in the Search Strategy.

Library catalog: Contains bibliographic records of the books, journals, maps, government documents, and materials the library owns and can be used in the library (Reference materials) or taken home to use (Circulating materials).

Magazine: Contains popular articles, not researched or scholarly. See also Periodical.

Microfilm/Microfiche: Photographic reproductions of printed material recorded on a flat sheet or roll of film. This film must be viewed on a projector called a microfiche/microfilm reader. A reader that also prints copies is called a reader-printer.

Non-circulating materials: Any library materials, which are restricted to use within the library. (e.g., reference books or rare books)

Online Periodical Database: Provides access to online journals, magazines, newspapers and other sources, frequently full-text.

Periodical: Publications issued at regular intervals of less than a year (e.g., magazines, journals, newspapers) and contain articles written by various authors. A journal contains peer-reviewed articles written by scholars while a magazine contains more popular articles often written by journalists. The terms periodical and serial are more generic and refer to all types of these materials.

Record: A collection of related data fields organized and accessible as a single entity. Examples of data fields are author, title, publisher, abstract, call number, etc. In a periodical index, which is a collection of article citations, each citation is a record. In the library catalogue, each reference retrieved per title is also a record.

Reference area: The section of the library containing those materials, which are intended to be referred to, rather than read through, and which are non-circulating

Reference books: Books designed to be consulted for specific facts, rather than to be read through.

Reference Desk: This desk is where Library Staff is available to assist you with your research. It is located on the first floor, just beyond the circulation desk.

Search strategy: Series of search statements organized to retrieve records that will answer the intellectual search request. (see also Boolean operator or Boolean logic).

Serial: See Periodical.

Stacks: The bookshelves containing the principal book collection of the library.

Subject Heading: A word or group of words indicating a subject under which all materials on the same theme are entered in a catalog or reference work.