



Researching Topics: A Sample Search

Follow this advice and you'll have a much easier time finding information on your research topics. The sample research topic used in throughout this handout is **Incas**.

Remember:

- ASK library faculty at the Reference desk if you have any questions. There are *no* stupid questions. When we're at the Reference desk, if we look busy we're just killing time in between answering questions.
- Research is a circular process. This list is only a general guide.

Finding background information

Find or create lists of subtopics, broader and narrower terms, and synonyms (words that have the same meaning).

TRY THESE RESOURCES:

- General encyclopedias (near the Reference desk). (1) To find **Incas**, use the *Encyclopedia Britannica* index volume A-K to look up "Incas". (2) Get the volumes that the index refers you to, and turn to the pages listed in the index. This source will give you some preliminary information on topics like geography, history, and culture.
- Library of Congress Subject Headings (ask library faculty at the Reference desk to show these to you). To find **Incas**, look in the volume that includes subjects starting with the letter **I**.

Finding books

Through our library you can access our own book collection plus the collections of many other libraries. If you're looking for a particular topic or title that you don't find in our library, ask the library faculty at the Reference desk for help. We can usually find the book you want and have it sent here through Interlibrary Loan. This service is free but can take several weeks.

USE THESE RESOURCES:

- Library of Congress Classification System handout. This lists topics and corresponding call numbers. Look at the chart and locate a general topic that your specific topic falls under. For **Incas**, books will be found under **History--Americas** in the **F** call number area. This means call numbers beginning with F will be about history of the Americas (for example: F 3429 .M26 1996 is the call number for *Daily Life in the Inca Empire*).
 1. Reference books. Go to the Reference shelves (behind the Reference desk) and browse the books that have call numbers beginning with F. Books are arranged here by call number.
 2. Circulating books. Go to the Circulation shelves and browse the books that have call numbers beginning with F. If you don't find books that are perfect and are entirely about your topic, look for books that might have a chapter on your topic. In these, check indexes and tables of contents for your specific topic.
- Library catalog (available from most computers in the library). All the books and videos that our library owns are in our catalog. You can search our catalog from any web browser on any internet-accessible computer by visiting our web site <<http://www.pierce.ctc.edu/library/>>. From our library, follow the steps below.
 1. Go to any computer. Follow the instructions to open Netscape Navigator.
 2. The Pierce College Library home page will appear. Click on "Library Catalog".
 3. To search by Library of Congress Subject Heading (which we found in the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* books), select the "Subject Browse" option in the "Choose Type of Search" box, then type the official Library of Congress Subject Heading in the "Search for" box.
 4. Click once in the "Search for" box. Type *incas* in the blank box. The related Library of Congress Subject Headings will appear.
 5. Click on the heading *incas* to see a list of the 6 items with that subject assigned to them.
 6. Click on any title to find out its location (which campus and whether it is on the Reference or Circulating shelves), its call number, and its status (whether it is currently checked out).
 7. If the book is on this campus and is not checked out to someone else, go find it on the shelves. If the book you want is at the other campus, place a hold on it by following these steps: (a) click on the "Request Item" tab; (b) enter your ID number and your last name; (c) under Type of Request "Hold" is selected so click "OK"; (d) on the next screen enter your social security number in the Barcode box; (e) verify that the "Pick Up At" box shows your campus ("Circulation Desk-FS" for Lakewood or "Circulation Desk-PY" for Puyallup). The book will be waiting for you at the Circulation desk within 24 hours.

Finding magazine, journal, or newspaper articles

Articles are designed either to give an overview of a topic or to focus on specific aspects of a topic. **Popular magazines** are geared toward the general public, are more general in scope, and cover fairly popular topics. **Scholarly journals** are geared toward professionals or researchers working in a particular subject area, are more specific, often report on research studies, and are usually reviewed by other scholars in the same field before they're published. For more information and examples see our *Magazines and Journals* handout.

USE THESE RESOURCES:

- Online periodicals indexes
 1. From the Pierce College Library home page, click on "Periodical Indexes".
 2. Choose either Academic Search Elite (EBSCOHOST) or ProQuest Direct, our two general subject indexes. This example uses Academic Search Elite.
 3. Click on the blue hypertext "Academic Search Elite (EBSCOHOST)" to login.
 4. Type *incas* in the blank search box. Click the "Search" button. Articles that have this word in their titles, descriptions, or subject headings will show up in a results list.
 5. Read the abstracts (summaries) of articles to see if they're useful to you.
 6. If you want a copy of the article, follow the steps below.
 - If an article is available in full-text format you can download, e-mail, or print it. To do any of these, click on the title you want to read. Follow the instructions on the screen or ask for help at the Reference desk.
 - If you want a copy of an article that isn't available in full-text, check one of our binders titled "Pierce College Periodical Holdings" to see if we carry the magazine or journal that your article appears in.
 - If we have paper copies of the periodical on this campus, go to the Periodicals shelves and find the magazine or journal on the shelf *alphabetically by title* (not by call number). You may check out the entire issue or copy the article.
 - If the periodical is on the other campus, print the article summary and bring it to the Circulation desk to request that we have that issue sent here for you. The issue or a copy of the article will be waiting for you at the Circulation desk within 24 hours.
 - If the article is not available full-text and is not something we subscribe to, print the article summary and bring it to the Circulation desk to request that we have it sent to us for you through Interlibrary Loan. Remember, this can take several weeks.

Searching the World Wide Web

1. From the Pierce College Library home page, click on "Internet Searching."
2. If you're new to the web, click on "A Guide to the World Wide Web" to learn Web basics.

USE THESE RESOURCES:

- Subject Starting Points. From the "Internet Searching" page of the Pierce College Library web site, click on "Subject Starting Points." Here you'll find an annotated (described) list of sites arranged by topic and subtopic. These sites are ones that Pierce College faculty use often and consider reputable. To find information on **Incas**, click on "Social Sciences." Under "Anthropology & Archaeology," click on "Anthropology Web Site." Click on "Latin and South America." In the "Lords of the Earth" description you'll see Incas described.
- Subject directories. If you don't find a web site for your topic, go back to the "Internet Searching" page of the Pierce College Library web site and click on "Internet Search Engines." Click on "Yahoo." On Yahoo, look for your topic or a related one in their subject lists. For our sample search, follow this path: Regional → Regions → South America → Social Science → Anthropology and Archaeology → Archaeology → Inca. From this list of related web sites, click on a title to visit that page. Let the surfing begin!
- Search engines
 1. From the "Internet Searching" page of the Pierce College Library web site, click on "Internet Search Engines."
 2. Choose one. For our sample search, we'll connect to Alta Vista.
 3. Type your topic in the blank search box. Because the Internet is so vast, type in the most narrow topic that you've decided on in your previous steps. If our sample topic has evolved into "art of the Incas," we type *incas art*. We'll then see a list of web sites that include both words. From this list of related web sites, click on a title to visit that page. Keep surfing.

Reading and analyzing the material you find

Evaluate the information you've found, paying attention its relevance, purpose, value, accuracy, bias, and credibility. See our handout on *Evaluating Sources* for more information.