GUIDEBOOK FOR FINDING PRIMARY SOURCES

FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WEBSITE:

www.loc.gov

Provided by:

Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program
California University of Pennsylvania

General Search Tips

Choosing Search Words | Using Special Characters | How are the Results Listed?

Choosing Search Words

A search is based on terms separated by spaces. If you enter the word **gold**, the search engine will look for any record that contains this term. Add more terms to look for phrases and multiple subjects. No punctuation is required (e.g., **gold mine** or **gold california**). The results indicate the type of match found. Exact matches will be listed first. If you do not find the materials you want, use the following tips to help focus or broaden your search, as needed.

Too Many Hits

If your search retrieves too many records, choose more specific search words:

1. Avoid overly general subjects (e.g. **war**, **women**, **building**) which are likely to be found in most collections. Use the Synonym List for alternatives.
2. Avoid category headings used to label each section in the bibliographic records. For example, **photograph** will appear in the MEDIUM section of every record of every photograph in American Memory.
3. Look for **Subject**, **Author**, **Geographic Location**, or other lists available from the home page of most collections. Important terms, used in the bibliographic records for that collection, will be listed and linked to records containing each listed term.
4. Look for hot-linked **Subjects** and **Authors** terms, available inside most bibliographic records. These will be linked to a list of related records. The list returned will include related records found for all collections that were included in your original search request.

Too Few Hits

If your search retrieves too few records, choose less specific words, or add synonyms.

1. Use the Synonym List for related terms.
2. Look for **Subject**, **Author**, **Geographic Location**, or other lists available from the home page of most collections. Important terms, used in the bibliographic records for that collection, will be listed and linked to records containing each listed term.
3. Look for hot-linked **Subjects** and **Authors** listed inside a bibliographic record focusing on a subject of interest. These will be linked to searches for related records. The list returned will include related records found for all collections that were included in your original search request.

Missing Results
If you do not find materials you know should be included, try choosing words that were in use when the collections were created.

1. Use older language usage rather than modern day usage. Language changes. For example, the following historical terms produce more "hits" than their modern day counterparts:

Modern Usage	Historical Usage
gas, service station	filling station
African American	Afro American, Negro
voting rights	suffrage

2. Additional alternate terms may be found in the Synonym List.
3. Use the names of towns, landmarks, bridges, and buildings in use at the time the collection was created.
4. Search for the nearest large town in existence at the time the collection was created. Towns and cities rise and fall in importance over time.
5. Note: Not all collections are searchable. (For details, see the Searchable American Memory Resources page.)

Some Words or Letters Are Ignored - the following are ignored by *InQuery:*

1. Case of letters (i.e. uppercase or lowercase)
2. Some very common words, such as conjunctions, articles and prepositions (e.g. **and**, **not**, or **the**) (These "stopwords" may be highlighted for you in bold, like regular search terms, in the bibliographic records that are returned.)

Using Special Characters

Avoid using all special characters unless they are listed below as helpful with *InQuery* searches.

Characters influencing search results

1. Accents and other Diacritics: Type in unaccented letters even when the word usually contains an accent. *InQuery* is programmed to find both accented and unaccented forms of your term. Attempting to type in characters with accents causes unpredictable search results. For example, **frappé** is indexed simply as **frappe**, and **mañana** as **manana**.
2. Use an asterisk (*****) at the *end* of a search term to find all records containing that word and other words that begin with that English language stem. For example, **tele*** returns hits about telephones and telegraphs. However, ***phone** and **tele*ph** do not produce the desired results.
3. **Avoid using the following characters:** # @ ( )

Characters NOT influencing search results - < > - , ; : . ? ! / [ ] “

How Are the Results Listed?

Understanding a little about how search results are listed may help you control which records are listed first.

Order of Search Results
The list of records returned is arranged in order of relevance to the words entered in the search box. Records listed first are most likely to be relevant to your search. When two or more words are entered in the search box, *InQuery* lists the results in four groups. The exact matches group is listed first, while the fourth group contains the least relevant records. Within each group records likely to be more relevant are listed first.

- To control which records are listed first: Enter the words in the order in which they are most likely to occur in the text or bibliographic records being searched. For example, in the California As I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California's Early Years, 1849-1900 collection, entering the terms **overland journey** produces 25 exact matches, which are placed at the top of the return list. Entering the same words in a different order, **journey overland**, produces no exact matches. All records found in the first case are still found (38 total hits), but they are ordered differently.
- Records receive a higher ranking, and will appear higher in the results list when they contain:
  - more of your search terms
  - repeated search terms
  - search terms that occur near each other
- Common words are given less weight than those that occur infrequently in the body of text.

Added features:
The Library of Congress takes the features *InQuery* provides and customizes them for enhanced retrieval in response to user feedback.

- Search terms are highlighted in bold in the retrieved bibliographic records or textual documents. (Very common words, such as, **and**, **the**, and **of**, are ignored in the search, but are highlighted in the bibliographic records that are returned. These very common words will not be highlighted in the full text of items returned.)
- When a full text search retrieves a long document, a **BEST MATCH** link appears in the header and footer links for that item. Click on the Best Match button to jump to the portion of text within that document (or document part) which was given the highest relevancy rating. Your search terms are likely to be repeated or clumped close together in this passage of text.

NOTE: The search results list remains in a temporary file on the Library's server for at least 1 hour after your last access. After that time, the list is erased.

Search Tips for the American Memory Collections

Click the links below or scroll down for help with the following kinds of searches:

Jump to:

- Search All Collections
- Search Groups of Collections/Browse Collections
- Search Individual Collections
- How to Format Search Terms
- Search for a Phrase
- Bibliographic Record Search
- Full-Text Search

Search All Collections

Enter one or more words into the search box at the top of any American Memory page to search all American Memory collections.

Results listed first are most likely to be relevant to your search. Results will appear higher in the list when they contain

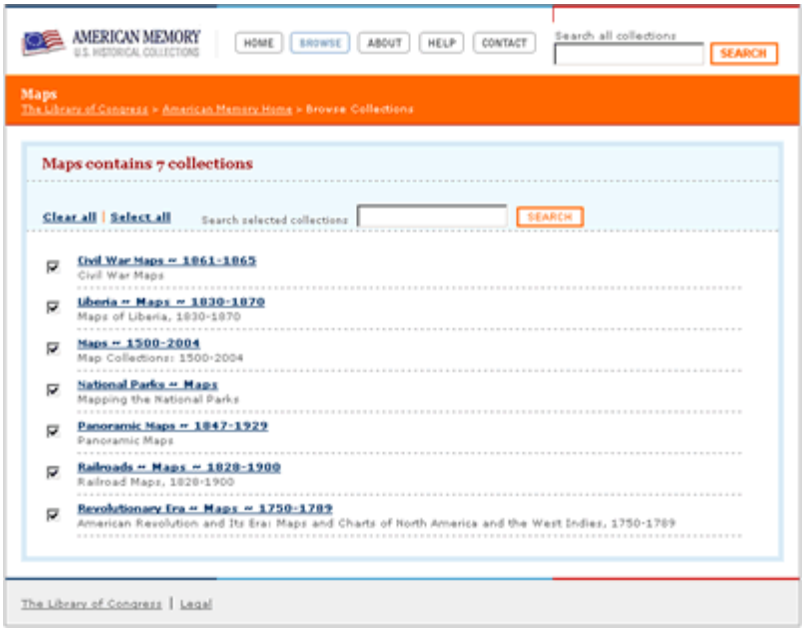
- more of your search terms;
- repeated search terms;
- search terms that occur near each other.

When you search all American Memory collections you are searching the bibliographic records of items within the collections. (Learn more about **bibliographic records**.) You are also searching some, but not all, full-text items within the collections. To search the texts in American Memory as comprehensively as possible, you will need to search collections individually (see **How to Format Search Terms** , below).

American Memory searches do not include the text of collection home pages, background text, illustrations, or special presentations. These pages can be searched through the Library of Congress **site search page**.

Search Groups of Collections/Browse Collections

American Memory collections are grouped into categories on the Browse Collections page. Collections can be browsed by subject, by time period, by format, and by place. Choose a category to see a list of all collections in that category. Use the checkboxes on this page to search more than one collection, or click a collection title to go directly to that collection.



Search Individual Collections

In addition to the Search All Collections box at the top of every American Memory page, there are also additional search options available within each collection. **Review a list of all current collections**.

The following collections are not searchable: **The New Deal Stage: Federal Theatre Project** and the **Walt Whitman Notebooks**.

How to Format Search Terms

Your searches will yield better results if you keep the following points in mind:

- Common words such as **and**, **not**, and **the** are ignored by the search engine.
- Case of letters is ignored. For example, **Civil** and **civil** are treated the same.
- Diacritic characters (accent marks, in non-English text) and other special characters produce inaccurate results, so plain (unaccented) letters should be substituted for letters with diacritics.

Search for a Phrase

Do not put quotation marks around the phrase you are searching.

When searching for a phrase, enter the words in the order they are most likely to occur. The order of search words does not affect the scope of the search results, but it will affect the order of their display.

Bibliographic Record Search

Choose a Bibliographic Record Search to find

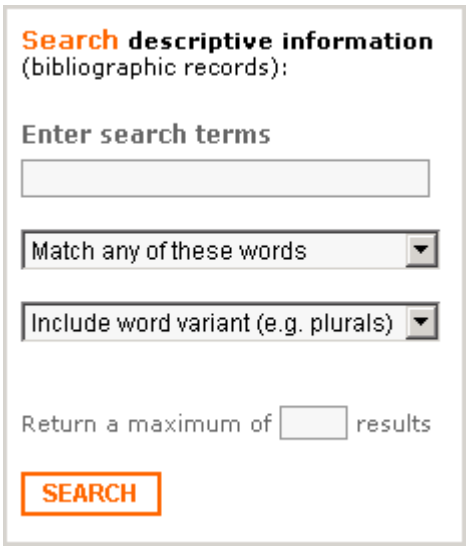
- a specific item by title or digital ID;
- works by an author, creator or publisher;
- works about broad subject categories;
- works whose central theme is about a person, place or event.

What is a bibliographic record?

A bibliographic record is comparable to a traditional library catalog card. In other words, most online bibliographic records include a title, the name(s) of the author(s) or other creator(s), and subject terms assigned by a cataloger or subject expert. They may also include other descriptive notes or information.

All American Memory materials can be searched by their bibliographic records.

Bibliographic Record Search Options

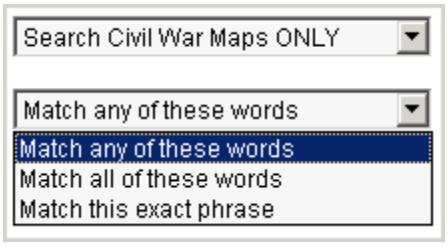


Default Settings

Unless you change them, the search engine will use pre-set or default settings designed to produce a high number of "hits," or search results. They are less useful for very precise searching. The default example above will

- find records that contain at least one of the words typed into the box;
- search for the words in the "core fields" of collection records;
- include words that are close variants (e.g., plurals) of the search words entered;
- return no more than 100 records.

Choose Settings



You can adjust the settings on the search page to generate different kinds of search outcomes:

- **Match any of these words**
  Finds all records with any one of the search terms entered. The more search terms you add, the more items will be returned. Best for producing the highest number of hits.
- **Match all of these words**
  Finds only records containing all of the search terms entered. The more search terms you add, the fewer items will be returned. Helps ensure that the items found relate to all of the search terms.
- **Match this exact phrase**
  Finds only records containing the words you enter, in the order you enter them. The most precise search option.

Matching an exact phrase can be useful for searching place names or when common words have a particular sense used in combination.

For example, the term "normal school" was used in the nineteenth century to describe schools for training teachers. Searching for the exact phrase may eliminate results containing the words "normal" and "school" in unrelated ways.

Matching an exact phrase can also be useful if you know a standard Library of Congress subject term, such as "description and travel" or "frontier and pioneer life."

Search Core Fields

Useful when searching for an item whose title, author, or identification number you already know. It can also be used to distinguish works by a person (search Author/Creator fields) from works about a person (search Subject fields).

The core fields include:

- **Author/Creator**
  Includes the person, institution, or conference responsible for creating a work. Editors, compilers, collaborators, translators, photographers, and so forth.
- **Title**
  Enter the complete title to retrieve the exact record. Words related to a work's main subject frequently appear in its title. To find multiple works related to your area of interest, do a search by title using a few key words.
- **Subject**
  A mixture of "controlled" and "uncontrolled" vocabulary. "Controlled" vocabulary refers to subject terms that have been standardized for library cataloging purposes.

  Note: When a bibliographic record is displayed on the screen, you can click on one of the highlighted subject headings to search for other records that have the same word(s) in a subject field.
- **Item ID**
  Contains the alphanumeric number assigned to each item—a unique identification number. When this number is known, it offers an efficient method of finding a particular item.

Word Variant vs. Exact Matches

- **Include word variants (e.g., plurals)**
  The results list will include records containing not only the exact search word(s), but also records containing words with the same English-language stem(s). For example, a variant search on mine will also find instances containing mines, mined, mining, miner, and miners.
- **Match words exactly**
  In some cases, particularly when looking for a phrase, it may be useful to require that words be matched exactly.
- **Return a maximum of ___ documents or parts**
  Use this option to adjust the maximum number of hits your search can generate.

Full Text Search

Choose a Full-Text Search to find

- unique passages of text, such as the source of a frequently-quoted phrase,
- concepts or ideas not defined by one subject term,
- information on persons, places, or events not central to an item's main theme,
- very specific topics.

What Is Full-Text Searching?

The term "Full Text" is used within American Memory to refer to the transcribed, electronically searchable versions of items that are text-based in their original forms: books or parts of books, pamphlets, manuscripts, legislative documents, broadsides, and so forth. A full-text search searches the text transcriptions.

It is important to note that some text-based materials in American Memory have not been transcribed into searchable text, and thus cannot be accessed by full-text searches.

Full-text search strategies should also take into account the fact that text-based materials are much less consistent than bibliographic records in language and structure.

One helpful way to use the full-text search feature is to enter a sentence or paragraph containing many words that characterize the topic you wish to investigate. A full-text search will then retrieve documents with similar passages. For example, the sentences below, if copied into the full-text search box as a search query, will locate multiple passages about irrigation:

A flowing well, wherever it can be got at moderate cost, answers admirably for irrigating purposes; and a well of seven-inch bore will water a considerable piece of land. Gardens and pleasure-grounds are commonly irrigated in this State by means of windmills, which pump water into small tanks.

Working with Document Parts

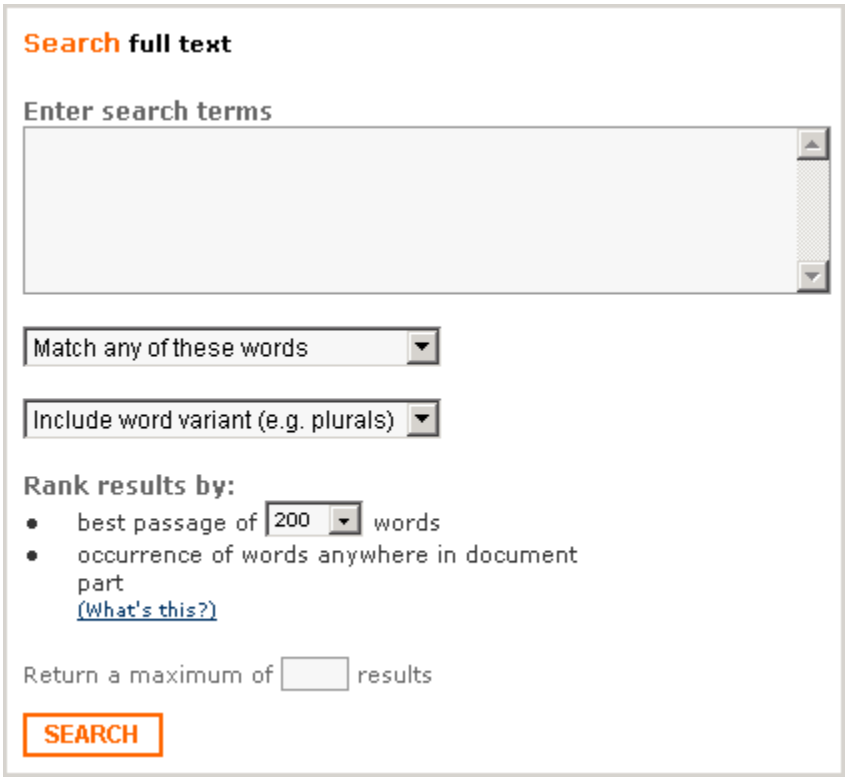
The full text of long documents, such as books, have been divided into logical parts for convenient presentation and searching. The most common example is for books to be separated into chapters. Other works are broken into parts on some other basis. When you search the full text of a collection, each document part is considered a separate item. A search may retrieve several parts from the same book.

As noted below, you can adjust your search settings to increase or decrease the number of document parts returned in a search.

Working with a Book Navigator

Each part or sub-section of a long document links to a full listing of all the parts, similar to a table of contents, known as a book navigator. If the original document contains a table of contents, the table of contents is presented in full text as a separate part in its own right and does not replace the book navigator.

Full Text Search options

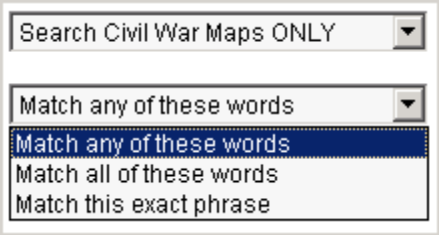


Default Settings

Unless you change them, the search engine will use pre-set or default settings designed to produce a high number of "hits," or search results. They are less useful for very precise searching. The default example above will

- find documents or document parts that contain at least one of the words typed into the box;
- include words that are close variants (e.g., plurals) of the search words entered;
- list results in order of the number of search words that occur in a single passage of 200 words within the document;
- return no more than 100 documents or document parts.

Choosing Settings



You can adjust the settings on the search page to generate different kinds of search outcomes:

- **Match any of these words**
  Finds all documents or document parts with any one of the search terms entered. The more search terms you add, the more items will be returned. Best for producing the highest number of hits.
- **Match all of these words**
  Finds only documents or document parts containing all of the search terms entered. The more search terms you add, the fewer items will be returned. Helps ensure that the items found relate to all of the search terms.
- **Match this exact phrase**
  Finds only documents or document parts containing the words you enter, in the order you enter them. The most precise search option.

  Matching an exact phrase can be useful for searching place names or when common words have a particular sense used in combination.

  For example, the term “normal school” was used in the nineteenth century to describe schools for training teachers. Searching for the exact phrase may eliminate results containing the words “normal” and “school” in unrelated ways.

  Note: Some very common words, such as **and**, **of**, **the**, **a**, and **to**, are ignored even when matching phrases.
- **Rank results by best passage**
  Ranking results by “best passage” can help you find a paragraph or section that expresses a concept or idea. You may wish to type in a large number of words, including synonyms, and search for a passage of 200 or 400 words. The search engine will identify passages that contain the largest number of these words close together.
  Example: In the California As I Saw It collection, searching for Indians, pine nuts, cook, meal, baskets, acorns, and food and ranking by passage will identify several passages pertaining to Native American foodways in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Since these words have also been used in paragraphs devoted to related subjects, some passages will not be relevant to your search.

- **Rank results by occurrence anywhere**
  Ranking results by “occurrence of words anywhere in document part” can help you find a book chapter or other large section that contains specific references. You may wish to type in a limited number of words, since this approach is most effective in a search for references to specific people, places, or things rather than for the expression of an idea.

  Example: A search for cowboys and grassland will identify a chapter that contains both of these words but, if they are widely separated, the text may not refer the use of grassland by cowboys.
- **Return a maximum of ___ documents or parts** Use this option to adjust the maximum number of hits your search can generate.

NOTE: Search engines outside of the Library of Congress may find many American Memory Home Pages and texts. However, the American Memory collection items and their descriptive records cannot usually be found by outside search engines.

Resources from Outside the Library of Congress

Area Studies

United States & Canada
Latin America
Australia & Oceania
East & Southeast Asia
Central & South Asia
Europe & Russia
Middle East & North Africa
Subsaharan Africa

General Internet

Lesson Plans and Other Teaching Aids
News
Reference
Using the Internet

Government, Economics & Law

Economics
Federal Government
Law
Political Science
State & Local Government

Humanities

Art & Architecture
Language & Culture
Literature
Music
Philosophy, Ethics, & Religion
Theatre & Cinema

Science & Technology

Science
Technology

Social Sciences

Anthropology
Geography
Psychology
Sociology

U.S. History

By Chronological Period
Primary Source Collections
Special Topics

World History

Primary and Secondary Sources
Teaching and Reference

Finding Primary Sources on the Library's Website

Primary Source Sets – Each set collects primary sources on a specific topic, all as easy-to-use PDFs, with historical background information and teaching ideas

Primary Sources by State - Selected primary sources for each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories.

Themed Resources – The best Library of Congress resources on the most frequently taught themes.

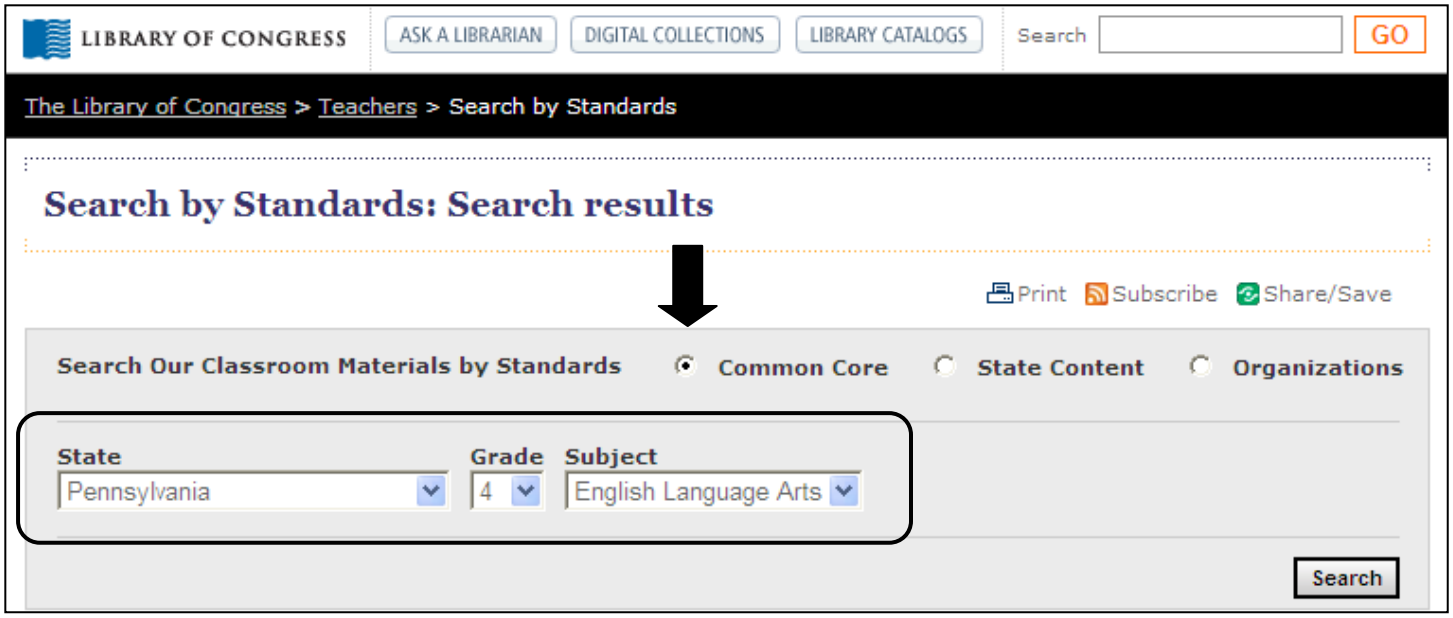
Browse by Topic - Easy browsing for primary sources across all the digital collections of the Library of Congress.

☺ Web Guides - In-depth guides to resources on a wide variety of topics.

☺ Ask a Librarian – If you can't find the primary sources you need, consider sending a question to a Library of Congress reference librarian.

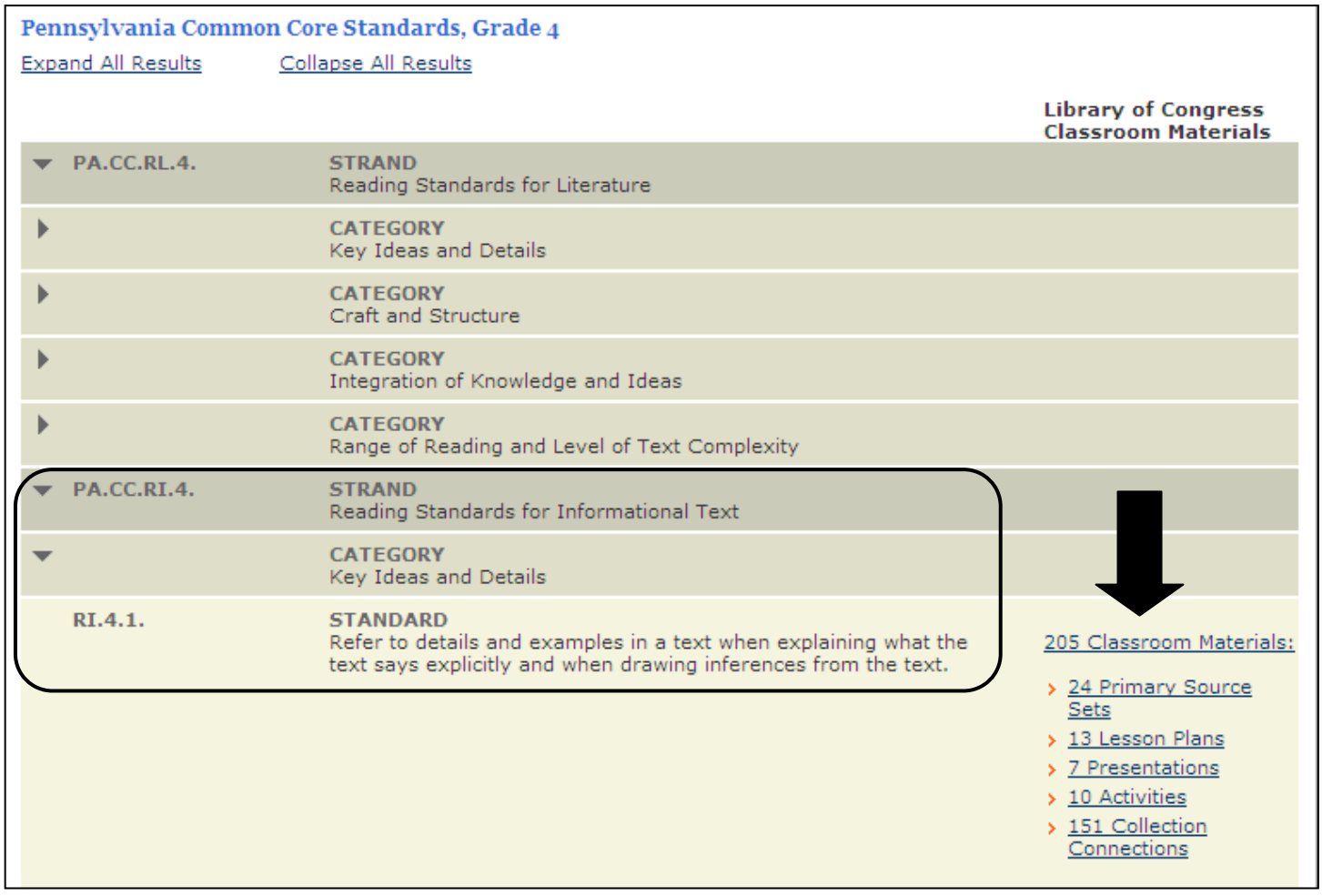
Finding Primary Sources by Standards

- From the **Teacher's Resource** page, click on **Classroom Materials.**
- Once you are on the **Classroom Materials** page click on the link that reads, **Find classroom materials that meet your state standards >**
- Select **Common Core** (see below).
- Select your state – Pennsylvania, Grade level, and subject (note: the only subject available currently is English Language Arts) then click on the **Search** command button. **SEE EXAMPLE BELOW**

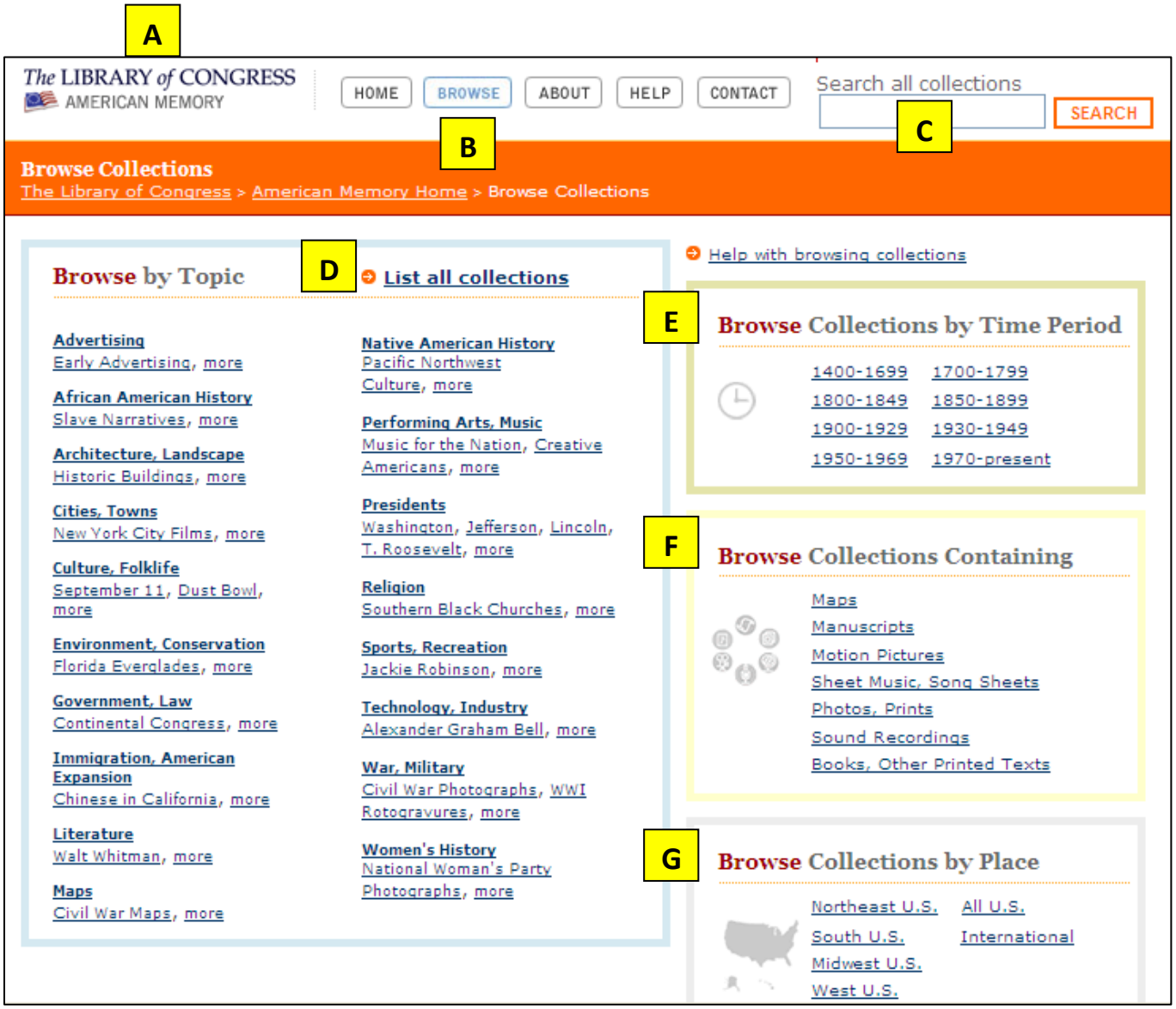


Finding Primary Sources by Standards (continued)

- Once the Common Core ELA Standards for Pennsylvania load you can Expand All Results or Collapse All Results (see below).
- In the example shown below the PA Common Core Standards for ELA are shown by **Strand** – which is **Reading Informational Text (PA.CC.RI.4)**, by **Category** – which is **Key Ideas and Details**, and by **Standard (RI.4.1).**
- Also available are links to Library of Congress primary sources that relate to this specific Standard. In the example shown below you have links to **205 Classroom Materials, 24 Primary Source Sets, 13 Lesson Plans, 7 Presentations, 10 Activities, and 151 Collection Connections.**



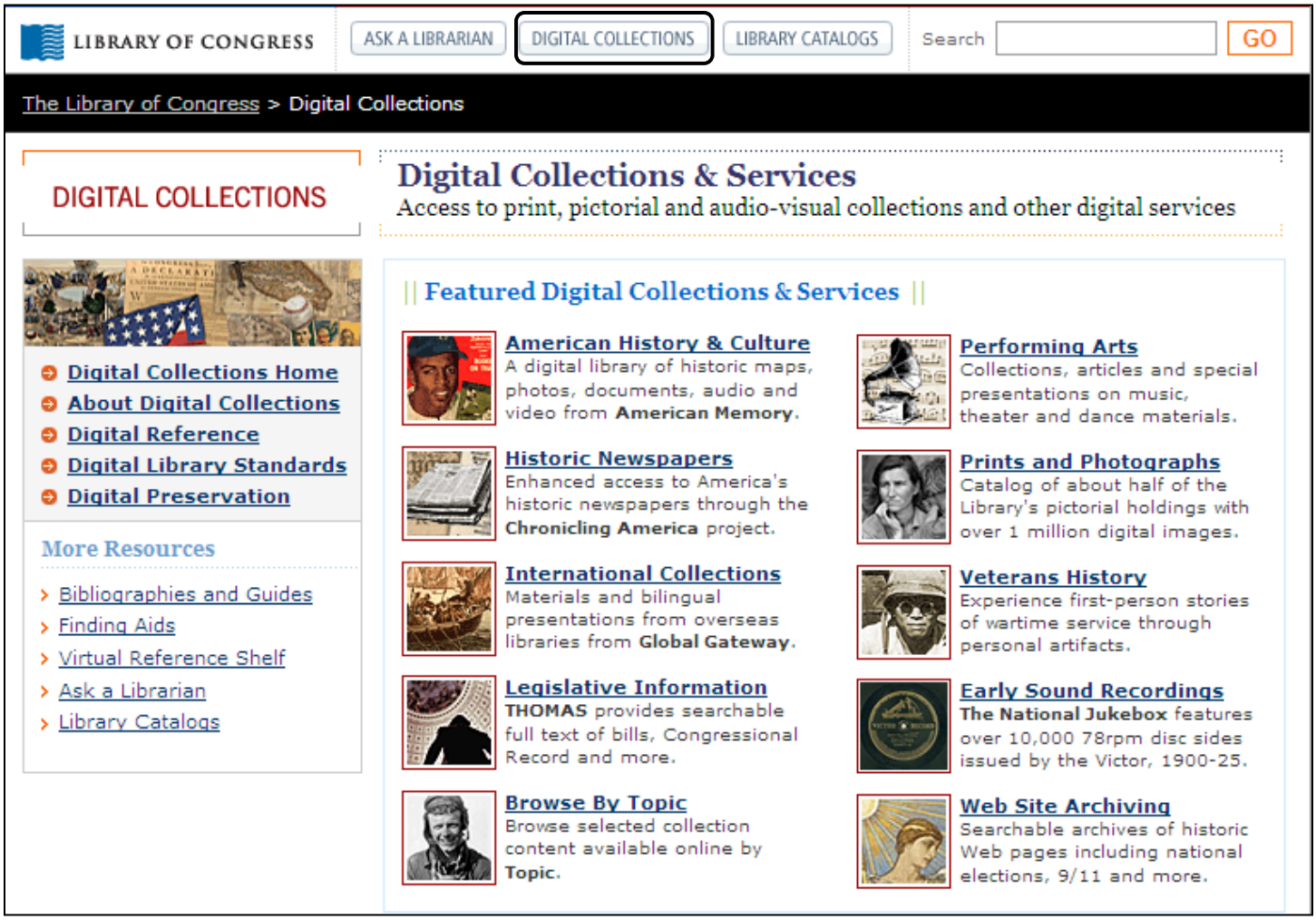
Library of Congress – Collection Finder



A. From the Library's home page select the **American Memory** Collection.
B. When the American Memory Collection page loads click on the **Browse** tab at the top of the page.
C. Initiate a **general keyword search** of the American Memory Collection.
D. Select **List all collections** to Browse American Memory by title.
E. Browse the American Memory Collection by **Time Period**.
F. Browse the American Memory Collection by **Format.**
G. Browse the American Memory Collection by **Place**

Digital Collections and Services

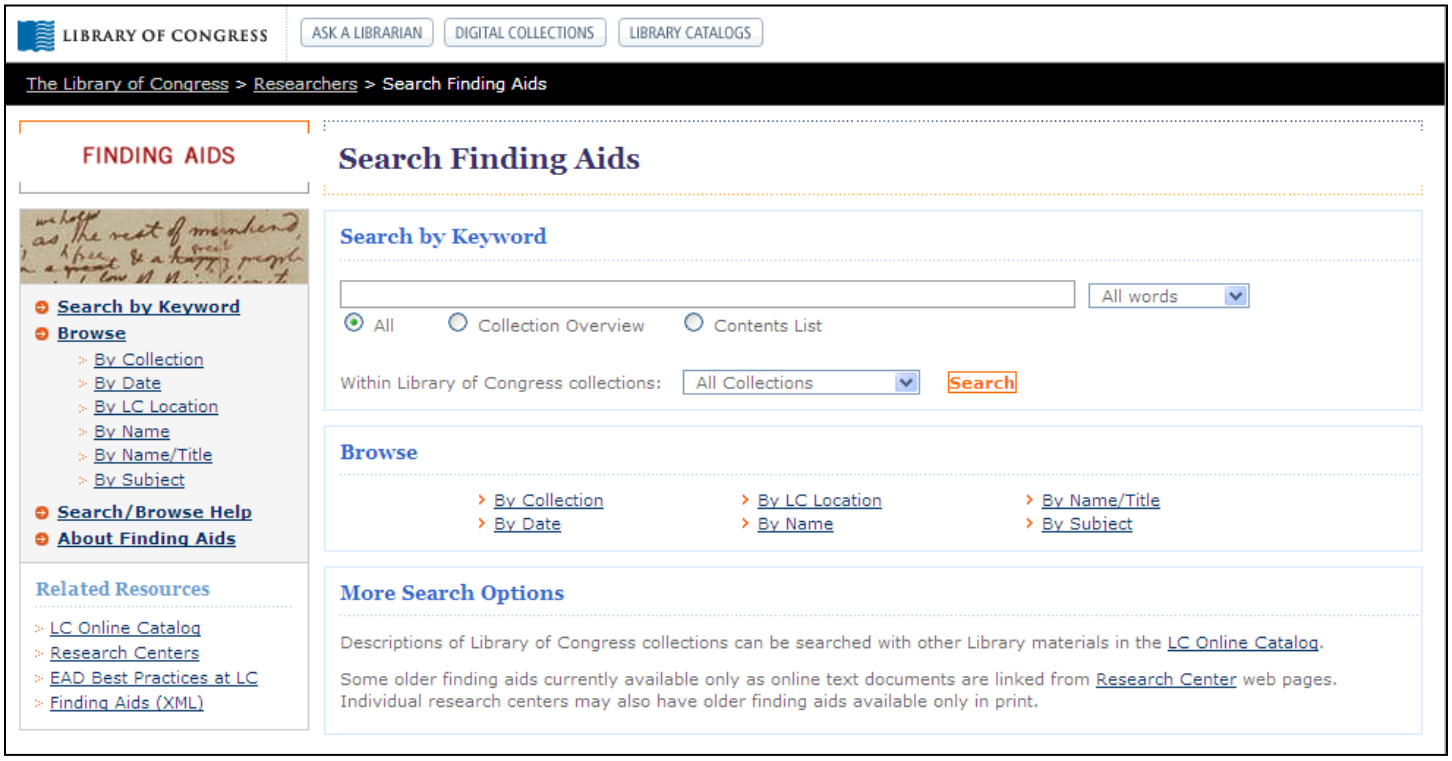
From the Library's home page, click on the **Digital Collections** tab at the top of the page



Finding Aids

From the **Digital Collections and Services** webpage, click on **Finding Aids** listed in the **More Resources menu** located on the left side of the page

- Search by keyword
- Browse the Library's digital resources by a variety of search terms
- Get help searching and browsing



Primary Source Bibliographic Organizer

Thumbnail Image	Digital ID/Permanent URL	MLA Citation of Source	Annotations for Instructional Use
	Digital ID - http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b41800	Lange, Dorothea. *Migrant Mother*. 1936. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information. *Prints and Photographs Division*. Library of Congress. 24, Oct. 2012. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998021539/PP/	I will use this photograph to illustrate what life was like for migrant workers during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s. Students will analyze the photo to understand the concerns of this mother of seven children.