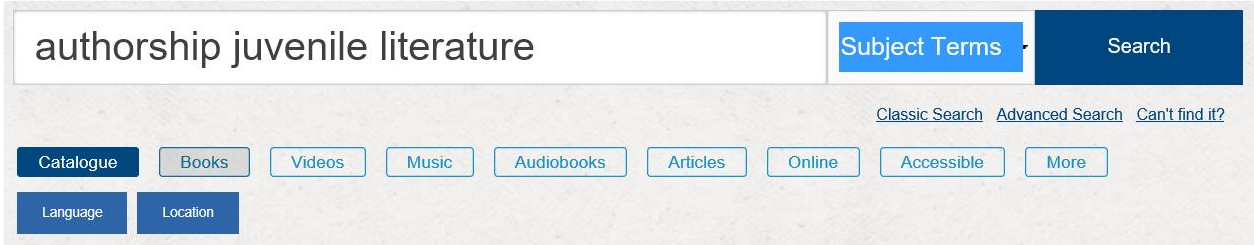


How to Search a Library Catalogue

Here are a few tips for searching an online public access catalogue (aka the OPAC).

Searching is pretty straightforward when you know the title or author, but topic searches are more challenging. Library catalogues might use subject headings you don't expect. For example, in some libraries cookbooks are filed under **Cookery**. Likewise, books about writing are filed under **Bookery**.¹

Here is a sample search on the online catalogue for Saskatchewan public libraries: <https://www.sasklibraries.ca>. I wanted books on creative writing that I could recommend for children. I did a basic search on CREATIVE WRITING FOR CHILDREN. My search produced many videos, audiobooks, novels, and adult books to sort through, so I clicked on a promising title from the list to see what topics the library used to describe this book. It turns out many books on writing are listed under the official subject heading **Authorship**, and nonfiction or instructional books for children are listed under **Juvenile literature**. I changed the **Any** search option (sometimes called **Word** or **Keyword**) to **Subject Terms** and entered **Authorship juvenile literature**.



The screenshot shows a search interface for a library catalogue. The search bar contains the text "authorship juvenile literature". To the right of the search bar are two buttons: "Subject Terms" (highlighted in blue) and "Search". Below the search bar are several filter buttons: "Catalogue", "Books", "Videos", "Music", "Audiobooks", "Articles", "Online", "Accessible", and "More". At the bottom left, there are two more filter buttons: "Language" and "Location". To the right of the search bar, there are three links: "Classic Search", "Advanced Search", and "Can't find it?".

This search produced around 400 titles. I narrowed it down by clicking on **Books**. Often you can refine your search results even further by selecting the language, year of publication, library location and other options. With some library catalogues, you must use the **Advanced Search** option to do this.

When you click on one of the titles it gives you oodles of information about the book. It shows which libraries have it in their collection and whether it's available. If it's not at your local library, you can ask to have it sent from another library. Better yet, ask the library staff to set you up with an online library account and request it yourself.

Here is a trickier search. When I worked at the library of the First Nations University of Canada, I was asked to search for very specific topics and materials. Many titles on Aboriginal peoples are assigned the official subject heading **Indians of North America** (from the elderly Library of Congress Classification System) or **Native peoples** (from the youthful Canadian Subject Headings system). To be thorough, I would add other keywords to my searches.

¹ Just kidding. However, *bookery* is a real word—it means the study of books, or a collection of books.

In this sample search, I want to know if the Saskatchewan public libraries have any DVDs on Aboriginal peoples. I went to **Advanced Search** and set it up like so:

Find:	Any Field	▼	Phrase (ADJ)	▼	Indians of North America		
Or	▼	Any Field	▼	Phrase (ADJ)	▼	First Nations	
Or	▼	Any Field	▼	Phrase (ADJ)	▼	Native peoples	
Or	▼	Any Field	▼	Phrase (ADJ)	▼	Indigenous peoples	
<input type="checkbox"/> Add or exclude another set of search terms						Or	▼
	Any Field	▼	Keyword (ALL)	▼	Aboriginal		
Or	▼	Any Field	▼	Keyword (ALL)	▼	Metis	
Or	▼	Any Field	▼	Keyword (ALL)	▼	Inuit	
And	▼	Any Field	▼	Keyword (ALL)	▼		
						Go!	Clear
Limit by:	DVD						

Some of the newer public library catalogues don't work very well for this kind of search. I had to select the Classic search menu, which includes more options.

Note that I use **OR** rather than **AND** between my keywords. Had I chosen **AND**, the catalogue would have searched for titles that contained every keyword in my list, and I would have ended up with no results. This search returned over 600 titles.

Not all titles about Aboriginal peoples will be listed under these topics. Some will be found under a narrower subject heading, such as **Cree**.

When you find a book you like, examine its library record with the eye of a detective. It will give you clues as to where to find other books on the same topic. Click on the subject headings, authors and series, and see where they take you.

Happy searching!