Welcome back. In this tutorial, we’re going to spend some time exploring the library catalog so that you’ll be ready to use it in your research.

To start with, what is a catalog? At its most basic, a catalog is a list of all the books and other resources in a library, designed to help you find them. Catalogs have come in many forms, but back in the good old days, they were typically created as ever-growing collections of index cards housed in cabinets. In large libraries, these card catalogs could be quite extensive.

Nowadays, of course, you usually find a library catalog on the computer.

**Finding the Catalog**

You can get to the catalog here at Northwestern in a few different ways. First, at the top of this research guide, or any research guide, you’ll see a search bar. This is attached to the library catalog. Second, on the library’s main page is the black navigation bar, which has a link labeled, “Books, Articles & More.” When we follow that link, we will come to a search bar that looks like this.

**Keyword Searching**

To show how it works, we’ll practice searching for a book. As an example, I’m going to search for the popular folk hero *John Henry*.

What we’ve just done is called a keyword search. We just typed in a couple of words that we thought of ourselves. And now the catalog is showing us all the resources that have John and Henry somewhere in their descriptions. You’ll see that we have books about the folk hero John Henry, but we also have books by or about John Henry
Newman, a prominent Catholic thinker from the nineteenth century. And if we look further down in the results, we’ll see works by John Henry Merryman, Henry Fielding, or O. Henry.

So, next we need to limit our search. One way to do this is to put “John Henry” in quotes. That way, the catalog will treat the name John Henry as a single term rather than as two. And that should eliminate most of the Johns and Henrys. However, when we run this new search, we once again see a great many works by or about John Henry Newman.

**Boolean Operators**

So then, let’s talk about Boolean operators. Don’t be confused by this term. All it really refers to are the words **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**. So, for our next search, we’ll keep the quotation marks around “John Henry,” but will add “NOT Newman.”

As the catalog is case-sensitive, make sure it recognizes NOT as a Boolean operator. To do that, you’ll have to put the word in all caps. Now, when we run this search again, we see that many if not all the resources we get are about John Henry the folk hero, though there will be some other John Henrys lurking in there. This might be enough to get us what we need, but we can change our method to refine the search even further.

**Subject Headings**

So let’s talk about subject terms. You may think *subject* and *keyword* sound like synonyms but they actually mean very different things. Subject terms are a form of what’s called *controlled vocabulary*; this is an officially recognized list of words and phrases used to describe library resources. One of the most commonly used is the...
Library of Congress Subject Headings, an absolutely massive list of subject terms. All the items in our library are described with Library of Congress Subject Headings, and you can use them to find the resources you need.

So let’s take a look at a book about John Henry. The first title from our previous search will do just fine: We can click on the title to bring up details about the book. When we do, we can see all kinds of information, but I want you to focus on this tab labeled, “Description.” When we open that tab, we can see a physical description, publication information, and other things. But we can also see the subject terms used to describe the book.

You’ll notice that one of those terms is John Henry (Legendary character). The subject terms are hot-linked, so if we click on one, we can see all the resources with that term. When we click on John Henry (Legendary character), we get exactly three hundred results, all of which should be about John Henry. Now, it is possible that there are good resources missing from these results; after all, a cataloging librarian might have left out an important subject term when describing items. Nonetheless, we know these results should all be relevant.

**Refining Results**

But we can still refine our results further. Take a look at this sidebar over on the left. I’m not going to describe it in detail, because I think that once you’ve noticed it, it will probably be self-explanatory. But do keep in mind that our catalog is WorldCat, a system used to catalog libraries all over the world. So we’re not just looking at our own holdings in these results.
But let’s say for our example that we want something that is available in Northwestern’s library, and, specifically that we want a book rather than an article or other resource. We can choose to limit results to Northwestern Oklahoma State University Library Services, and we can limit the format to *book*. This will give us just five results, and you can see that all of them are in our library.

Before we move on, we’ll quickly look at one more option, and that is advanced search, which you can get to by clicking the link underneath the search bar. The advanced search page looks like this, and it would enable us to perform the search we just did in a single step. You can choose to search a single area of a resource’s description, such as the title, author’s name, or subject terms. You can also input multiple terms and connect them together using Boolean operators. But I’ll let you explore this further on your own.

**Interlibrary Loan**

Now, you might have been wondering earlier, what is the point of having a library catalog that is not for our library only, but for a vast network of libraries? The answer is interlibrary loan. Let’s say you wanted this title, a book by the historian Scott Reynolds Nelson on the real man who’s likely behind the John Henry legend. You can easily see that this is not in our library collection, because there are no call numbers or other access information visible. So why is it here? Why can you see it? Did we do this just to torment you?

Yes, actually, but never mind that right now. As usual, you can click the book’s title to bring up its details, and you’ll see this button. Click that button and it will bring up a form through which you can order the book from another library. You’ll need your
student ID number, and you’ll have to fill in some additional information as well, including your email address. Make sure you use your Northwestern email address and not a private one to make sure you get the resources you’re requesting.

If you’re taking online courses, or if you’re on one of our satellite campuses, you can order books from our collection in a similar way. Just open the details of the title you want and click the button labeled, “Request NWOSU-owned Item.” You’ll have to log in with your ID number and password, and once you do, you’ll get a form like this: Select the branch campus you want the items sent to.

You should have your items sent to a satellite campus if possible: It will arrive more quickly and it will save you money, because you can return it to the campus instead of mailing it back. if it’s not possible to get the item at a branch campus, then fill in your address in this item description window. It will be your responsibility to mail the item back in appropriate packaging before its due date.

**The Menu Bar**

Finally, let’s take a look at one more feature, and that’s this little menu bar that you’ll see on every item in the catalog.

*Cite*

This menu bar has four options on it: The first one we’ll look at, and the one that you’ll probably use most frequently, is “Cite.” Clicking “Cite” will bring up this window, which can produce an automatically generated citation such as you would use in a bibliography or works cited page.

You begin by selecting your citation style; for this example, we’ll use the style of the Modern Language Association, or MLA, which you will probably be required to use
in several of your classes. Once you select your citation style the catalog will create a citation for you. Keep in mind, this has been generated by a computer, so it almost certainly has errors in it. It gives you a place to start, but it is still your responsibility to proofread it. Ultimately, the latest edition of the style guide is the final authority on what your citation should look like.

If you’re using reference management software such as EndNote or Mendeley, you can also export the citation. Most reference management software will recognize RIS files, so you can simply download the RIS file and open it with your program.

**Link**

The next two options on the menu bar are these. “Link” will create a stable, permanent link to the catalog entry. If you need to link to the catalog, you should use this rather than copying and pasting the address from your web browser.

**Email**

Next is “Email.” You can use this to email a catalog record to yourself or someone else. If you’re researching at a public computer, emailing records to yourself can be a good way to keep track of your work.

**Save**

Finally, we’ll spend a little time with this fourth option, “Save.” When you click on it, all it does is make a blue star. So what’s up with that?

Well, notice that in the upper right-hand corner, you’ve got this little spot labeled, “My Items.” If we click on that, we can see the items we’ve saved. Now, you’ll notice that it says these are saved only temporarily. If we want to save them permanently, we’ll have to sign in to our account.
Notice, in the upper right corner, you’ve got this little label, “Sign In.” So let’s click on that. That will of course bring us to a sign-in window. You’ll need your student ID number and password, and if you haven’t yet set up your WorldCat account, you’ll have to do so at this time.

Once we are signed in, we have several options, one of which is to create a list. When we select that, we can name the list, add details about it, and choose which of the save titles we want to add to it. When we’re done filling out the information, we can click Save. Now our list will be available when we sign in again.

So, we’ve quickly covered some of the most important features of the library catalog. You should now be ready to explore it on your own. As time goes on, you’ll become more comfortable using it, but remember, you can always ask a librarian for help.