

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
Oxford Reference Online - Premium
April 2008

In April 2008, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of Oxford Reference Online - Premium.

Oxford Reference Online – Premium (ORO) is a database consisting of over 175 full text reference works, that include language dictionaries, quotation dictionaries and key titles from the *Oxford Companions* and *Oxford Dictionaries* series covering a wide range of subjects.

Each reviewer independently, or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staff, reviewed and evaluated Oxford Reference Online - Premium. Though other faculty and/or staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member only and not transferred to another. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the service to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT RANKINGS

- #1 --- Not Recommended
- #2 --- Recommend with reservations as noted.
- #3 --- Recommended.
- #4 --- Outstanding offer and opportunity.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 3, 3, 3

Is the product suitable for community college students?

Oxford Reference Online – Premium aims to be a comprehensive reference resource covering the areas across the subject spectrum. There are over 175 dictionaries and reference titles included in this resource, and although the database is strongest in language and literature, it is also very useful for humanities, social science studies (history, religion, philosophy, political science) and the arts. While the database does contain titles that would support business and the sciences (physical and biological sciences, and health/medicine), the database would greatly benefit from significant additions to these subject areas. Additional searchable or browsable content includes hundreds of full-color maps, thousands of illustrations, themed timelines for key 20th century events and external web links.

This database is an excellent source for locating quick facts and definitions and most entries are short and concise. Larger, more in-depth entries are available, but can be difficult to locate within large results lists. The results lists can be sorted according to a variety of criteria, including entry length, but this option is not obvious, especially for novice searchers.

The Advanced Search options are powerful, but confusing. It is clear on the Advanced Search Screen that users can limit by subject by checking the boxes next to the subject areas. What is not so clear is that the subject headings are also links and, if the user clicks on a subject area, they will also be given the option to limit their search to individual titles within that subject area. The reviewers recommend improvements to the advanced search screen to include more (and clearer) instructions and additional limiting options. The Advanced Search screen would be improved, for instance, if there were an option to limit searches for lengthy articles before completing the search. As it stands now, a user is left to sort through a long results list after the search to locate the more substantial articles. This database would also benefit from adding a citation generator (to format citations for sources according to MLA, APA, or other standard documentation styles) or an option to export to a third-party bibliographic citation tool.

These comments aside, the database is a strong offering of reliable, up-to-date reference books from a respected academic publisher and would be a good choice for an electronic reference resource for any community college.

DATABASE FEATURES RANKINGS

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review. Unless otherwise indicated, all comments are for Oxford Reference Online - Premium only.

The following attributes were examined and rated:

- #1 - - - Poor
- #2 - - - Needs Improvement
- #3 - - - Good
- #4 - - - Excellent

INFORMATION DATABASE 3, 3, 3

Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

Oxford Reference Online – Premium’s database consists of over 175 full text reference works, that include language dictionaries, quotation dictionaries and key titles from the *Oxford Companions* and *Oxford Dictionaries* series covering a wide range of subjects – art & architecture, classics, history, literature, military history, mythology & folklore, performing arts, politics & social sciences, religion & philosophy, economics & business, law, biological sciences, computing, earth & environmental sciences, food & nutrition, medicine & physical sciences and mathematics. A majority of the entries in this database

are short and concise, although there are longer entries available. The results list can be sorted to pull out the longer, more in-depth articles.

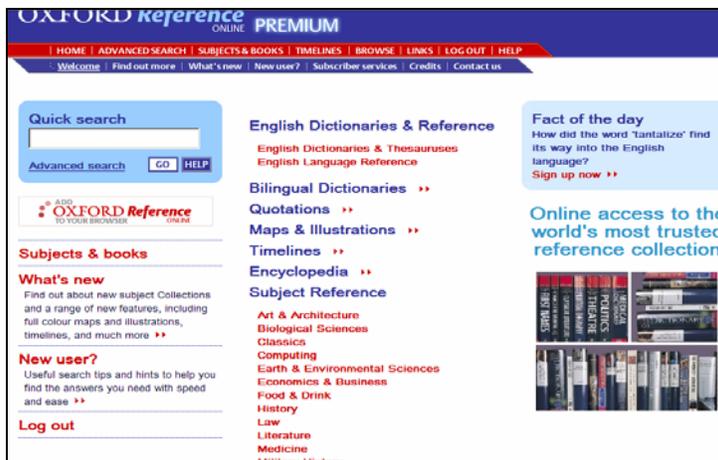
New content is added throughout the year. Titles are updated with new editions at least three times a year in accordance with print publication schedules. Recently added titles include *Oxford Dictionary of Rhymes*, *Oxford Dictionary of Genetics*, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* and the *Encyclopedia of Mammals*.

This database can be enhanced with the Western Civilization and Literature Collections, which contain an additional 20 titles (14 in Literature, 6 in Western Civilization). These collections include many encyclopedias (covering American Literature, British Literature, Children’s Literature, the Enlightenment, the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Middle Ages). Currently these extra collections do not form part of the CCL offering. However 8 of the titles are also available as part of the Oxford Digital Reference Shelf (which is currently offered through the consortium), a set of 29 titles available for one-time purchase (with perpetual ownership). Titles can also be purchased individually and will be incorporated into ORO – Premium. And as long as a library subscribes to ORO-Premium, there is no additional hosting fee charged.

SEARCH INTERFACE 2.5, 2.5, 2.5

Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

On first impressions, the ORO’s search interface appears simple and uncomplicated. From the home page of this database, the Quick search option is presented to the user, with links to the following options: Search within a subject; a Subjects and books; and Advanced search.

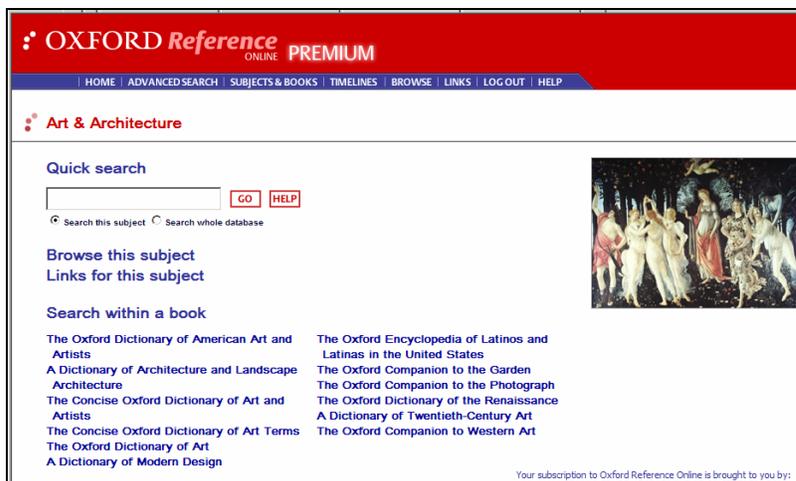


A user can enter a **Quick search** in the box provided to return a list of matching entry headings from multiple sources. By default, the operator between search terms is “and.” If no match is found in an entry heading, the search will default to a full text search. If there are no results from a full-text search, then the search will revert to a “pattern

search” (like a fuzzy search) in case search terms entered contain misspellings. Results page in this type of search appear in a tabbed list, sorted by categories like dictionaries, English-language reference, bilingual dictionaries, etc. Results can be refined (limited) by subject area, or re-sorted to display alphabetically by article title and also by article length.

A **Search within a subject** is launched when a user selects one of the categories -- English Dictionaries and Reference or Quotations, Maps & Illustrations, etc. -- displayed on the main search page.

By clicking on the **Subject and books** link, a user can browse lists of titles in the database which are categorized in broad subject groupings (e.g. Art & Architecture, Literature, Military History, Bilingual Dictionaries, etc.)

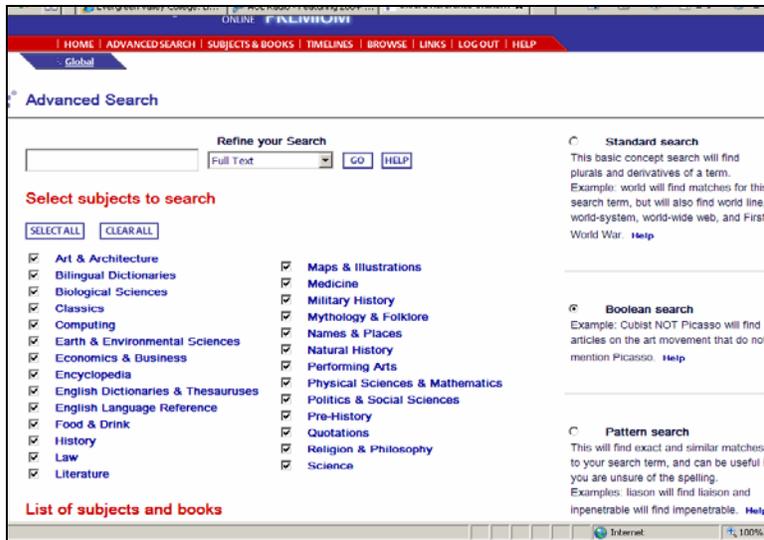


The screenshot shows the Oxford Reference Online Premium website interface. At the top, there is a red navigation bar with the text "OXFORD Reference ONLINE PREMIUM" and a menu with links: HOME, ADVANCED SEARCH, SUBJECTS & BOOKS, TIMELINES, BROWSE, LINKS, LOG OUT, HELP. Below the navigation bar, the page title is "Art & Architecture". There is a "Quick search" section with a search input field, "GO" and "HELP" buttons, and radio buttons for "Search this subject" (selected) and "Search whole database". To the right of the search section is a small image of a classical painting. Below the search section, there are links for "Browse this subject", "Links for this subject", and "Search within a book". Under "Search within a book", there are two columns of book titles:

The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists	The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States
A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture	The Oxford Companion to the Garden
The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists	The Oxford Companion to the Photograph
The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms	A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art
The Oxford Dictionary of Art	The Oxford Companion to Western Art
A Dictionary of Modern Design	

At the bottom right of the page, there is a small text: "Your subscription to Oxford Reference Online is brought to you by:"

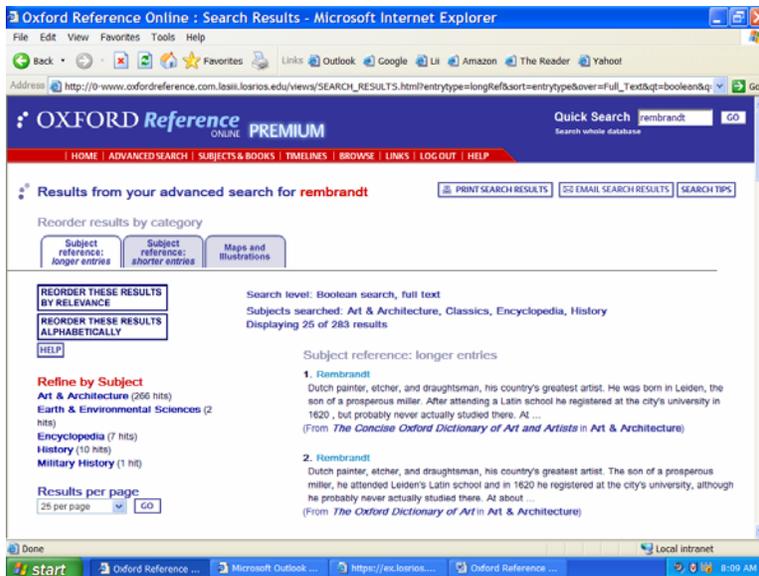
A user can execute a search in all of the titles within a subject area (as shown below), click on one or more individual titles to be searched independently, or browse this subject (which will give an alphabetized list of index headings for that subject area). The user also has the option from this screen of widening the search to look for terms within the whole ORO database.



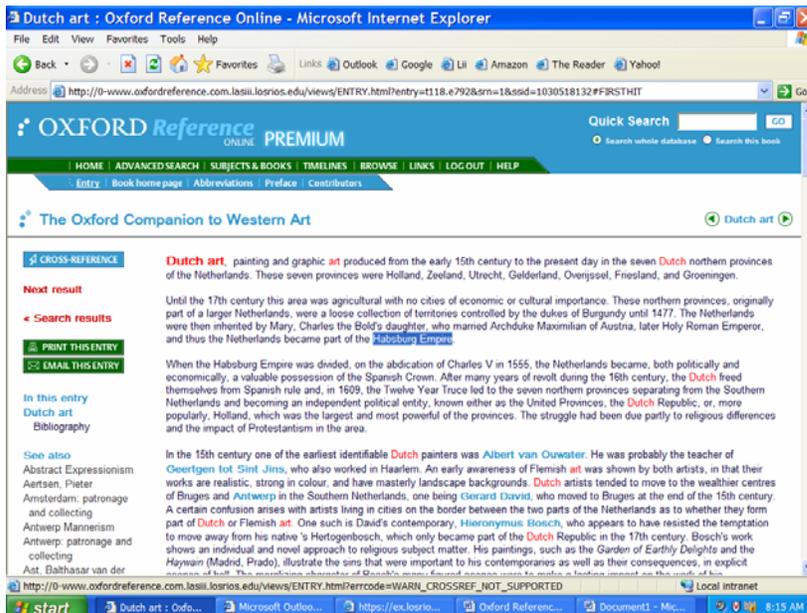
A user can use the **advanced search option** to use Boolean search terms, perform a pattern search (similar to a fuzzy search), or to search for specific people or for entry headings only in a selected subject or across a range of subjects. This page would benefit from including some other options, such as allowing limiters for articles with illustrations or the option to look for longer articles.

Only once a particular document or entry is selected from a results list does a user have the option to print or email the entry. One drawback to this database is that it does not allow the user to collect “marked” items (so documents or citations can be downloaded, emailed or printed in multiples) or to save search histories. Also, having a breadcrumb trail or other navigation devices would help users find their way back to a results page once they have navigated away from it.

From a results list, the database does contain helpful features that allow a user to **sort (reorder) the results** by article length, thus easily pulling out longer entries. This option is not at all obvious, though, and the reviewers only discovered it by accident.



While there are many cross-references built into the database through hypertext links, users also have the ability to simulate cross-references on any topic that piques their interest. They can simply highlight the word or phrase that interests them (for instance, “Habsburg Empire” in the example below) and then click on the **Cross Reference** button on the top left of the screen. This will conduct a new search on the databases, bringing up related articles (11 articles on the example shown).



USER SUPPORT SERVICES 3, 3, 3

What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?

While search screens and results screens are clean and orderly, there are layers of options available, indeed required, for the most efficient, successful use of this product. Many of these options may go unnoticed by novice users, so a review of the available documentation is necessary for obtaining the best results from the database.

Oxford provides complete documentation on the help screens. Users can browse through general subject headings using a table of contents along the left side of the screen. In addition, there are context sensitive links to the help screens from the different search screens (various search options are available – basic search, advanced search, searching within subject areas and searching within a specific title) and the results lists. The help screens are clearly written and include screen shots whenever appropriate. Additionally, Oxford maintains an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) list featuring sections for general users as well as for librarians and library administrators.

Library administrators have access to a variety of reports and services through the Subscriber Services screen, including (but not limited to) usage reports, account preferences and MARC records. Technical support is available via the FAQs or an email query form provided on the website. Telephone support is available from 9 AM -5 PM EST.

COST 3, 2.5, 3

If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

Oxford provides a variety of reasonable subscription options through the consortium, based upon concurrent users and FTEs of the individual campuses. The pricing is comparable to the Credo Reference 100 subscription which includes access to 100 Reference titles, and is significantly less than the Credo Unlimited access to over 270 titles. At this time, Oxford Reference Online contains over 175 titles.

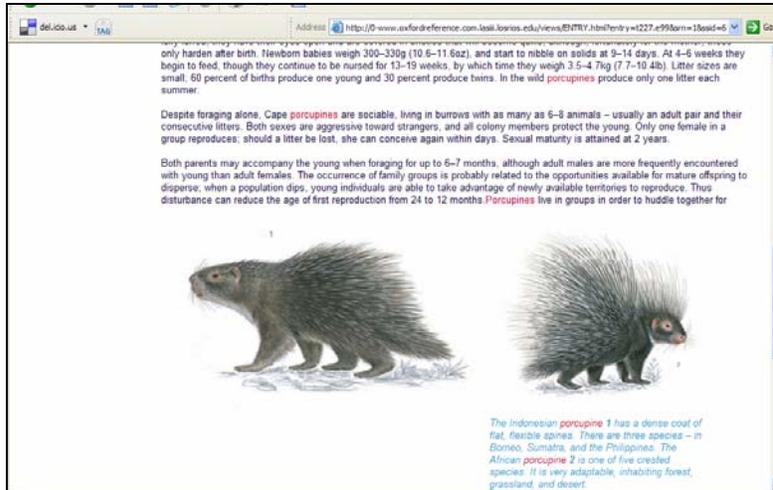
AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 2.5, 2.5 , 2.5

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?

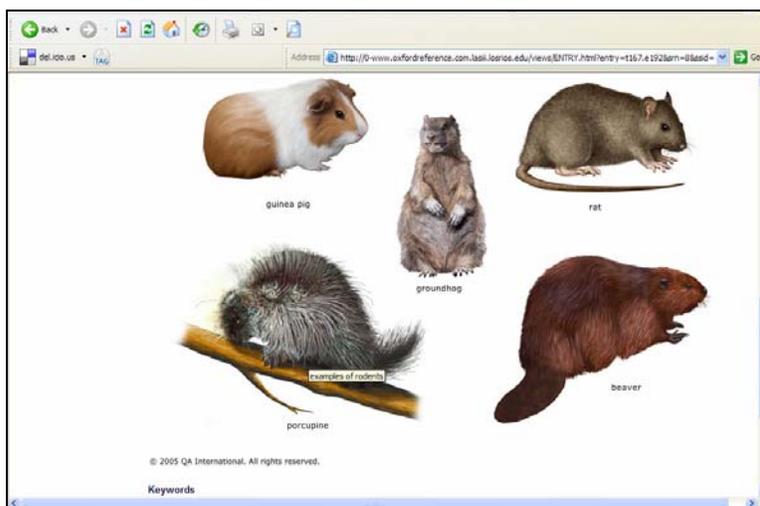
Access to the product was stable with a fast response time when tested from computers on campus as well as a home computer with a DSL connection. According to Oxford's documentation, the product is designed to be compliant with Section 508 (1998 amendments) of the US Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The software has "been tested to a limited degree using the screen reader JAWS, and works acceptably well with this software."

The reviewers did notice that the use of alt tags was sporadic and, when present, not very helpful. When a graphic or illustration was contained in the body of an article, there were

no alt tags. Each of the images in the article examined was linked so they would open in a separate window. Therefore when JAWS “read” the graphic, the information was simply a long, alpha-numeric file name necessary for the link (0199206082.old-world-porcupines.1).



Alt tags were present in the fully visual resources, such as the [Visual English Dictionary](#), but were not always useful. For example, a search on porcupines yielded a page showing examples of rodents. Each of the alt tags simply read “examples of rodents” rather than identifying the specific rodent pictured. All of the names of the rodents were listed as keywords, which JAWS did read, but with no relation to where the animal appears on the graphic itself. Fixing this problem would require “cutting” larger graphics into segments and creating alt tags for each segment. This would be time consuming, but worth the work, since this is the only way to make the graphics accessible and the alt tags relevant.



Remote access to the database is available through a proxy, or remote access server and also through username and password verification. The documentation from Oxford states that libraries have the option to allow their users to access Oxford Reference Online using their library cards. Interested libraries are instructed to contact Oxford University Press for more information about this option.

Oxford Reference is designed to work well with both Windows and Macintosh computers using the following browsers: Internet Explorer 5.0 and above for Windows and version 5.5 for Macintosh; Netscape 6.0 and above for Windows and version 7.0 for Macintosh; and Firefox (it should be noted that the alt tags on graphics do not appear when using Firefox). The database will work on earlier versions of these browsers as well as on Opera 7.0 for Windows (although Opera does not fully support JavaScript).

OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT

Brisco, Shonda. "A's across the board: ebooks are getting ready to go to school." School Library Journal 52.12 (Dec 2006): 81(3).

Juhl, B. "Oxford reference online." Choice : WEB X 1 Aug. 2006: 81.

LaGuardia, Cheryl. "Oxford Reference Online Premium Collection." Library Journal 1 Mar. 2004: 118,120.

Polanka, Sue. "Options for the E-reference Collection." Booklist 103.5 (Nov 1, 2006): 93(3).