

**Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee review of
Encyclopædia Britannica Online
January 2005**

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed the Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member(s) only and not transferred to others. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus. Attributes of the information resources were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the “least value” and 4 representing the “most value.” The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE

SEARCH INTERFACE

USER SUPPORT SERVICES

COST

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

INFORMATION DATABASE 4

Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the community colleges as a whole.

Encyclopædia Britannica Online (EBO) is a comprehensive general reference online database with an exceptional depth of coverage making it an excellent online resource for California community college students. EBO includes the complete *Encyclopædia Britannica* (with more than 8,000 articles not found in the print edition), as well as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*, *Britannica Student Encyclopedia* and the *Britannica Book of the Year*. The latest encyclopedia added to the site, *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, features 28,000 short entries on a full range of topics.

EBO users can find more than 118,000 articles, updated and revised by *Encyclopædia Britannica* editors and contributors; over 23,000 bibliographies; over 23,000 illustrations, maps, and graphics; and more than 215,000 entries--including definitions, pronunciation guides, and word histories--from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus*.

EBO users can also search an Internet directory that includes more than 300,000 links to Web sites selected, rated, and reviewed by *Britannica* editors. The *Extensive World Atlas* links EBO users to thousands of maps, flags, articles, and statistics of over 215 countries.

Multimedia provides over 27,000 images and maps plus 3,300 animations, videos, and sound files. *Britannica Spotlights* offer alternating unique presentations of general interest topics such as the American Presidency, Shakespeare and the Globe, Guide to Black History, Clockworks: From Sundials to the Atomic Second, American Women's History, and the Great Barrier Reef.

Access to over 150 full-text journals and magazines provided by EBSCO Publishing Company includes such titles as American Spectator, Bioscience, Current Psychology, Film History, Humanist, Journal of Environmental Health, Mass Communication & Society, National Review, Policy Studies Journal, Saturday Evening Post, and Wilderness.

EBO provides valuable online general reference resources to California community college students on or off-campus. The primary advantage over the print edition is the number and currency of articles as well as linked resources.

EBO has clear and colorful graphics and multimedia that open quickly in a separate browser window and are easy to print.

SEARCH INTERFACE 3

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?

The EBO interface is user friendly, intuitive, and does not require an excessive amount of training to obtain relevant search results.

The layout of the EBO Home Page is attractive and logical. The web page features a prominent banner at the top of the page displaying the Encyclopædia Britannica Online logo. Directly below the logo in the header are interactive menu buttons. These buttons appear at the top of every search results page. The “Home” button can be used to return to the EBO Home Page. The “New” button can be used to find out new EBO products and features. The “Workspace” button can be used to save and collect research links in a “workspace” and then return later in the online session to review them. The “Browse” button can be used as an alternate to link to and navigate browsing options displayed from the EBO Home Page. The “Help” button can be used to visit the EBO web page where links to find tips and advice on searching EBO, frequently asked questions about the service, contact information, and additional details about EBO are available. The “Guided Tour” button can be used to download and/or print a .pdf file that provides a short tour through the *Encyclopædia Britannica* library.

From the EBO Home Page users can locate information quickly by using Boolean operators; browsing A-Z; or typing in words, phrases, and questions to receive a list of relevance-ranked articles. A “Suggested searches:” text box at the top of the web page under the SEARCH banner allows users to enter a word, phrase, or question and a search is activated by clicking on a round “Go” radio button to the immediate right of the text box. If users do not know the correct spelling of words to be entered in the search text

box they can check the “Not sure of the spelling?” box to the right of the “Go” button. This option assists users to improve search results together with the Search Tips link to the right of the “Not sure of the spelling?” box.

Directly below the “Suggested searches:” text box users have the option to select particular sources to include in their search results by checking the box next to one or more of the following sources: Encyclopædia Britannica; Britannica Student Encyclopedia; Britannica Elementary Encyclopedia; Britannica Concise Encyclopedia; Britannica Internet Guide; and, Video & Media. The default search provides results from all of the above sources.

Directly below these check boxes, users may conduct Merriam-Webster Searches by entering words in the Collegiate Dictionary and the Collegiate Thesaurus text boxes. Searches are activated by clicking on the “Go” button to the right of the text boxes.

EBO offers six options to browse the database under BROWSE banner. Each option title is displayed in bold and larger font size with unique icons and concise browse type descriptions directly under each title. For example, under the “Timeline Browse” title, a clock icon is displayed with the following descriptions: “Explore the past” and “Trace selected topics through history with illustrations and key dates”.

The *Index* assists users to find all references to a topic throughout *Encyclopædia Britannica* with the Index.

The *A-Z Browse* allows users to browse *Encyclopædia Britannica* in its traditional alphabetic arrangement.

The *Subject Browse* helps users find articles organized into different subject areas.

The *Year in Review Browse* provides users with articles about notable events and people of the recent past.

The *World Atlas* allows users to examine maps of continents, countries and oceans and to find links to related *Encyclopædia Britannica* articles.

The *Video Browse* helps users browse through selected videos organized by subject.

Prominently displayed in descending order on the right hand side of the EBO web page are: BIOGRAPHY OF THE DAY (with the picture and name of the individual); THIS DAY IN HISTORY (with picture and short description); BRITANNICA HIGHLIGHTS (with pictures, text, and links); DID YOU KNOW? (with description and link to contact EBO); and, SPOTLIGHTS (with description and link). A Learn More link to the right of the pictures under BIOGRAPHY OF THE DAY and THIS DAY IN HISTORY provides users articles and additional resources links.

EBO Search Results web pages are displayed in four easy to read columns with descriptions and/or links: Encyclopædia Britannica; Britannica Student Encyclopedia; The Web's Best Sites; Additional Content (with links to Journals and Magazines, Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, and Britannica Elementary Encyclopedia), Images, and Video & Media.

The four academic levels of encyclopedia articles are valuable reference tools particularly the first three levels for Basic Skills and English as a Second Language students (Britannica Elementary, Concise, and Student Encyclopedias) and the fourth level (Encyclopædia Britannica) for more advanced online general encyclopedia reference needs in community colleges.

The EBO interface is easy and intuitive to use. All the search screens are clear, uncluttered and visually appealing. There are clear visual navigational links and pages load quickly.

The EBO interface allows users to email and print articles. To email an article, users click on the phrase “E-mail this article”, fill in the appropriate information and send the information for emailing. Users can print from the browser or use the EBO interface. Users can also download/save articles by clicking on the browser pull-down menu, select the “Save As” option and download/save the article to a disk in the (A:) drive.

Links to Print Page, Print Article, E-Mail Article, and Cite Article are only available from search results pages to Britannica Encyclopedia articles. All journal/magazine articles and images can only be printed or saved (see above) at this time.

EBO provides citations that conform to the following styles: the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and Britannica.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES 4

If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone helpline available?

The “Help” icon is located at the top of every EBO web page. The EBO “Help Online” web page is both context-sensitive and a dynamic Table of Contents that provides hyperlinks to useful information on: Search Tips & Advice (including Getting Started, Understanding Search Results, Refining Your Query, and Z39.50 Instructions); Frequently Asked Questions (including Subscription Questions, Help With Access, Britannica Product Inquiries, and Policies); About Encyclopædia Britannica (including What’s New, Awards and Honors, Copyright, Trademarks, and Usage, Usage Agreement, and Accessibility Policy); and, Contact EBO.

Search Tips & Advice includes valuable information such as Boolean Operators, Natural Language Queries, Punctuation, Special Characters, and Wildcards.

EBO Help documentation is adequate, clear, and easy to follow and understand. Email and telephonic help is available. EBO supplies training if required.

A web-based usage statistics reporting system is available from EBO and statistics can be gathered on a daily, monthly, yearly, and by library or subscribing consortium. EBO will issue usernames and passwords upon request and provides a radio button to click on to that allows subscribers to download statistics reports in spreadsheet format.

COST 3

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

At this time, consortium level pricing for Britannica Online is \$0.275 per FTE or \$240 minimum which makes this general reference online database an affordable valuable resource.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 4

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

Access and connectivity to EBO was reliable and stable from on and off-campus computers. EBO is available 24/7 and it was available at every attempt to use with good interactivity speed and a quick response time. There are no simultaneous user restrictions and remote access is available using both IP and User Name/Password authentication, which means that any of the California community colleges would be able to take advantage of this accessibility.

EBO is ADA compliant and encourages questions, concerns, comments, or suggestions regarding ADA compliance from users who visit the EBO Web Site Accessibility Policy web page linked via EBO "Help".

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 4

EBO is an excellent online general reference resource for California community colleges. EBO is very user friendly and contains timely accurate information. The addition of email and print formatting options for journal/magazine articles and images would improve EBO's functionality and give this product a clear advantage over competing products.

Additional Reviews

Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. [Internet Database]. **Booklist.** September 15, 2004 v101 i2 p268(2)

Encyclopedia Britannica Online. **Choice WEB VIII Special Issue to Volume 41.** August 2004 v41 p66(2)