Finding Information

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Introduction

We live very much in an Age of Information and it is becoming increasingly necessary for us to develop skills in finding information. Those who ignore information can expect to be left behind. These notes are meant to serve as an introduction but is up to you to develop and acquire the skills and this requires practice. I discuss a number of topics under separate headings.

British Council Library

The British Council Library is now located in the Student Dom on Moniuszki Street is a valuable source of information in English, having many reference works, language tapes, videos, newspapers, New Scientist etc as well as a good collection of English Literature (both classical and modern). Anyone is free to enter without payment. If you wish to borrow materials you pay an annual fee of $10z\ l$. A zerox machine is also available.

English Dictionaries

For American English the standard dictionary is *Websters Dictionary* in various forms while for Anglo-English the *Oxford Dictionary* is the clear authority. Both dictionaries are available on compact disk. English journals will expect Anglo-English while American journals expect American English to be used. The unabridged Oxford Dictionary is a remarkable work of scholarship and well worth consulting. As it involves over 20 volumes it is probably best used in the compact disk version. There is a print version in the British Council Library. The New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998) is an excellent volume with many examples of English Usuage (e.g. When should you use *all together* rather than *altogether*? In Toruń it costs about zł110. It is also available in the Physics Library. Read the Preface for a refreshing view of English English.

For a rich source of dictionaries, thesauarus, acronyms, synonyms, homophones, antonyms, multilingual dictionaries etc. etc. try

http://www.yourdictionary.com/

Merrian-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus is available on-line at http://www.m-w.com/

English Usage

My favourite reference for coping with the complexities of English usage is *Fowler's Guide to Modern English Usage* which is periodically revised from Fowler's original of 1920. Fowler emphasises flexibility in English usage and has a delightful sense of humour. This is the key book for solving literary questions.

Encyclopaedias

These can often be useful in starting enquiries. They are probably not as useful as in earlier times but the Britannica Encyclopaedia can make interesting browsing. This is available as a multimedia CD. It can also be accessed at http://brittanica.com/

Abstracts

Numerous abstracting journals exist. Among the ones of interest to physical scientists are *Physics Abstracts, Mathematical Reviews, Chemical Abstracts, Current Contents*. Most of these also exist on compact disk. Thus in the Mathematics Instytut there is *Silver Platter* which contains on compact disk all of Mathematical Reviews from 1975 to the present. This is a really excellent source of searchable information on mathematical physics as well as mathematics generally. You may search authors, keywords, subjects etc. Ask the Librarian to show you. Physics Abstracts and Chemical Abstracts are key reference sources. The printed versions are now almost unmanageable and the compact disk versions are preferable. Current Contents gives a listing of the titles of the papers published in many journals. This can be particularly useful in seeing what is being published in journals not received by the library.

Science Citation Index

This appears in a printed form but the compact disk form is more manageable and is searchable. It is particularly useful in seeing who is citing your work and gives a unique method of following through the development of a subject.

Netscape

Netscape is rapidly becoming an indispensable source of information, and regrettably much junk. Several servers contain very useful data bases of articles prior to publication. Probably the most useful to physicists are those from Los Alamos and SLAC. In Europe you may access the Los Alamos database via Italy at the WEB address: http://babbage.sissa.it/ or http://xxx.uni-augsburg.de/ Once you get to the database things are self-explanatory. Separate data links exist for a wide range of physics, mathematics, non-linear sciences and computer languages. You may download articles as source files or printable postscript files. There are very useful searching capabilities.

The SLAC database is at: http://www-spires.slac.stanford.edu/find/hep/ and while primarily directed at high energy physics contains a lot of useful searchable information on topics in astrophysics and atomic physics.

If you are interested in quotations try

http://www.bartleby.com/99/

Search Engines

A number of search engines exist for searching the WEB and can be extremely useful. Unfortunately the large amount of junk on the WEB can make searching difficult. Success is likely to come if you make a careful choice of keywords and enclose your search words in double quotes. My favourite is http://www.google.com/

There are a host of other search engines such as Hotbot, Yahoo, Excite, AltaVista etc. The search engines can locate many types of information

To be Continued!