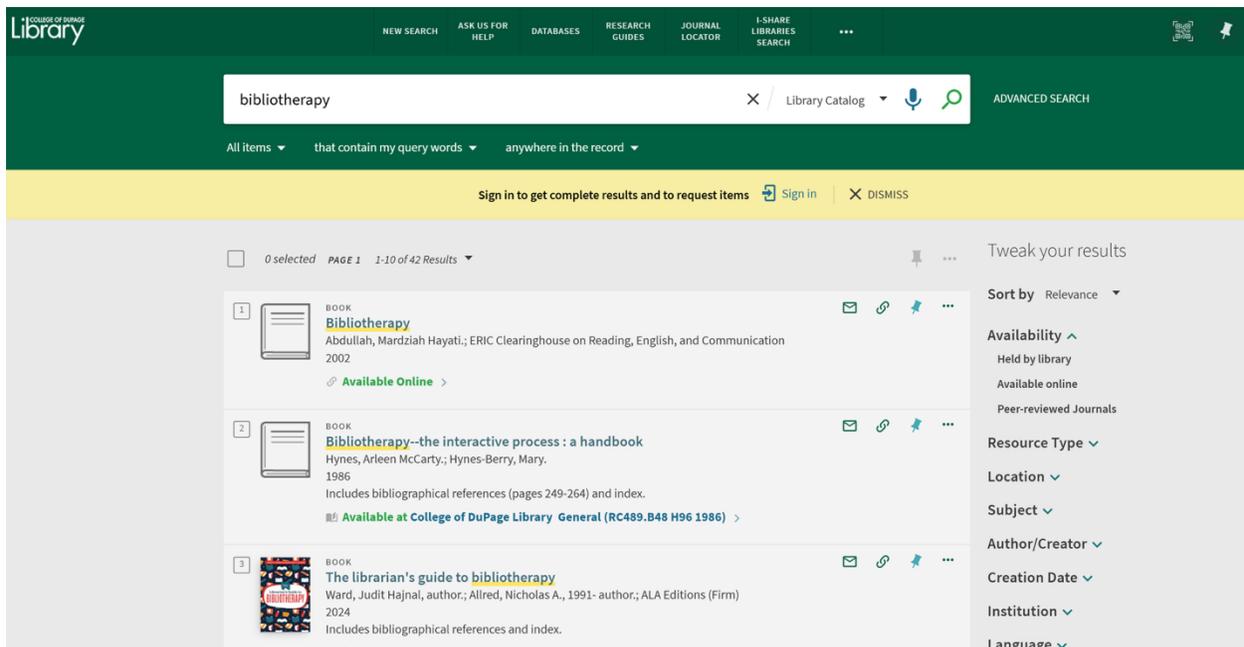


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The online public access catalog has come a long way from being “written directly on the wall of the library,” as in the “first known recorded catalog” (Fons, 2016, p. 15). While those early catalogs were the first signs of the library catalog being for the readers, and not just for the librarians to manage their own understanding of the collection, they were hard to update and difficult to search. The OPAC of today is built for readers far beyond the walls of the library to access its collection in a variety of ways.

The College of DuPage Library where I work uses an OPAC called Primo, from the company Ex Libris, which connects to the Alma software that we use as an internal library management system. A single search bar at the top creates a one-stop shop for the reader to begin finding what they need, with the default searches set to “All items, that contain my query words, anywhere in the record” within the Library Catalog. Below is a screenshot of the results for a simple search.



But this is only where the search process begins. Here we would be relying on relevance rankings (most likely a preference for the search phrase appearing in the title), but by using the various drop-downs and filters we can narrow the results. We could search explicitly for title, or expand the search to other i-Share libraries in the consortium, or use the filters on the right side to only find works that are peer-reviewed, or on a specific subject. Here is a screenshot of the filters available to fine-tune the results.

## Tweak your results

**Sort by** Relevance ▼

**Availability** ^

Held by library

Available online

Peer-reviewed Journals

**Resource Type** ▼

**Location** ▼

**Subject** ▼

**Author/Creator** ▼

**Creation Date** ▼

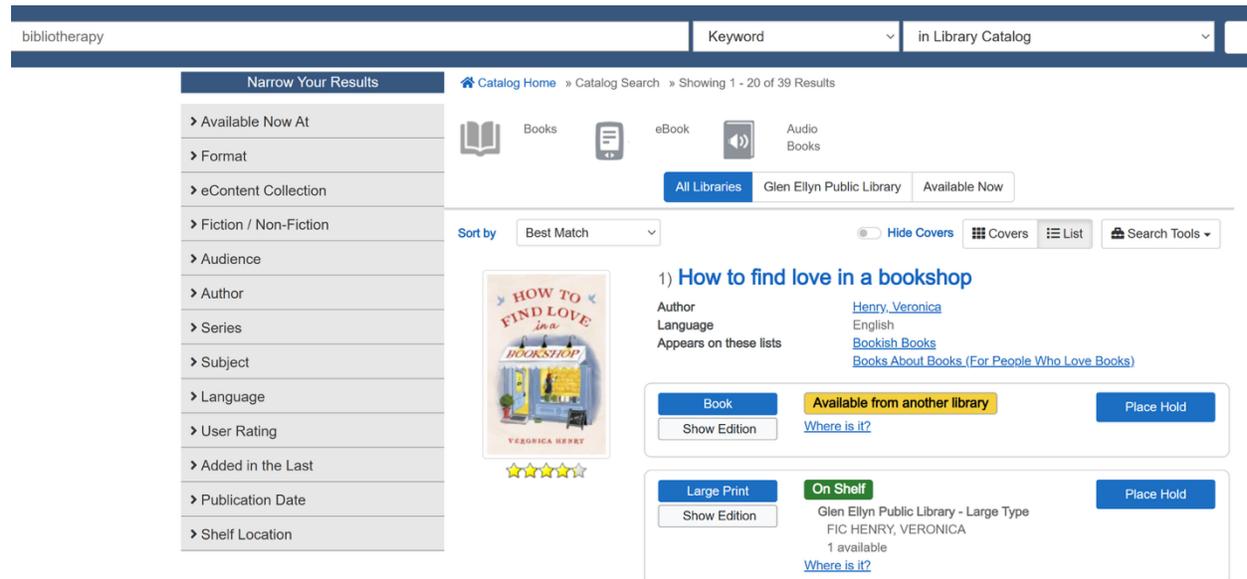
**Institution** ▼

**Language** ▼

Functionally the OPAC is drawing on the database of materials behind the software interface. As Coyle (2016) writes, “A database management system is able to perform what is called ‘random access,’ which is the ability to go seemingly directly to the entry or entries that match the query.” This way the third title in a search for “bibliotherapy” can be “The librarian’s guide to bibliotherapy,” regardless of alphabetization making that a much harder process with a traditional title search. Refining searches, reorganizing results, and filtering by various factors can greatly improve the experience of interacting with the OPAC as a user. While Fons (2016) writes about the risk that digital systems

can place the convenience of the librarian over the benefit to the reader, I would argue that a widely accessible and responsive catalog allows a reader far more successful interactions with the catalog than older and more librarian-reliant technologies.

That being said, the OPAC used by the COD Library lacks some functionality that I prefer. For example, here is a screenshot from the OPAC used by the Glen Ellyn Public Library.



The search's first result may seem less relevant – but what stands out to me is the difference in the offered filters. In particular, the “Fiction/Non-Fiction” and the “Audience” filter, which can quickly narrow down adult non-fiction books or juvenile fiction as needed. COD’s OPAC offers no way to distinguish these basic categories.

Ultimately, every OPAC must make choices about what to prioritize, and what audience it serves. The academic focus of COD places a “peer review” filter over genre and audience filters for the more public audience of the Glen Ellyn Public Library. But depending on the design of the underlying database, OPACs could potentially offer even more flexibility and customization for the individual user interacting with that data through their interface. I would love to see more variety in filters and more interactivity for the results offered in the future, at all libraries.

## Works Cited

Coyle, K. (2016, January 4). *The Evolving Catalog*. American Libraries Magazine. <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/01/04/cataloging-evolves/Links-to-an-external-site>.

Fons, T. (2016). Chapter 4. The Tradition of Library Catalogs. *Library Technology Reports*, 52(5), Article 5.

