Search Tips

Suggestions from the Library of Congress "Help" pages

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/help/search_help.html, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/help/#tips

How to Format Search Terms
- Common words such as **and**, **not**, and **the** are ignored by the search engine.
- Case of letters is ignored. For example, **Civil** and **civil** are treated the same.
- Diacritic characters (accent marks, in non-English text) and other special characters produce inaccurate results, so plain (unaccented) letters should be substituted for letters with diacritics.

Search for a Phrase
- Try putting quotation marks around an exact phrase you are searching.
- When searching for a phrase, enter the words in the order they are most likely to occur.
- The order of search words does not affect the scope of the search results, but it will affect the order of their display.

Too Many or Too Few Results?
- Try more specific or broader terms.
- Bibliographic records contain links to related Subjects and Authors/Creators: Click on the terms under those headings.
- Try using wildcards (a word with an asterisk) to enable the search to include variations on a word (E.g., child* retrieves child, children, childlike)

Modern Usage vs. Historical Usage
Because language changes, be sure to use search terms used at the time the collection materials were created, even if those terms are now obsolete.
For example, the following historical terms will produce more results than their modern-day counterparts:

Modern Usage	Historical Usage
gas, service station	filling station
African American	Afro American, Negro
voting rights	suffrage

Use the names of towns, landmarks, bridges, buildings, and other geographic features that were current when the materials you are searching were created. For example, keep in mind that places in West Virginia were in Virginia until 1863.

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Suggestions from *Primary Source Teaching the Web 2.0 Way, K-12*

by Mary J. Johnson *(2009, pp. 63-64)*

- **Abbreviations--***Wm.* for *William, ry* for *railway, Bros.* for *Brothers, Merc.* for *Merchants*
- **Specific words, not general themes**—*railroads, horses, wagons, Union Pacific, Ford* (rather than *transportation*)
- **Historical terms**—*European War* or *European Struggle* (rather than *World War I*)
- **Terms unacceptable today**—*colored* for *African Americans, savages* for *Native Americans, Huns* for *Germans*
- **Names and titles**—Husbands' first names for married women (*Mrs. J.J. Brown* rather than *Molly Brown, or Margaret Brown),* abbreviations for men's names and titles (*Wm.* for *William, Geo.* for *George, Thos.* for *Thomas, Chas.* for *Charles, Robt.* for *Robert,Gen.* for *General)*

Additional Searching Tips

Use correct spelling and try alternate spellings: colour, theatre, tipi, practise

Try variations of terms

- Names— *Abraham Lincoln, President Lincoln, Lincoln, A.*
- Dates—*Apr. 15,   1850-1865,   April 15, 1865*
- Places--*Salem, Illinois,   Springfield, Ill.,   Appomattox Court House*
- Events-- *Lincoln assassination, Battle at Gettysburg*
- Objects—*Draft of Emancipation Proclamation, reward broadside, derringer*
- Topics--*Slavery, civil rights, abolition*

Try regional variations

- War of Secession **vs.** War of Northern Aggression
- Pop **vs**. soda **vs**. coke

Try discipline-specific terms

- **Math:** graph, circumference, geometry
- **Science:** experiment, bacteria, torque
- **ELA:** narrative, thesis, denouement
- **Social studies:** due process, jurisdiction, resolution

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