

Places to Search for Information on a Novel: Example—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Books:

Search iLink: <http://www.nicholls.edu/library>

First, click **Power Search** (link located below the search box). Then, begin your catalog search.

Suggestion:

Use the **word or phrase search**, and search for the term *Margaret Atwood* to see what books we have about her. For something on the particular book, do an **author** search for *Atwood*, combined with a **title** search for *The Handmaid's Tale*.

For a more subject oriented search, try something like this:

subject = *fiction*

AND

word or phrase = *feminism*

OR

word or phrase = *literature*

AND

word or phrase = *religion*

OR

any combination of the above terms or similar terms

NOTE: You can also search the database called *WorldCat* to see if books exist which our library does not have, and then Interlibrary Loan these books.

Articles on Literature:

Search this database first: *MLA International Bibliography*

<http://www.nicholls.edu/library/database.htm> (Databases, listed alphabetically)

Suggestions:

Leave the searches set to **default fields**, and use these search terms:

Margaret Atwood AND Handmaid's Tale

This will give you a list of all articles published on that novel. If you look carefully when you are putting in your search terms, you will see an option to check a box that will limit your results to **Full Text**. If you check this box, your results list will include only those articles that can be accessed on the computer (in html or pdf format) and then printed.

You can supplement the *MLA International Directory* with a database called *The Literature Resource Center*. When you click on the link to that database, it defaults to the author search, so you would type in *Atwood, Margaret*. Once you get a list of hits, notice that there are various tabs you can click on to get certain kinds of information. These are

- Biographies: This includes entries from *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, an excellent one-stop source on any writer and her works.
- Literary Criticism, Articles, and Work Overviews: Your Full-Text articles will be here.
- Bibliographies: These are articles and books that list articles and books about a writer.
- Additional Resources: This is where you will find websites listed.

Articles on a Subject:

Search this database first: *Academic Search Premier*

<http://www.nicholls.edu/library/database.htm> (Databases, listed alphabetically)

Suggestions:

Leave the searches set to **default fields**, and use these search terms:

theocracies **OR** *theocracy* **AND** *women's rights*
abortion rights **AND** *fiction*

This will give you a list of all articles published on those subjects. If you look carefully when you are putting in your search terms, you will see an option to check a box that will limit your results to **Full Text**. If you check this box, your results list will include only those articles that can be accessed on the computer (in html or pdf format) and then printed.

Other EBSCO databases that could be useful for searches having to do with issues pertinent to *The Handmaid's Tale* include these:

- *ERIC*: an education database, in case you wanted to know about teaching the novel
- *History Reference Center, International Political Science Abstracts, Military and Government Collection, World History Collection*: to get historical angles on theocracies and women
- *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection* and *PsycInfo*: the psychological angle
- *SocIndex With Full Text*: the sociological angle

To get to any of these, go to the Library page, click on Electronic Research Databases, and then click on any EBSCOHost link.

Websites:

By far, the best search engine on the World Wide Web is *Google* (www.google.com) which is located and maintained at Stanford University. Google allows for phrase searches, for combination (boolean) searches, and for domain limitations. For example, if you wanted to find sites about writing Literary Analyses which included Online Tutorials and were hosted by educational institutions, you would type in the following (including spaces and punctuation):

“literary analysis” “online tutorial” site:.edu

This search results in about 70 hits (of the millions of sites on the web), and one of those hits is called *Media and Media Literacy*. Its site description states "This online tutorial takes students through ... Literary Analysis ... to help students analyze a passage" This indicates that this site may have exactly what you are looking for. Indeed, this site has a section called *WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE* which contains links to tutorials and examples of literary analyses (HINT: In this case, the site could be accessed as a .doc or as a .html site. In such cases, chose the .html, or web page, and you will note that Google color codes your result so you can quickly find the words "literary analysis" on the page).

But back to why the searched worked: The Google command for domain limitation is **site:**, followed by the domain you wish to limit results to, such as government agencies (**.gov**), universities (**.edu**), not-for-profit organizations (**.org**), and military sites (**.mil**). By typing **site:.edu** in the above search, you are telling the search engine to return only those sites that come from universities. The Google command for a phrase search is enclosing the phrase within quotes. So when you typed "**literary analysis**" and "**online tutorials**" (in quotes), you tell the search engine not to return sites with the word **literary** in them, unless that word is immediately followed by the word **analysis**. The space between the three commands takes the place of the boolean operator **AND**, thus allowing you to combine terms.

Of course, you can also click on Google's Advanced Search options, which would allow you to more graphically envision your search strategy. And as always with the web, keep in mind that site evaluation is important, as this web tutorial at instructs:

<http://www.webliminal.com/search/search-web12.html> .

Now try typing the following into Google:

“Margaret Atwood” “The Handmaid’s Tale” site:.edu

Other searches you could try include these:

“Margaret Atwood” “The Handmaid’s Tale” site:.org

“Margaret Atwood” “The Handmaid’s Tale” feminism site:.edu

“women’s rights” theocracies site:.gov

“women’s rights” theocracies site:.edu

“The Handmaid’s Tale” Atwood “study guide”