

Search Tips

What does OPA search?

The Online Public Access (OPA) system provides a centralized, streamlined means of searching multiple National Archives resources at once. OPA allows you to search all of the catalog records and authority files from the online catalog, records from the Electronic Records Archives (ERA), and all of the web pages from Archives.gov and the Presidential Libraries. The system illustrates a streamlined search experience for users.

[Top of Page](#)

Keyword Searching

You can enter one or more keywords in the basic search box. The system will retrieve the results as applicable from catalog records, Archives.gov, and the Presidential Libraries and present them together in OPA.

The Advanced Search gives you additional search options to narrow your search. At the top of any screen in OPA, there is an Advanced Search link directly to the right of the search box. See [Advanced Search](#) for more information.

The following is a Quick Reference for the most common types of search expressions and operators you can use to refine your search.

Search Expression	Search Results
Harry Truman	Finds results where both the term <i>Harry</i> and the term <i>Truman</i> are present. There is an implicit <i>AND</i> between the words entered. They do not need to be next to each other and they do not need to be in the order specified.
Harry AND Truman	Finds results where both the term <i>Harry</i> and the term <i>Truman</i> are present.
Harry OR Truman	Finds results containing either <i>Harry</i> or <i>Truman</i> , such as <i>Harry Harrison</i> , <i>Truman K. Gibson</i> , <i>Harry Truman</i> .
"Harry S. Truman"	Finds results containing the exact phrase <i>Harry S. Truman</i> or <i>Harry S</i>

	<i>Truman</i> (punctuation is ignored), but not <i>Harry Truman</i> .
(Harry Truman) AND Captain	Finds results where <i>Harry S. Truman</i> or <i>Harry S Truman</i> is found exactly and in that order (punctuation is ignored), and the word <i>Captain</i> is also found somewhere in the same result, such as <i>Harry Truman, 129th Field Artillery Captain</i> .
Truman NOT Harry	Finds results containing <i>Truman</i> but not including <i>Harry</i> , such as <i>Truman K. Gibson</i> , but not <i>Harry Truman</i> .
(Franklin OR (Theodore NOT Teddy)) AND Roosevelt	Finds <i>Franklin Roosevelt</i> and <i>Theodore Roosevelt</i> (as long as there is no reference to <i>Teddy Roosevelt</i>).
bal*	Finds <i>ball</i> , <i>balance</i> , <i>ballast</i> , <i>balderdash</i> , etc.

If you enter more than one word in the keyword search box, and none of those words are search operators, then your search results will include results that contain all the words (the words are automatically combined using the **AND** operator).

An operator is a reserved word with a special meaning, such as **AND**, **OR**, **NOT**. The results of the search will change depending upon when and where you use an operator.

Double quotes are used in exact phrase searching. Parentheses are used to group search terms and imply precedence. The wildcard character is used to expand a search term.

Punctuation is ignored in keyword searches, except for apostrophe–s ('s). For example if you search *Kennedy's* this will only find results containing *Kennedy's*, not *Kennedy*.

Stop words are ignored on all types of searches. These are common English–language words (e.g., a, are, by, the, etc.) that are dropped from the search in order to help improve system performance.

Diacritics are also ignored on all types of searches. Search terms containing diacritics (e.g., ä) will find references containing the word as you entered it, as well as words containing the nearest basic equivalent letter.

[Top of Page](#)

Exact Phrase Searching

Exact phrase searching limits your search to multiple terms in the precise order specified. For example, searching for "*south east asia*" will only find results that include those three words side by side and in that order.

You can specify exact phrase searches in any of the free text search boxes by enclosing the phrase in double quotes " ". For example, when you enter "*Harry Truman*" in the main keyword search box, your results will only include results where the words *Harry* and *Truman* appear together, in that exact order. In this example you will not retrieve *Harry S. Truman*.

If you enter an operator inside of the double quotes, then the operator is treated like a regular word, and the search is based on an exact phrase match. For example, if you enter the exact phrase "*Harry and Truman*", your search will include results where the three words *Harry and Truman* appear (all together and in that order).

If you enter more than one exact phrase, and you do not include an operator, then your search will include results where both exact phrases are found. For example, if you enter "*Harry Truman*" "*Jackie Kennedy*", your search will include results where both *Harry Truman* (together and in that order) and *Jackie Kennedy* (together and in that order) appear. However, if you enter "*Harry Truman*" **OR** "*Jackie Kennedy*", your search will include results that have either *Harry Truman* or *Jackie Kennedy* or both.

If you enter an exact phrase plus one or more other words, and you do not include an operator, then your search will find results that include both the other word(s) and the exact phrase. For example, if you enter *Truman* "*Jackie Kennedy*", then this is interpreted as *Truman AND Jackie Kennedy*".

[Top of Page](#)

Wildcard Searching

Search terms can include a wildcard at the end. The wildcard character is the asterisk (*). For example, to retrieve results that contain the words *child* and *children*, enter *child** in the search box.

[Top of Page](#)

Search Expansions

Online Public Access also performs expansions on search queries. Search expansion is used to expand a user's query to match additional results that may be applicable, such as matching search terms based on synonyms and fixing spelling errors.

Search expansion helps improve recall by matching similar terms and bringing back more results for the user. However, this may come at the price of reducing precision in the search. Therefore, search expansions are not turned on by default in OPA. If you are interested in expanding your search:

1. Go to the top of the search page results page, to the message " *Your search term has been expanded. Show expanded search terms* ".
2. Click on the link to *Show expanded search terms*.
3. In the Expansions box, click any of the desired checkboxes to add the expanded term to your search.
4. In the lower right corner, click on the "Search" button to update the search. Your search will be re-run with search expansions turned on.
5. At any time you can go back and turn expansions off and re-run your search.

For example, a search on photograph allows you to expand and also search on *architectural photographs, aerial photographs, photos, and pictures*.

[Top of Page](#)

Advanced Search

The Advanced Search page allows you to refine your search parameters. You can use each of the advanced search options alone (except for the Date search, which must be combined with at least one other search parameter), combine two or more from the same data source, or use them in combination with the search box at the top of the screen.

Please note that all of the advanced search options except for Data Source only apply to Archival Descriptions or Authority Records. The advanced search options are grouped together on the screen to indicate whether they apply to Archival Descriptions only or Authority Records.

[Top of Page](#)

The following options are available on the Advanced Search screen.

Data Source

This allows you to select one or more data sources in which to perform your search. The following Data Sources can be searched:

- Archival Descriptions – searches all catalog records
- Archives.gov – searches web pages on Archives.gov
- Authority Records – searches Organization and Person Name authority records
- Archival Descriptions with Digital Objects – searches catalog records with a digital copy of the records available online
- Presidential Libraries – searches web pages from the presidential libraries
- Presidential/Vice Presidential Electronic Records – searches electronic records from presidential/vice presidential materials (currently only White House Emails, White House Photo System, and White House Worker and Visitor Entry System)

Click one or more checkboxes next to a Data Source to narrow your search. To search across all Data Sources, select the first checkbox next to “Select All / Deselect All.” If multiple Data Sources are selected, the advanced search will display only the shared fields between Data Sources to search.

[Top of Page](#)

Person or Organization Name

The *Person or Organization Name* search allows you to search for specific people or organizations that are associated with archival descriptions. You can link from specific authority records to view archival descriptions associated with them.

To use this search, enter keywords in the *Person or Organization Name* search box and click the Search button. If you enter more than one search term, it will narrow your search. For example, if you enter *adams john* this will narrow the search more than if you just enter *adams*. You can also enter the acronym of an organization, such as *FBI*. However this can often obtain different results than if you search using the full name of the organization, such as *Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

When you click on a Person or Organization Name on either the groupings page or expanded results page, the full description for that Person or Organization is displayed.

The full authority record shows the total number of archival descriptions that the preferred authority name appears in. That number is broken down by Roles. These roles reflect the association the person has with the described archival materials. The possible role types are Creator, Contributor, Donor, or Subject. Click on any of the links to view the related archival description(s).

Not all person names in our archival descriptions are indexed with person authority records. If you do not find the person you are looking for by using this search, try searching for the person name in the basic search box at the top of the page.

[Top of Page](#)

Tags

The Tags search allows you to search for catalog records that have been tagged by users that contain the term searched as a tag. For example, a Tags search for the term “Truman” will return all descriptions tagged with as “Truman.”

[Top of Page](#)

Year

The *Year* search allows you to narrow your search by the dates associated with the records or authorities. The following types of dates can be searched for records: Inclusive Dates, Coverage Dates, Production Date, Copyright Date, Broadcast Date or Release Date. For Organizations users can search the Establish and Abolish Dates and for Person Names the Birth and Death Dates.

The *Dates* search for archival descriptions consists of two date boxes in which you can enter a year (YYYY). You can also click on the calendar icon next to the text box to select a year. OPA will find results that fall between the provided date range.

[Top of Page](#)

Type of Archival Materials

The *Type of Archival Materials* search allows you to limit your search to archival descriptions that contain a particular type of records, such as *Textual Records*, *Maps and Charts*, or *Moving Images*. This option is only available for the Archival Descriptions and Archival Descriptions with Digital Objects.

All types are selected and searched by default. To select a single option simply click on an option in the selection box. To select more than one option, hold down the Ctrl key while clicking on all the desired options. To return to searching all types, hold down the Ctrl key and deselect any highlighted options.

[Top of Page](#)

Level of Description

The *Level of Description* search allows you to limit your search to archival descriptions at a particular archival level such as *Record Group*, *Collection*, *Series*, *File Unit*, or *Item*.

All levels are selected and searched by default. To select a single option simply click on an option in the selection box. To select more than one option, hold down the Ctrl key while clicking on all the desired options. To return to searching all levels, hold down the Ctrl key and deselect any highlighted options.

[Top of Page](#)

Location of Archival Materials

The *Location of Archival Materials* search allows you to limit your search to archival descriptions of materials held by a specific National Archives unit such as the *Jimmy Carter Library*.

All locations are selected and searched by default. To select a single option simply click on an option in the selection box. To select more than one option, hold down the Ctrl key while clicking on all the desired options. To return to searching all locations, hold down the Ctrl key and deselect any highlighted options.

[Top of Page](#)

Title

The *Title* search allows you to enter keywords in the text box and limit your search on various title fields in archival description records. The following types of titles can be searched: Title, Other Title, Subtitle, Production Series Title, and Production Series Subtitle.

[Top of Page](#)

Geographic References

The *Geographic References* search allows you to search for archival descriptions of materials that are associated with specific geographic locations. This searches on any Geographic References that have been added to archival descriptions as subject terms.

To use this search, enter keywords in the *Geographic References* search box, scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click *Search*. For example, you can enter a search for *Belgium*.

When you click on a result on either the groupings page or expanded results page, the full archival description is displayed. Scroll down to the section for *Subjects Represented in the Archival Materials*.

If you wish to see the full authority record for the Geographic Reference, click on the hyperlinked subject term in the archival description, e.g., *Belgium (Europe) nation*. The full authority record for a Geographic Reference shows the total number of archival descriptions that the term appears in.

[Top of Page](#)

Record Group Number

The *Record Group Number* search allows you to search for archival descriptions belonging to a particular Record Group. It will search for the description of a particular Record Group, as well as any Series, File Units, and Items that fall under that Record Group.

To use this search, enter a Record Group Number in the search box (e.g., 330), scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click *Search*.

[Top of Page](#)

Collection Identifier

The *Collection Identifier* search allows you to search for archival descriptions belonging to a particular Collection. It will search for the description of a particular Collection, as well as any Series, File Units, and Items that fall under that Collection.

To use this search, enter a Collection Identifier in the search box (e.g., *JC-1033*), scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click *Search*.

[Top of Page](#)

Creator

The *Creator* search allows you to search for archival descriptions of records that are associated with a specific Creating Organization or Creating Individual (person).

To use this search, enter keywords in the *Creator* search box, scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click *Search*. For example, enter a search for *Voice of America*.

When you click on a result on either the groupings page or expanded results page, the full archival description is displayed. The *Creator(s)* field is displayed near the top of the full description.

If you wish to see the full authority record for the Organization Name or Person Name who created the records, click on the hyperlinked name after the *Creator(s)* label, e.g., *U.S. Information Agency. Voice of America. (08/01/1953 — 04/01/1978)*.

[Top of Page](#)

Description Identifier

The *Description Identifier* search allows you to narrow your search based on some of the most common identifiers used by the National Archives to identify archival descriptions. These identifiers include:

- Record Group Number
- Collection Identifier
- National Archives Identifier
- Local Identifier
- Variant Control Number, such as a NAIL Control Number, Agency-Assigned Identifier, or HMS Entry Number
- Former Record Group Number
- Former Collection Identifier

Enter the appropriate number/identifier such as *194229* or "*NWCTB-75-PI163E98*" and click *Search* at the bottom of the screen.

[Top of Page](#)

Relevancy Ranking

Relevancy ranking refers to how search results are ranked or ordered in the result set. The relevancy ranking is based on a variety of factors, including term frequency and what field the term was found in, as certain parts of a document — such as the Title field — may be more important than others.

OPA also allows us the ability to configure or modify the relevancy ranking based on our own parameters, allowing us to fine-tune the user experience.

For searches that are federated to another source (i.e. Archives.gov), OPA will present the results as they are returned from that source. OPA has no control over the relevancy ranking of federated search results.