

A Guide to ESTC, EEBO, ECCO, and Beyond

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This handout is an introductory guide to important electronic resources that help you locate primary materials, especially those published before the nineteenth century:

ESTC = English Short-Title Catalogue
EEBO = Early English Books Online
ECCO = Eighteenth-Century Collections Online

The purpose of this handout is to explain the distinctions among these three resources so that you can use them in an effective and efficient manner.

ESTC (English Short-Title Catalogue):

The ESTC is an online catalogue of printed material—books, pamphlets, periodicals, etc. (The ESTC does not contain citations of manuscripts.) For an item to appear in the ESTC, it needs to meet the following criteria:

Chronological: Prior to 1801
Geographical: Printed in the British Isles or North America
Linguistic: Written in the English language

In order for an item to appear in the ESTC, it *must* meet the chronological criterion; that is, it must have been published before 1801. As for the geographical and linguistic criteria, an item need only meet one of them. So a book written in Latin and published in England should be in the ESTC. So too should a book written in English and published in France. However, Latin books published on the Continent do not appear in the ESTC, which means that this catalogue does not fully capture the range of books sold and read in the pre-1801 period.

The ESTC contains citations only; it does not contain any digital images of books. This point is important to bear in mind. But the ESTC is the backbone for the databases discussed below that contain digital images. Any serious research project that involves printed matter before 1801 should start with the ESTC. Within the limits described above, the ESTC aspires to contain a *complete* record of what was printed, when, where, and by whom, *including all genres of printed material*. That is, the ESTC catalogues poems, pamphlets, Bibles, cookbooks, legal books, etc.

Many items listed in the ESTC are not available as digital images, but the ESTC can point one to where they can be found. The ESTC lists microfilm information for the item when available. More importantly, the ESTC lists library locations where the original books can be found, along with shelfmarks (i.e., call numbers). This important feature allows scholars to plan research trips to the major libraries that have reported their holdings to the ESTC.

One limitation of the ESTC is its cataloguing of periodicals. Periodicals appear in the ESTC, but this database was not specifically designed with the intention of covering publications of this nature. Those interested in studying periodicals should supplement their ESTC searches by consulting the relevant printed reference works devoted to pre-1800 periodicals.

Finally, the ESTC is now freely available to the public courtesy of the British Library. To access the ESTC, go to:

<http://estc.bl.uk>

The other databases discussed below are *not* free. In order to access them, you must connect to them from an institution that pays the subscription fees.

EEBO (Early English Books Online) and ECCO (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online):

Again, you cannot access EEBO or ECCO unless you are connected via a subscription-paying institution. Though EEBO and ECCO both contain digital images, they differ in important ways, as shown by the table below:

	EEBO	ECCO
Time period?	1475-1700	1701-1800
Can images be downloaded?	Yes	Yes, but in 250 page segments
Can one search the full text of these books?	Depends on the institution	Yes
Indexed by Subject?	Yes	No
Searchable by ESTC #?	No	Yes

The most important difference between EEBO and ECCO concerns the time periods they cover. EEBO contains material up through 1700; ECCO, using a literal definition of the eighteenth century, contains material from 1701 through 1800. Except for particularly unusual cases, the two databases do not overlap in their contents.

One can download pdf files from both EEBO and ECCO, though ECCO restricts downloading to no more than 250 pages at once. (Using a commercial version of Adobe Acrobat, or something similar, you can combine separate pdf files into a single file.) The images in both EEBO and ECCO are digital scans made from microfilms. This means that if the book was never microfilmed, it is not part of EEBO or ECCO. And not all of the microfilms were scanned into the digital databases, though the vast majority have been.

One of the most significant features of these new databases is the ability to search the full text of early printed books. ECCO allows full-text searching for all of its contents. EEBO, however, has only a portion of its contents available for full-text searches. In addition, EEBO does not

allow full-text searching except for the institutions that are working to create this feature. (For a list of these institutions, go to http://www.lib.umich.edu/tcp/eebo/proj_stat/ps_partners.html)

EEBO and ECCO differ in regard to subject headings. Because the ESTC was formed from three different projects over many decades, the existence of subject headings varies. For books that are from the periods 1475-1640 (from the original *Short-Title Catalogue* created by Pollard and Redgrave) and 1641-1700 (from Donald Wing's short-title catalogue), subject headings exist. But subject headings were not initially created for the eighteenth-century records in the ESTC, and so subject headings rarely occur for the items in ECCO.

When you find a specific item in the ESTC, how do you find that item in EEBO or ECCO?

This question is important to raise, because the ESTC is the database that should be used for exhaustive searches. But once you find a particular item, you should not need to conduct another search to find the item in EEBO or ECCO. The problem is that currently there is no convenient way to move from the ESTC to EEBO or ECCO. (And again, not everything listed in the ESTC is available in either EEBO or ECCO.) The process is cumbersome, and somewhat complicated. One can only hope that it will become simpler over time.

If one is looking at an item in ESTC for the years 1475-1640 (the STC period), then one should note the STC number. For example, if one searches the ESTC for *Hamlet* printed in 1603, one finds one record, and that record has the STC number 22275. One then enters that number into the "Bibliographic Number" field in EEBO to find the digital images for this book.

If one is looking at an item in ESTC for the years 1641-1700 (the Wing period), then one should note the Wing number. For example, if one searches the ESTC for *Paradise Lost* printed in 1667, one finds two records, one with Wing number M2136 and the other with M2137. One then enters either number into the "Bibliographic Number" field in EEBO to find the digital images for those books.

If one is looking at an item in ESTC for the years 1701-1800, then one should note the ESTC number (also called ESTC citation number). Every ESTC record has a unique number that begins with a letter and is followed by up to 6 digits. The ESTC omits any leading zeros. So if the ESTC number is T001234, then the ESTC will list that as T1234. ECCO accepts this as either T001234 or T1234. To search by ESTC number in ECCO, go to the Advanced Search screen, select "ESTC number" in the drop-down menu, enter the number, and click Search.

What about items not contained in EEBO or ECCO? What about nineteenth-century books?

There exist other non-commercial projects that complement and in some cases supplement EEBO and ECCO. For the most part, these projects have focused on substantial book volumes rather than brief pamphlets.

The two projects are sponsored by Google and the Internet Archive, and both are freely available to anyone in contrast to the subscription services of EEBO and ECCO. Both Google and the Internet Archive are in the process of scanning the entire collection of printed material from

major libraries. For those items currently in the public domain (which includes all pre-1900 material), both projects allow anyone to conduct full-text searches within the books and download complete pdf files of these books. Google is working with a group of libraries that includes Harvard, Oxford's Bodleian Library, the New York Public Library, the University of Michigan, and others. The Internet Archive's collection is based on various sources, including Microsoft's now defunct project that scanned books from the British Library, the University of Toronto, and the University of California system. Together, these freely available resources offer some exciting opportunities for research.

Both projects, however, are currently awkward to use, and locating an item in either database (even when you know it appears there) is not especially easy. As far as I can tell, neither database is integrated with the ESTC. For Google, I recommend that you start with its advanced search page:

http://books.google.com/advanced_book_search

To access the collections of the Internet Archive, go to:

<http://www.archive.org/advancedsearch.php>

My experience so far with both databases is that Google has scanned many more books than the Internet Archive, but its speed in doing so has come at the cost of quality. You will often find blurry images in Google or the odd shots of the scanner's thumb. (However, upon revisiting the book some time later, I have found that Google has fixed these errors.) In contrast, Microsoft's files on the Internet Archive look great, partly because they are in color, whereas Google's are almost always in black and white. Because of Microsoft's greater attention to the quality of their image files, they are much larger than those of Google. But the increase in size comes with another benefit: the full-text contents of Microsoft's files are embedded in the pdf file that you download. This means that you can conduct a full-text search of Microsoft's files on your computer using Adobe Acrobat Reader. With Google, you can conduct a full-text search only via the Internet.

Benjamin Pauley has created a very helpful tool for locating eighteenth-century items in Google Books. His admirable goal is to create a public domain version of ECCO. His [Eighteenth-Century Book Tracker](#) website will prove useful even for those who have access to ECCO. He lists items by author, title, year, and ESTC number. This website is very much a work in progress, but well worth a look and well worth contributing to.

Further reading:

Melton, Robert W. "The Baby Figure of the Giant Mass': Pollard & Redgrave's and Wing's Short-Title Catalogues." *Distinguished Classics of Reference Publishing*. Ed. James Rettig. Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx, 1992. 242-58. Melton describes the STC and Wing catalogues that paved the way for the ESTC.

- Gadd, Ian. "The Use and Misuse of *Early English Books Online*." *Literature Compass* 6 (2009): 1-13 ([Wiley Interscience](#)). Gadd offers a good mini-history of the progress from the original STC through EEBO and ECCO, and explains why neither EEBO nor any other electronic reproduction replaces the original printed book.
- Tabor, Stephen. "ESTC and the Bibliographical Community." *The Library*, 7th ser., 8 (2007): 367-86 ([Project Muse](#)).
- Darnton, Robert. "Google & the Future of Books." *New York Review of Books*, 12 February 2009, 9-11 ([New York Review Online](#)).