

HOW TO SEARCH ONLINE COLLECTIONS

(transcript to the [resource video](#))

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Hello and welcome to our video on how to search online museum collections.

There are of course thousands of museums across the globe with online collections. This video aims to give you a general idea based on museums that educators asked for in this poll in the Art History Teaching Resources Facebook group.

First of all, where can we find collections searches?

Many museum main landing or home pages have a search button indicated with a magnifying glass. This is your general search. If the museum has an online collections database, and it is not indicated on the home page, it can commonly be found under a tab called Art, Collections, Research, or Experience depending on the type of museum.

The difference is that if you search in the general search, and here I am searching for ancient jewelry, you will not only get results of the artworks in the collection, but also things related to this artwork such as gallery information, blogs, archival information, or related exhibitions.

So if your goal is to find the artwork or object itself, search in the **collections search** not in the general search.

In the collections search, you can find some suggestions; either some popular searches, themes, or the museums highlights. In the Art Institute of Chicago collections search, when we search for "vase", we will get the objects with images and descriptions right away.

But if I needed to find something more specific than a vase, what keywords should I use?

Let's look into the British Museum. Again you can see the magnifying glass general search, but this time we will go directly to the collections search now that we know where it is located.

The British Museum has a "Collection" and a "Collection Online" page, which are basically the same. They both provide you with some highlights and themes, which can be very helpful learning what kinds of terms or keywords are used for certain cultural areas or time periods. These will help you with getting your desired results, especially if you have no contextual information to start with.

In the search bar, we can enter a word, person, or place name. I am typing in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur and the search is suggestion me different options. If you type "Ur" and hit search you will get all the results that include this word, so I see that Ur is specified as a city, but I am also noticing that if I search for the "Third Dynasty of Ur" as a time period, I may get more results. So it is really up to you and what you are looking for. There are about 27,000 results if we don't filter them in any way, but maybe I am doing an object analysis assignment and I need images, so I can select to search for objects with images here.

One important note about keywords is that every museum uses different keywords, categories, and departmental terms. So don't give up easily! If you search for a word and can't find the results you are looking for, you may want to try a couple more related keywords.

Here in the Louvre collection search I am entering Anatolia, which gives me 16 results, whereas Asia Minor, which more or less is the same geographical area during a different time period gives me 34 results. If you are not familiar with the specific chronological or archaeological term, you can always search by country, culture, or a more general term. Be aware that all keywords may come up with different results.

To find more targeted or specific results you may want to narrow your search. Try using more specific keywords. The search "mask" will bring up over 3000 results in the Met collection search, whereas "animal mask" results in around 300 objects. You can further filter your searches by material and geographic location, or you can search for a specific phrase in the description by putting quotation marks around your keywords.

There may be several different ways to get to the collections search. On the Getty website, you can use the general search, which may not result in the objects you are looking for since archival information also comes up. To be able to use filters you need to get to the collections search, which you can do through the exploring art page. This gives you the options to search the archives and collections separately.

Or you can go to the resources tab and find the collections search there. Both of these options take you to the main collections page, where you can search objects using different filters. Here I am searching for Greek vases that come from the geographical location: Italy.

Let's say you want to be even more specific: if you don't remember the exact term your instructor used in the class, you can look it up on Google or another search engine, figure out the keyword and then search for it in the museum collections search. Another tip if you don't know which museums have the object you are looking for is to search for the keyword by adding the word "museum" after it so that your results show objects in online museum collections.

Let's go to the one this lekythos in the Penn Museum. Here we have all the "tombstone" information about this object.

One of the helpful tools in the Penn Museum collection is the interactive map, which enables us to see what kinds of objects and materials come from different geographical areas. Some of the locations in the map are as specific as an archaeological site. By exploring the map you can find terms that are used for objects coming from that area or culture and search those further in the collection, such as "rhyton."

Many of the museum search results are linked to each other to provide us with more information. Let's say a museum's #Saturday social media post inspired me to search for more artworks on cats. The object page itself provides us with the tombstone information, and even tells us if this is on view or not. The medium describes the materials and techniques used so you can search specifically for those keywords. The reference or accession number is the

unique identifier assigned to this artwork, so if you want to come back to this artwork without searching through results, note this number down and search for that in the collections search next time. Usually at the bottom of the object page you can find related artworks or keywords that this artwork is tagged with that connects with other artworks. So you can see the artworks by the same artist within the same museum, for example.

Some museums provide videos or 3D images and reconstructions with the object for more visual information. Some museums have their gallery audioguides and more information on the gallery itself. The gallery information is especially helpful if you want to see the object in person or if you would like to know which objects are exhibited together.

Another important information on object pages is the “provenance.” Simply put provenance means the history of an object and how it got to the museum. Here you can see if an object was excavated, bought, or donated. Note that not all museums or museum object pages provide this information.

Some museums also provide some references or a bibliography, so that you can read more about the objects or the themes connected to it.

Note that some of these terms on the object pages are clickable. You can find more targeted results using these terms in your search.

One of the helpful resources the Met provides is the Timeline of Art History, which gives you some basic background information about the time period or culture and suggests other keywords for you to explore.

Not all but some museums have more specific guidelines for searching their collections. Make sure to see what other tips and suggestions they have for finding the best results.

Thanks for watching and good luck in your search!

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