

péter's picks & pans



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My picks include a long-time fave, the Xrefer.com site, which has an outstanding collection of nearly 50 ready-reference sources in an integrated, not merely aggregated, fashion. The other pick is the Yahoo! Research Documents Collection, a version of the excellent Northern Light Special Collection at an incredibly good subscription rate. The pan is the semi-defunct Prestige Factor database that features a specious prestige factor for scholarly and professional journals that is best ignored.



thepicks

XREFER

As I surveyed past "Picks and Pans" columns, I was surprised to realize I had not yet written about the free Xrefer service [www.xrefer.com] that I have been using day in and day out for about a year. Big mistake because—according to my informal surveys during conference workshops—surprisingly few librarians know of this U.K. gem of ready reference. There is also a fee-based library version, xreferplus, but it is the free version—offering nearly 50, almost exclusively British, encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauri, and quotation sources—that impresses me mightily.

This is not a collection of some outdated versions of second-rate ready-reference sources, but a suite of many of the best encyclopedias, dictionaries, and directories from Macmillan, Penguin, and especially Oxford University Press. The latter accounts for nearly half the collection. This will particularly warm the hearts of those who cannot afford the subscription fee to the larger and eminently searchable, but pricey, Oxford Reference Online service.

Good researchers always corroborate their data, and Xrefer is not only a superb tool to get information from a variety of mostly top-notch sources in a single search, but also for corroborating and complementing data. A search for Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, for example, immediately alerts you that her birth year is questionable, as two of the sources in the short result list show it to be 1907, and two others as 1910. As for the complementary nature of the sources check out my case study [www2.hawaii.edu/~jacso/g.htm#63] illustrating how a dozen Xrefer sources paint a far more complete picture about the life and works of Arthur "Darkness at Noon" Koestler than many respected but disparate ready-reference sources. The alternative is to search successively, and receive fewer results, in free and fee-based sources such as the full Britannica, Grolier, Encarta, and Columbia encyclopedias.

In addition, the items of the different Xrefer sources are hyperlinked. No, not by the routine method of matching keywords, but through human-assigned index terms for subjects, locations, and personal names listed in the indexes of the books used in the Xrefer collection. For example, the 18 entries for Victor

Xrefer

Yahoo! Research
Documents Collection

Prestige Factor

(originally Viktor) Vasarely (originally Vászárhelyi), lead you to articles in the various encyclopedias and dictionaries about optical art, kinetic art, folk art, as well as to his contemporaries, mentors, followers, and imitators.

Yes, it would be beautiful to have illustrations, such as some of the famous works of art by Kahlo, Vasarely, and others, but incorporating these into Xrefer would be very expensive and getting permission an extremely arduous task. Perhaps links to stable Web sites would be a good compromise. The software also offers another feature: a fuzzy searching option that is especially useful considering the inconsistency among romanized versions of Asian, Arab, and Slavic names used by the different sources. The form ~mujahideen, with the tilde indicating fuzzy search, brings up 10 relevant entries that spell the word as mujahidin and/or mujahedin. You will find inconsistencies even among Oxford University Press publications, but Xrefer handles those with aplomb. True, some fuzzy searches also include irrelevant items, but that's negligible in light of what you get.



YAHOO! RESEARCH DOCUMENTS COLLECTION

Yahoo! has been on a downhill slide for some time. Its once superior directory, compiled by competent individuals, has been polluted—diluted by entries that no thinking human being would have added (look at the encyclopedia category as an example). Two new products/services, however, have made me use Yahoo! again daily. One of them, the Research Documents Collection [http://premium.search.yahoo.com] is my current pick. It is the equivalent of Northern Light's outstanding Special Collection but with an irresistibly good subscription option. The Research Documents Collection joined Yahoo! almost simultaneously with the purchase of Northern Light by divine, inc.

By my calculation there were a little over 31 million full-text articles (as of early March 2002) from nearly

xrefer [Help](#)

Search results 1 to 10 of 18 for search term vasarely

[next >](#)

Vasarely Victor 1908 1997
 Vasarely Victor: 1908 1997 Hungarian-born painter. After training in Budapest, he moved to Paris...
The Macmillan Encyclopedia 2001

Vasarély Victor de 1908 1997
 Vasarely Victor de: 1908 1997 Hungarian painter. He was tutored by Moholy-Nagy, and...
The Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Art and Artists

Vasarely Viktor 1908 1997
 Vasarely Viktor: 1908 1997 Hungarian-born French painter. He settled in Paris in 1930 after...
The Oxford English Reference Dictionary

Vasarely Viktor 1908 1997
 Vasarely Viktor: 1908 1997 Hungarian-born French painter. He settled in Paris in 1930 after...
Oxford Paperback Encyclopedia

Vasarely Victor 1908
 Vasarely Victor: 1908 Hungarian-born painter, active in France, the main originator and one of the leading...
The Oxford Dictionary of Art

Vasarély Victor 1908 1997
 Vasarely Victor: 1908 1997 Hungarian-born French painter, sculptor, and graphic artist and the main...
Who's Who in the Twentieth Century: Oxford University Press

Op art
 ...Violent colour contrasts and subtly distorted patterns are commonly used. Exponents include Victor Vasarely and Bridget Riley.

Short result list from Xrefer.

xrefer [Help](#)

> your search results

xreferences

[kinetic art](#)
Oxford Paperback Encyclopedia

[kinetic art](#)
The Macmillan Encyclopedia 2001

[folk art](#)
The Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms

[kinetic art](#)
The Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms

[Kinetic art](#)
The Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Art and Artists

[view all references](#) (11)

adjacent entries

[Varley, Frederick](#)

[Varley, John \(1778 - 1842\)](#)

[varnish](#)

Vasarely, Victor (1908)

Vasarely, Victor (1908)
 Hungarian-born painter, active in France, the main originator and one of the leading practitioners of Op art

He settled in Paris in 1930, and for the next decade he worked mainly as a commercial artist, particularly on the designing of posters, showing a keen interest in visual tricks such as [trompe-l'œil](#) and space illusions. From 1943 he turned to painting and c. 1947 he adopted the method of geometrical abstraction for which he is best known.

From c. 1955 Vasarely wrote a number of manifestos, which, together with his painting, were a major influence on younger artists in this field. In his own work he explored the means and methods of creating a hallucinatory impression of movement through visual ambiguity, using for this purpose alternating positive-negative shapes interrupted in such a way as to suggest underlying secondary shapes. His fascination with the idea of movement led him to experiment with [kinetic art](#) and he also collaborated with architects in such works as his relief in aluminium for Caracas University (1954), and the French Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal, hoping to create a kind of urban [folk art](#).

Vasarely has lived mainly in the south of France since 1961 and there are two museums dedicated to him in Provence--the Fondation Vasarely at Aix-en-Provence, which he designed himself, and the Château et Musée Vasarely at Gordes. There is also a Vasarely museum at Pécs, his home town in Hungary. Vasarely's son, **Jean-Pierre** (1934), who works under the name Yvaral, is also an Op and Kinetic artist.

Oxford Dictionary of Art, © Oxford University Press 1997

Full entry and partial list of its Xrefs (cross references).

7,100 sources (journals, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets) in the Research Documents collection. You will find top-ranking scholarly and professional journals from every discipline (even if they are often called magazines by Yahoo!), very popular general-interest magazines and newspapers, as well as renowned news wire services. The price of full-text Northern Light Special Collection documents has been very reasonable, ranging from \$1 to \$4, even for very long articles of 30-40 pages, and it is incredibly inexpensive at Yahoo! if you have a subscription. Yahoo! had problems activating the 50-document subscription, but after intense pressure admitted the problem and promised to fix it.

Don't cringe, this is not a subscription that requires much thinking. It is \$4.95 per month for up to 50 qualifying documents (not pages). A single substantial article is worth that \$4.95, and you still can order 49 other articles. If you don't have the subscription, you can still pay for an individual document.

What is a qualifying document? Any article from the 4,700 journals that authorize Northern Light/Yahoo! to deliver the full digital text to the customer. These journals include the very best; it is not like the selections of some book clubs where you can often choose only between the bad, the worse, and the worst. If you need proof, make any search and examine the retrieved source titles.

My test searches about digital libraries, impact factor, and copyright infringement produced dozens of highly relevant articles, with 95% of them from highly respected journals. The journals for the different topical searches, included *ONLINE*, *Searcher*, *Information Today*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Documentation*, *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, *Information Management Journal*, various *Seybold Reports*, and a number of prominent law reviews and journals like *Yale Law Journal*, *Stanford Law Review*, *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology*, and *William & Mary Law Review*. There were also some journals, which are either known to be available in HTML and/or PDF format (like articles from the *British Medical Jour-*

The screenshot shows a Yahoo! search results page. At the top, the Yahoo! logo is on the left, and the text 'Welcome, peterjaco!' is on the right. Below the logo is a search bar containing the text 'Impact factor'. To the right of the search bar are links for 'Search' and 'Advanced Search Help'. Below the search bar, there are links for 'Categories', 'Web Sites', 'Web Pages', 'News', and 'Research Documents'. The main content area is titled 'Research Documents' and shows a list of five search results. Each result includes a numbered title, a date, and a brief description of the article's content. The results are: 1. 'Why the impact factor of journals should not be used for evaluating research...' (02/15/1997), 2. 'Financial Management's Success as an Academic Journal...' (10/01/1999), 3. 'SPARC partner Organic Letters surpasses competitor...' (11/01/2001), 4. 'In which journal will pediatricians find the best evidence for clinical practice...' (08/01/2000), and 5. 'Comparex Launches Corporate BI Education Programme...' (02/11/2002).

A sample result list from Yahoo! Research Documents Collection.

nal), or are available in HTML format (like some of the articles from *ONLINE*, *Information Today*, and *Computers in Libraries*) at the respective publisher's sites.

Many of the articles are long or very long, and include tables. Of course in

plain-text format, the documents are not as appealing as in page image format, but you get full-text information from most of the commercial and expensive information services in ASCII format at a far higher price. Some journals are known to contain little or

The screenshot shows a Yahoo! 'Document Summary' page. At the top, the Yahoo! logo is on the left, and the text 'Northern Light From divine' is on the right. Below the logo is a search bar containing the text 'Impact factor'. To the right of the search bar are links for 'Search' and 'Advanced Search Help'. Below the search bar, there are links for 'Categories', 'Web Sites', 'Web Pages', 'News', and 'Research Documents'. The main content area is titled 'Document Summary' and shows details for a specific document. The details include: Title: 'Financial Management's Success as an Academic Journal', Source: 'Financial Management', Date: 'Aut/1999', Price: '\$2.95 (subscription document)', Document Size: 'Long (8 to 25 pages), with 26 Table(s)', Document ID: 'EL20000405090015025', Subject(s): 'Financial management-Literature', Citation Information: '(ISSN: 0046-3892), Vol. 28 No. 3 Pg. 76', Author(s): 'Kenneth A. Borokhovich, Robert J. Bricker, Betty J. Simkins', and Document Type: 'Article'. On the right side of the page, there is a 'Purchase this Document' section with two options: 'Get A Subscription' (Get 50 qualifying documents per month for \$4.95) and 'Buy This Document' (Get this article for \$2.95).

Informative abstracts and bibliographic citations are free, the full text articles cost a penny per page or less.

no illustrations, such as the excellent *Library Trends* and all of the law reviews, so the ASCII text format is not always a real issue. The information about the length of the article is not always exact, as it probably is calculated from the number of words in the bibliographic record, and the number of tables is very often wrong—but you still get a lot of bang for the buck.

The software is familiar for Northern Light users; there are just very few minor differences. The PowerSearch mode is excellent, allowing you to search for words or phrases in the title (it would be lovely to have an option for abstracts, too) or anywhere in the documents. You may limit the search to specific journals, major subject categories, document types, and time period. Is this Nirvana? I am tempted to say yes, but there is an even better service, XanEdu, a subsidiary of ProQuest, that provides documents in page-image format from thousands of high-quality journals at a quarterly subscription rate of \$29.95. That's Xanadu to me, and I will tell more about it in the next column.



thepan

PRESTIGE FACTOR DATABASE

[Editor's note: A funny thing happened to Péter on his way to this review of Prestige Factor. Its Web site suddenly displayed only the stark sentence, "The services provided at this Web site are no longer available." An e-mail to customers, dated March 22, 2002, elaborated somewhat. "We regret to inform you that prestigefactor.com has gone out of business. Unfortunately, in the U.S./Canada, anybody can be sued without merit. Very costly litigation matters (millions of dollars) to defend ourselves from our competitor are the reasons for this very sad decision." The note goes on to say that the company will provide the product, either as a download or on CD-ROM. The lawsuit referenced is one apparently filed by ISI. It is normally the policy of ONLINE

Please click here if you wish to know how the 1,468 journals are arranged engine is for **PERSONAL USE ONLY** according to the Terms of Use

Journal	Prestige Factor	Ranking Prestige Factor	Ranking Impact Factor-like*	Percentile
Annual-Rev-Psychol	0.01	1467	6	0.14

The Annual Review of Psychology would go mental seeing its absolutely inferior score and ranking.

not to review products that no longer exist. In this case, however, because the product lives on even though its producer has gone out of business, we are running Péter's review.]

Prestige Factor, which was produced by a Canadian company of the same name, derives its data from the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) database of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). ISI calculates JCR impact factor by dividing the number of citations received by a journal in the previous 2 years (1999 and 1998 in the JCR 2000 edition published in mid-2001) by the number of "citable items" (reviews of published literature on a subject, original articles, and short research papers, called notes) in the journal for the same 2 years. This is a somewhat flawed algorithm, aggravated by the inconsistency of ISI staff members in assigning document types to publications, but it is still the most comprehensive, objective, and reproducible alternative for measuring the scholarly impact, prestige, and recognition of journals.

Prestige Factor used a subset of the journals covered by the Science and the Social Science editions of JCR 2000; changed the journal abbreviations; took the 2000, 1999, and 1998 data for citations received and items published in about 80% of JCR journals; calculated the impact factor for 1998-2000 instead of 1998-1999 as JCR does; restricted the items published data in the denominator by not counting reviews (as identified by ISI); and came up with the Prestige Factor. The Prestige Factor, along with a Review Index (RI) and Publishing Index (PI), is "explained" in mostly pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo that leaves the various algorithms undisclosed.

Prestige Factor claims to have determined the real value of academic journals, and in doing so, it mistakes prestige for novelty and does really odd things. It shuffles a few journals in most subject categories by adding/removing them from/to a different JCR category with the help of "subject experts," whose identity the company was not willing to disclose to me. So, for example, *Patient Education & Counseling* not only made it to the Information & Library Sciences category, but also managed to score 28.86 points, ranking it as the 12th most prestigious journal among 52 journals of our profession. *Landscape & Urban Planning* did almost as well among the ILS journals, far ahead of such truly respected library and information science journals as *Library and Information Science Research*, *Library Trends*, *Library Quarterly*, *Information Processing & Management*, or *ONLINE*.

The real absurdity comes to the surface when you look at the very bottom of the Prestige Factor database rank list. The *Annual Review of Psychology*—in a tie—is the least prestigious social science journal with a PF score of 0.001. *Evolutionary Anthropology*, which is head and shoulders the leader among the 51 anthropology journals in JCR 2000, can be happy to be downgraded by PF only to rank #17 among the 48 anthropology journals in PF. Enough said, but go to my site [www2.hawaii.edu/~jacso/extra] to learn a little more about this database.

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Comments? E-mail letters to the editor to marydee@xmission.com.