

Cheng Chat – De-Mystifying Library Jargon

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All professions have their own special vocabularies that are familiar to their members, but are meaningless or confusing to everyone else. This *jargon* can be found in a lot of places, from medical terminology (*STAT*) to business lingo (*beta testing*) to military slang (*AWOL*). There's even library jargon. Since one of the Library's goals is to communicate clearly with you, we thought we'd take a moment to translate our most used jargon into plain English!

Call Number:

Call number is a combination of letters and numbers that uniquely identify a specific item in the library. We use the Library of Congress system which is different from the more familiar numbers-only Dewey Decimal System. Call numbers are used to organize library materials by grouping similar books near each other, making it easier to discover related resources in one place!

Stacks:

The term *stacks* is just a fancy way of saying *bookshelves*.

Circulation:

Many materials owned by the library are considered *circulating materials*, because they can be borrowed by students and faculty. Just like blood moves in a 'loop' through our bodies, books and media *circulate* through the University and return to be used again by others.

OPAC:

This term stands for *Online Public Access Catalog*, and refers to the online catalog used to search for materials that the library owns (including books, e-books, music, videos, and periodicals). Our particular OPAC is named ChengFind, after the benefactors of our library!

Databases:

Not to be confused with the OPAC, a database is a searchable collection of resources (journal articles, e-books, streaming video, etc.). Many of the approximately 130 databases we subscribe to are subject specific, like *Historical Abstracts*, and can be used to find information for your research projects. Unlike searching Google, you'll never be asked for your credit card number!

Periodicals:

Periodicals are any type of publication that comes out *periodically*, that is, on a regular basis. For instance, newspapers are usually available daily, while some magazines are published weekly, and many journals are published monthly, quarterly, or even annually. We have access to thousands of newspapers, magazines and scholarly journals via our databases.

Abstract:

An *abstract* is the short summary at the beginning of scholarly articles that highlights important details in the article, but is not a substitute for reading the whole thing. Reading the abstract is a handy way of determining whether or not the article you're looking at is worth reading (or printing), in the first place!

Keywords:

Keywords are what librarians (and you!) use to search for information in both online databases and print sources. They're the important words that sum up the research you're doing, and are usually the *nouns* in a research question (person, place, or thing). Choosing good keywords is the *key* to successful research!

We hope these definitions help to explain some of our library lingo. If you hear a term that's unfamiliar, just ask!