

Accessing journals and other resources in African universities and research institutes

A brief guide for researchers

Researchers in African universities and research institutes often report that they lack access to high quality academic journals. However, recent ACU research suggests that around 80% of some the top-ranking journals are actually available in the current collections of many African university libraries.¹ Researchers across the continent now have direct access, via their libraries and often in online form, to the latest issues and archives of many thousands of full-text journals.

As you search, it is important to understand the difference between current issue databases and back-file collections. In some cases the current issue of a journal may need to be accessed from a different source to its back issues. Your librarian is the best person to advise you on what is available, but the suggestions below may help to get you started. A glossary of terms is included at the end of this sheet.

How to find out which journals or resources are relevant to your research

There is no single way to identify and access the journals you may need for your work, but by combining a number of different routes, being creative, and developing your search skills, it should be possible to find most of what you need. We outline some of the approaches you may take below.

1. Getting to know the key journals in your subject area

You will probably be familiar with the key journals which are most relevant to your subject area, and which you want to check regularly. But if you are not sure, or want to extend your knowledge of journals in your field, there are a number of ways in which you can do this.

People to help you with your research

- Your **research supervisor or academic staff in your department** will be able to provide information about the key journals or other resources in your subject area. These may include databases, books, journals, theses etc.
- **Your librarian/library** will be able to help you find out what resources are available to you and how to access them.

Places to look

- **Library websites** may provide **lists of journals and databases in specific subject areas**. If your library does not have such a list, you may be able to find useful lists on other university library websites.
- Many **publishers' databases and archives** let you **browse journals in specific subject areas** to enable an overview of what is available.

¹ See www.acu.ac.uk/growing_knowledge

2. If you have a specific journal or article in mind

First steps

- Identify **who publishes the journal** you want to access, or what journal the article is published in (eg Cambridge University Press, Springer, Wiley, etc). You might search Google or another search engine for the name of the journal
- Check your **library** for details of available resources. This may provide a list of publishers' databases, or there may be a full e-resource service enabling you to search or browse journals by title or by subject area
- Choose the **correct database or online resource** (eg Cambridge Journals Online).
- Search or browse for the journal within the publisher's database

Collections from a number of publishers

- Some journals can be accessed via services which search across and aggregate journals from a number of different publishers e.g. EBSCO. Some journals may not be available in full-text via the publisher's own database, but may be provided via the aggregated collection. Check your library website or visit your library for information.
- If the journal is in **health, agriculture or environment**, or related development and scientific areas (including social sciences), try searching the three Research4Life collections (more information about these initiatives is given later).
 - **HINARI** - (health) www.who.int/hinari
 - **OARE** – (environment) www.oaresciences.org
 - **AGORA** - (agriculture) www.aginternetwork.org

Open access journals

There are many high quality journals which are open access and so are freely available. **WorldWideScience.org** enables you to search across 32 national scientific databases and portals from 52 countries. It searches across resources including DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) which includes 3,622 free quality controlled journals, covering all subjects and languages (1,251 of these journals are available in full text online) in addition to national and regional databases such as African Journals Online, Bangladesh Journals Online, Nepal Journals Online, Philippine Journals Online, and Vietnam Journals Online.

Archives and back issue collections

If you are looking for a back issue of a journal you may find it through an archive such as **JSTOR** or **EBSCO** (see above). These provide full-text access to journals but often with a delay of six months to five years from the date of publication.

African published journals

If the journal is published in Africa check **African Journals Online** www.ajol.info. Articles may be available in full text, or by free document delivery.

3. If you do not have a specific journal title in mind

First check whether your library has its own **federated search tool** or **library catalogue (OPAC)**, which will allow you to search across all the databases and journals to which the library subscribes. If the library does not provide a search tool of its own you could try the following routes:

- Try searching **aggregated databases or bibliographic services** such as Web of Science or Scopus (free for institutions registered with HINARI, AGROA and OARE) to show you articles or journals from a number of different publishers (often you can do this if even if you don't have a subscription, but you will not be able to download the full-text to all articles). This will allow you to search across many journals and publishers and to identify articles in your area of interest. There are specialist bibliographic services for different disciplines.
- Try searching a few of the different **publishers' databases** – accessed via your university library website. However, remember that these will only show you articles or journals from a single publisher.

- **Google** can also help, but many of the results it provides may not be of the academic quality you need. **Google Scholar** may be more useful here, as this is focused on scholarly and academic sources.

4. If the article is not available online

If the article you need doesn't seem to be available online, you may be able to get a copy via a **document delivery service**. Ask your librarian to find out if this is possible.

Access schemes which provide free or discounted access to journals in developing countries

There are a number of journal/resource access schemes which work via publishers, librarians and library consortia. Through these, free or substantially discounted subscriptions have been negotiated, enabling libraries to purchase these at more affordable prices. As a result, many thousands of journals that you can access in the ways outlined above, are available online free at the point of use to researchers and students. Some of these schemes are outlined below.

- **Research4Life** is the collective name for **AGORA**, **HINARI**, and **OARE**, which offer free or low-cost access.
 - **AGORA**: from the FAO provides a collection of 1900 journals in the fields of food, agriculture, environmental science, and related social sciences www.aginternetwork.org
 - **HINARI**: from the WHO provides a collection of more than 7,000 journal titles in biomedical and health literature www.who.int/hinari
 - **OARE**: from UNEP provides a collection of more than 2,990 peer-reviewed titles in environmental science research www.oaresciences.org
- **PERii**, INASP's Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information, works with more than 50 publishers and aggregators to make their resources available within its partner and network countries. To see which resources are available to your country and to find the contact details for your country coordinator, go to www.inasp.info and use the box "Where We Work" to select your country.
- **EIFL** (www.eifl.net) -- through central negotiation with publishers, EIFL negotiates highly discounted prices and fair terms of use to increase access to scholarly material which is essential for research and education. Contact your librarian to find out which resources are available in your country.
- **The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL)** (www.teeal.org) is a digital library, developed by Cornell University, and supplied on an external hard drive and DVDs with no need for internet access. African universities and research institutes can purchase this for an initial base cost and subsequent annual updates. Check to see if your institution already has access.
- Research institutes which are part of the **Global Development Network (GDN)** can access a range of high quality resources through document delivery, by email or in print, via the British Library for Development Studies (www.gdnet.org/cms.php?id=blds_document_delivery_service)

If you have any problems...

If it looks like you should be able to access an online article or journal but you are unable to, **contact your librarian**.

You may need a username and password in order to access it or you may need to go via a particular entry portal or database. Your librarian will be able to advise you and ensure you can get access to what you need.

If you have suggestions or comments about this sheet please contact libraries@acu.ac.uk

Glossary of terms

Abstract:	Brief summary of the contents and major points contained within a journal article, report or other paper.
Volume:	All issues of a journal which have been published within a given period (such as a calendar year).
Issue:	A single edition of a particular journal, usually containing a series of articles and reviews. Together several issues, usually spanning a calendar year, form a volume.
Bibliographic database:	Contains standardised descriptions of specific documents, usually including information such as author, title, subject heading and keywords. Some are general databases encompassing a number of academic disciplines, while others concentrate on a specific discipline or subject area. Some bibliographic databases contain just the abstract of an article, while some contain the full-text of an article. Examples include OAlster, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, CAB Abstracts, Agroforestry Abstracts etc.
Aggregated database:	Brings together abstracts of full-text items from a range of different publishers within a single database. An example is EBSCO.
Back-file, archive:	Collection of all issues of a journal which precede the current issue, or before a given date. An example is JSTOR which contains back issues of journals, but often with a 'moving wall' where the newest issue available in the archive dates from between 3 and 5 years from the current issue.
Full-text:	The full text of a journal article, as opposed to the abstract or summary.
Federated search:	Enables you to perform a search across several databases or information sources by using a single search tool or platform.
OPAC:	Online Public Access Catalogue. A database of all the items held by a particular library system, enabling you to search across these using author, title, subject and keyword.