

How to research a building

While researching a building you will need to consult numerous print and web based resources, both current and those of the period of the building's original construction.

The vast variety of available materials ranges from monographs, essays, and newspaper and journal articles to archival records, photographs, drawings, websites, etc.

While researching a specific building you need to discuss its function (in broad terms), structure and design.

To be able to do this you might want to analyze:

- the purpose of the building
- the building's composition and spatial organization
- the building's structure
- the building's materials and how they contribute to its purpose and statement
- the building's style
- the building's systems
- construction detailing
- the building's relationship with surrounding area and environment
- the building's relationship with other works of the same architect
- the building's relationship with significant typological or stylistic precedents

In order to better understand the architect's ideas you might want to learn more about his or her philosophy and "creative process", which will help you put the building into historical and architectural context.

While consulting various sources (it is especially critical for web based materials) you must evaluate each for:

- accuracy
- authority
- currency
- objectivity
- coverage

To learn how to evaluate Web resources, review the [NJIT tutorial](#) or consult this guide by the [Berkeley University Library](#).

You must acknowledge all the sources you use whether you are

- directly copying the words (quoting), or
- putting an author's ideas into your own words (paraphrasing)

Plagiarism –“the appropriation or imitation of another's ideas and manner of expressing them” - is a serious offense.

You can [read more about plagiarism](#) at the Library website.

You can learn how to borrow without plagiarizing by reading “**A short guide to writing about art**” by S. Barnet (*Arch Ref. N7476 .B37 2005*)

While referring to used materials consult the available library style manuals and online Guide for [citing print and electronic resources](#).

While researching a building you will be most likely using primary and secondary materials.

Primary materials are the subject of study (the building itself, photographs, drawings, technical documentation, thoughts expressed by the architect himself, related correspondence, other archival materials, etc.).

Secondary materials are what have already been written about the primary materials (critical essays, articles, books, etc).

You start your research with collecting general data:

- Architect(s) name(s)
- Date(s) of construction
- Location, address
- Use

If you are researching a current project you should be able to identify individuals who can be approached for advice and relevant information, and find government materials documenting or describing a site or a building itself.

If you are researching an older building you might need to find out if its name and address changed over a period of time, if it has undergone alterations, and if its use is still the same. You will have to find government documents describing a site or a building.

In some cases you might need to draw on the literature in other disciplines, for example, psychology and environmental studies, to retrieve materials related to the connection between human behavior and physical environment.

You also should consider retrieving case studies relevant to assigned projects.

Search strategies:

For general information, look at dictionaries and encyclopedias located in the Reference section of the Architecture Library. You might also want to check our online tutorial **How to find information on architects**, which lists many of these materials.

Consult the [Grove Dictionary of Art](#) which is available in print in the Reference section and online via the Library homepage

It is a good source, which along with general histories, monographs, and specialized dictionaries, will help you:

- to put a specific architect and/or a building into historical and cultural context
- define style and terms
- provide biographical data
- provide bibliographical data (information on literature about the specific topic)

Dictionaries and encyclopedias can be a good starting point of your research.

To find books first search the [NJIT online catalog](#).

To learn more about finding books check our tutorial **How to find a book**.

To locate books outside of NJIT you might want to try an easy-to-search database, [WorldCat](#).

You can also search catalogs of local libraries: Rutgers University, Newark Public Library, New York Public Library, Columbia University Avery Library, etc. Access to them is available via the Internet, and is also linked from the Architecture Library website.

Very often articles are the only sources available, especially when you are looking for information on recent events and new names.

To locate articles search periodical indexes and databases:

Check our tutorials:

How to find articles

How to search Avery Index

The Avery Index is one of your most valuable tools; nevertheless other indexes and databases available at NJIT Libraries can also be helpful:

You can access almost all of them online via the Library homepage (click on Databases)

Academic Search Premier

Art Full Text

Art Index Retrospective

Lexis-Nexis

OmniFile

The print version of the New York Times Index is located at Van Houten Library.

Some Web-based indexes available at Rutgers University Libraries can be used as an additional source:

New York Times Index (via Proquest)

Archival resources

America History and Life

Art Bibliographies Modern

Factiva

Humanities Full text

You might also want to search [JerseyClicks](#), the portal to full-text databases offered by the New Jersey State Library.

Newark Public library has a collection of local newspapers, with some dating back to 1791.

New York Public library provides access to:

- National Newspaper database, including full-text of the last few years of *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*
- New York State newspapers (major state newspapers available in full-text)
- New York Times (1851-current)
- Factiva (formerly Dow Jones Interactive)
- Proquest historical database

It is critical to find as many images of a specific building as possible: sketches, site plans, elevations and sections, facades, interiors, details, technical drawings, photographs, etc.

To find drawings, plans, photographs

First, search the [Architecture Library Image Database](#)

Links to other image databanks can be found in our tutorial

How to find images

Among them the most comprehensive online collections of images are:

[Society of Architectural Historians Image Exchange](#)

[SPIRO](#) (Berkley University slide collection online):

[Library of Congress American Memory Collection](#)

[Philadelphia Athenaeum](#)

(Requires registration)

[Chicago Image base](#)

[Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur](#) (From Germany, but contains images of architectural monuments in various countries)

[Architecture & Patrimoine \(Formerly Merimee\) database](#) (French only)

[Vitruvio](#) (Switzerland)

[Perseus](#) (Archaic and classical Greek world)

Many architectural firms have their own websites that include information on their projects, along with biographical and other data on their principal architects.

For images of buildings constructed prior to the 1980s and reproduced in books, consult the **World of Architecture Index: a Guide to Illustrations** (Arch Ref NA 202.T4 1991)

Search **Avery Index** to find images published in periodicals. You can use the "limit" option to locate records with illustrations: plans, maps, photos, elevations, isometric drawings, etc (select type of illustrations from the menu and apply limits).

While searching the Web consider using specialized image search engines:

- [Google](#)
- [Altavista](#)
- [All the web](#)
- [Picsearch](#)
- [Search-22](#)

New York Public Library, The Milstein Division of US History, Local History and Genealogy (first floor in Room 121), holds collections of:

- **Photographic Views of New York City: 1870's—1970's.**
This microfiche collection reproduces over 54,000 original photographs that mark the development of New York City and its architecture. It is indexed by three volumes, organized by street, building and subject.
- **Lloyd Acker Collection--Views of New York City Buildings 1935-75.**
This microfilm collection is indexed by street and house number and is valuable for views of facades of less significant buildings.

Very often you will need to locate maps of a specific area. For finding maps check the following locations:

- Architecture Library and Digital Image database at NJIT. We have a collection of New Jersey maps (USGS and Sanborn)
- Newark Public Library has a collection of 2500 historical and current maps (bound and on film) including Sanborn maps files along with other miscellaneous fire insurance atlases for Newark and nearby communities.
- Columbia University library provides online access to Sanborn maps of New York and New Jersey.
- New York Public Library provides online access to Sanborn maps of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

To find archival materials you might want to use various archives and special collections

Selected Special collections for locating primary materials:

[New York Historical Society](#)

[New York Public Library](#)

Department of buildings: Manhattan – Hudson street, 5th floor
212-312-8904

[Landmark preservation commission](#)

[National Trust for Historic preservation](#)

[NYC department of building database:](#)

Provides access to general information on properties in New York City, which includes block and lot number, census track and landmark status.

[Building permit database](#) (1900-1986): searchable database by address, architect, owner and type of building.

[Newark Public Library special collections](#)

[New Jersey Historical Society](#)

[Chicago landmarks](#)

[Chicago Historical Society](#)

[Art Institute in Chicago Library, Ryerson and Burnham Archive](#)

Searching Tips:

While looking for information on a specific building, consider a few searching tips:

If you know the **name of the architect or firm** search for specific names (Refer to **How to find information on architects** tutorial)

If the building is a landmark or part of a landmark district, check the published reports of the Landmark Preservation Commission listed under keywords. For example:

Landmark preservation (building name)

If you do not get desirable results consider using various names in your searches (i.e., Huntington Hartford Gallery or Museum of Art and Design; Beaubourg or Center Pompidou)

Or, using just an address (Columbus Circle 2)

Consider searching by keyword versus subject heading depending on the topic of your research.

Open a detailed record for a library holding to find appropriate subject headings and then use these subject headings for further searches to get similar results.

Please do not hesitate to ask Architecture library staff for assistance. Good Luck!