

Political Science 083T First Year Seminar
Prof. Baumgartner
Home work due on Monday Nov 10, 2008

This is an assignment on how to use the New York Times Historical Collection. This provides a database of the entire record of stories in the history of the New York Times, going back to 1851. (Like JSTOR, it is historical, not current, and does not include the most recent years.)

How to use it?

1. From the library home page, go to the tab at the top called “Databases”
2. Find New York Times Historical 1851-2005 in the alphabetical list.
3. Play around with it until you know how to search and feel comfortable with it.

What’s the assignment?

1. Call your mom and find out her birthday, her mom’s birthday, and her grandma’s birthday. (If you want to you can use a substitute for your mom, but you have to get someone from 3 successive generations, or 4 if you want to go that far.)
2. Save a PDF file of Page A.1 for your own birthday. How to do that?
 - a. Search for the word “the” in any documents type
 - b. Limit the search to “1” in the “page” field
 - c. Select your birthdate
 - d. Do the search. You should get about 10 hits, roughly. (Hopefully, at least one article on the front page contains the word “the” – if not we’re in trouble!)
 - e. For any one of the articles, click on “page map”
 - f. At the right, it offers the option of “page image – pdf” – click on that.
 - g. Save this file to a usb-drive giving it a name like “my_birthday.pdf”
3. Now do the same for “moms_birthday.pdf”, then for grandma, then for great-grandma.
4. Come to class with those four files printed out. Do more if you want to keep going back.
5. After you show them to me mail them to your mom or take them home for Thanksgiving.

What’s the assignment for next week?

Next time, we’ll go to this same source but search for themes using keyword searches. So think of topics that interest you and play around to identify the key-words that seem to work. Read the “search tips” so that you understand what “Boolean operators” are and how to use them, and also the idea of “within 3” to get cases where two words are used near each other but not necessarily in order. Consider something simple like how would you search for articles related to “nuclear energy” or something like that. Consider something even simpler like searches for “Richard Nixon” (but note he was sometimes referred to as “Richard M. Nixon” and sometimes “President Nixon” and sometimes “Vice-President Nixon” and sometimes “Tricky Dick”. Now consider something harder like how would you approach the question of identifying stories on a topic such as health care reform. Play around on the site and get familiar with these search options. Knowing how to do this will be very helpful. It will allow you to find information, but also track how things change over time, if you do the same search for different historical periods. More details to follow on this assignment when the time comes.