Test Driving CD-ROMS - Reviews of CD-ROM Products

Norman Desmarais
Providence College, normd_l@providence.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3000

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Bar to move to the desired topic.

The encyclopedia has a very strong search engine that will locate specific terms, phrases, or groups of terms and phrases quickly and easily. Phrases like black hole, internal combustion engine, and high definition television need not be included in quotation marks or any other marks to distinguish them from single word terms. The engine will support up to four terms connected with the Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT. The engine will search the full text of the encyclopedia, but researchers can opt to limit the search to articles only. They can also indicate the relationship between the terms—up to fifty words apart.

While the search engine defaults to searching the CD, researchers can opt to search the Web also. The program will let them select Excite, Lycos, or Infoseek as their preferred search engine. If that's not enough, researchers can focus on a search on one or more of the ten subjects covered by the encyclopedia: agriculture/forestry, astronomy, biology, chemistry, computer science, earth sciences, engineering, mathematics, medicine/psychology, or physics. Topic filters permit browsing any of 20 major topic areas (and nearly 100 subtopics) in the Encyclopedia.

Results display in a large, easily legible typeface and users can enlarge or reduce the size as desired or quickly return to the original size with a single click. Researchers can have the results sorted alphabetically (default) or by relevance. Links open new windows. Users can tile them or cascade them. They can easily forget how many they have open. There's no Back button to return to a departure point. The assumption is that one will close the windows. Users can close individual windows at will to conserve RAM; but there's a button on the toolbar to close them all with one click. Some of the icons are not intuitive nor are they sensitive to mouse movement where they would give a pop-up explanation.

A search for "discrete cosine transform" produced two articles but neither had a detailed description. None of the articles on the turbine or specific turbines (gas, hydraulic, steam, etc.) contained any illustrations to show how a turbine worked. Al-
though the article on nuclear reaction contained no illustrations, it had a detailed animation of a chain reaction. As mentioned earlier, the print edition of the encyclopedia has many more illustrations than the CD. For example, the article on the motor has thirteen figures in the print edition but none on the CD. The article on Neptune has no illustrations on the CD while the book has several figures and color plates. The CD article on the moon lacked the 19 figures and four tables from the print; but it included an animation and excellent explanation of the moon’s orbit.

Researchers can easily view any illustrations, maps, or other graphics associated with an article. There’s no media gallery; but many of the images would not make much sense viewed out of context of the article. Researchers can print articles, copy portions to the Windows clipboard, bookmark them for quick reference later, view associated multimedia features (where available), look for a particular word or phrase within the article, or look up a word in the dictionary. Copying works fine for the text, but formulas will usually appear garbled and exponents and subscripts will display on the same line as real numbers.

The text is authoritative and well written. In fact, the McGraw-Hill Multimedia Encyclopedia of Science & Technology has become or should be the point of departure to begin research on a scientific or technological topic. It is not likely that any library other than those specializing in science and technology will need both the print and the CD versions. If one needs the plethora of illustrations that the print version contains, then the CD will not suffice. If the text is the primary concern, the CD is an excellent purchase. The search engine is fast and powerful. It makes searching the encyclopedia and other associated resources much faster than locating the same information in print.

Barron’s Book Study Notes — $29.99
Reviewed by Norman Desmarais (Providence College)

This edition of Barron’s Book Study Notes is a collaboration between Corel and World Library, Inc. which released a version of the notes in 1993. Both company names appear on the packaging, with Corel displayed most prominently. However, Corel recently sold the rights to Hoffmann + Associates and no longer sells or supports the product. This edition, identified as version 1.00.016, has the same text as the World Library version. In addition, it includes the American Heritage Concise Dictionary, 3rd ed., a different search engine (Fulcrum Technologies, Inc.), author biographies, and a media portfolio which provides access to ca. 48 illustrations, 12 author pictures, and 3 videos.

The product was designed to operate under Windows 3.x; and it runs on Windows 95 and Windows NT. It contains descriptive and critical information for 101 literary works and 66 authors. The notes cover the plot summary, character analysis, and themes. They also include sample tests followed by the answers, term paper ideas, a glossary, excerpts of commentary by noteworthy critics, and a bibliography.

The viewing panel occupies 2/3 of the screen and the search tools appear as a series of tabs and windows on the left of the viewing panel. The text appears on numbered pages, similar to a printed edition. However, the interface is too small for comfortable viewing, so the student will have to close the search panel which expands the viewing panel and makes the text more legible.

The search engine uses a card catalog metaphor and even includes graphics of catalog drawers when one selects author/title and subject tabs. The title tab defaults to showing all titles in the database. Students can select an individual author to get a list of titles by that author. The 101 titles represent the work of 66 authors, so very few have more than one work included. Shakespeare has the most with 14 titles. Generally, the criticized work is the most important, most representative, or the most studied. In some cases, one might argue otherwise. For example Camus’s The Stranger is included but not The Myth of Sisyphus, The Plague, The Fall, or The Rebel.

Many of the titles (33 or 1/3 of the entire bibliography) appear alphabetized under initial articles. The earlier World Library edition had them alphabetized in proper sequence, ignoring the initial ar-

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>