

## What's New

Since the committee's previous full review, JSTOR has introduced four key features to their interface: Indexing using their own Thesaurus (JSTOR calls their indexing terms "Topics"), "Topic Cards" students see that lead them to other subjects when they download an article, encyclopedia entries appearing on top of a topic's search results, and the Text Analyzer where the user inserts a word or PDF document to conduct a search.

Perhaps the most important feature added to the JSTOR interface is the thesaurus. It was debuted in January, 2017, and it is what they call a "living thesaurus." In addition to an established thesaurus provided by indexers of the product, whenever a document uses a key term three times or more, results (up to ten) will also be included based on the number of actual times a word is used. JSTOR also invites librarians to suggest more key terms for respective fields. For the user, the label for the subject terms is "topics" and they appear as links listed below each bibliographic entry in the search results. Users can then click on the term to find all articles that use that particular topic. One key element lacking in the thesaurus are names of people and places. Searches on Toni Morrison and searches on California had no topics terms related to either.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

[Orality, Literacy, and Memory in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon](#)

[Joyce Irene Middleton](#)

*College English*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 64-75

**Topics:** [Memory](#), [Literacy](#), [African culture](#), [Oral literature](#), [Orality](#), [Folksongs](#), [Storytelling](#), [African American culture](#), [Black communities](#), [African American literature](#)

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In addition to this searching aid, JSTOR also provides "topic cards." After a student downloads an article they are interested in using, up to four topic cards will appear on the top of the screen after a download has been completed. The student can then click the heading in a particular topic card, leading to articles indexed according to the topic. Topic cards include the number of articles related to that term. For social issues and the sciences they can be quite effective. Unfortunately, for literary criticism and biographies that are about particular individuals, they are not as effective unless you are writing a thematic paper that compared texts or related the text to certain ideals, principles and themes. Notice in the examples below the topics cards match areas the students may be seeking for their paper (including "Same sex marriage," the likely chief signifier), while the Toni Morrison topic cards only lead students to themes such as memory and oral literature, in general.

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<p><b><u>Same Sex Marriage</u></b> 3,333 items</p> <p>Same-sex marriage, also known as gay marriage, is marriage between people of the same sex, either as...</p>	<p><b><u>Political Attitudes</u></b> 10,661 items</p> <p>No description found for this topic.</p>	<p><b><u>Protestantism</u></b> 50,362 items</p> <p>Protestantism is a form of Christian faith and practice which originated with the Protestant Reforma...</p>	<p><b><u>Public Opinion</u></b> 12,523 items</p> <p>The desires, wants, and thinking of the majority of the people - or the collective opinion of the pe...</p>
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<p><b><u>Memory</u></b> 47,464 items</p> <p>Memory is how information is encoded, stored, and retrieved. Encoding allows information from the ou...</p>	<p><b><u>Literacy</u></b> 14,631 items</p> <p>Literacy is traditionally understood as the ability to read, write, and use arithmetic. The modern t...</p>	<p><b><u>African Culture</u></b> 27,556 items</p> <p>The culture of Africa is varied and manifold, consisting of a mixture of tribes that each have their...</p>	<p><b><u>Oral Literature</u></b> 6,442 items</p> <p>Oral literature or folk literature corresponds in the sphere of the spoken (oral) word to literature...</p>
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JOURNAL ARTICLE  
**Orality, Literacy, and Memory in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon**



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Once a student clicks on a topic, when available, above the search results there will be an encyclopedia entry that matches the exact topic term. This approach is reminiscent to EDS users who have what are called “Research Starters” on top of their results, but in this case the encyclopedia entry only appears when a “Topic” link is actually clicked on. The obviously controversial element is that the encyclopedia entries come from Wikipedia, which some faculty members forbid students from using in their papers. In general, the first two to three paragraphs of the last captured Wikipedia entry appears as the encyclopedia entry in JSTOR. Pictures from Wikipedia are also included with the Wikipedia entry. With each entry there is a thumbs up and thumbs down option along with a Flag This Description entry that also allows users to report inaccuracies.

## Topic: Climate Change

Climate change is a change in the statistical distribution of weather patterns when that change lasts for an extended period of time (i.e., decades to millions of years). Climate change may refer to a change in average weather conditions, or in the time variation of weather around longer-term average conditions (i.e., more or fewer extreme weather events). Climate change is caused by factors such as biotic processes, variations in solar radiation received by Earth, plate tectonics, and volcanic eruptions. Certain human activities have also been identified as significant causes of recent climate change, often referred to as global warming. Scientists actively work to understand past and future climate by using observations and theoretical models. A climate record—extending deep into the Earth's past—has been assembled, and continues to be built up, based on geological evidence from borehole temperature profiles, cores removed from deep accumulations of ice, floral and faunal records, glacial... [Show More](#)

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

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### Search Within This Topic:



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Finally, there is the Text Analyzer, which a year and half after introduction is still in “Beta” mode. A student could enter a Word or PDF document such as a draft of their paper or a published text, and functioning like a “super search term” the database will then provide a number of results. In a way, this approach may be a bit too sophisticated for community college students. Some faculty may like it for their research, though, or if they want to check for plagiarism. The results can help when thesaurus terms are used frequently in an article, and is definitely an interesting approach to discover articles, similar to footnote chasing. The main challenge may be the drag-and-drop interface, which is not necessarily intuitive in the context. So with respect to user friendliness, it does require a user who understands how to maneuver files on a computer via a Graphic User Interface well.

Use your own document to search for articles and books.

Don't have a document handy? Try dragging this.

Drag and drop a document or image here or copy and paste text

[You can also select files from your computer](#)

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**Verdict** (for product updates instead of rating we determine by the three criteria listed below. The one in bold is the verdict)

**New and Improved**    Just New    What Were They Thinking?

Overall, it is definitely of the opinion for this quick review that JSTOR is “New and Improved.” The previous complaint of many reviews on JSTOR before 2017 was the lack of indexing. With this use of “Topics,” JSTOR is now somewhat comparable to the Big Three Vendors’ power in locating and discovering articles and other materials. The ingenious inclusion of the Topic Cards once a user has demonstrated interest in an article when downloading it reinforces and encourages students to locate more similar articles. The main drawback is that “Topics” do not include proper names or places, so discovering related articles on persons or geographic locations is dependent only on keyword searching, but JSTOR’s indexing is still a definite improvement where in previous versions all the user could do was a full-text search.

The other features would probably be more “Just New.” The encyclopedia entries are a nice addition. However, unlike EBSCO Discovery Service’s Research Starters, JSTOR’s are not professionally vetted for accuracy and quality. The Text Analyzer would more likely be beneficial for serious researchers, those of the type who would also use citation indices, but for community college students they need to figure out what they are writing first. And if they just insert any articles when their theme for their research paper is truly different, they could end up spending more time than needed organizing their thoughts--unless they have determined the article they are using is truly “on the mark” for what they are researching. Instruction would be needed for them to use the Text Analyzer effectively, including tips on some of the questionable interface choices JSTOR has made.

References

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