Sci-Tech News

Volume 58 | Issue 1 Article 5

January 2004

Ten or So Things That Every Chemistry Librarian Absolutely, Positively Has to Have to Keep from Being an Absolute Plonk

F. Barton Culp

Ten or So Things That Every Chemistry Librarian Absolutely, Positively Has to Have to Keep From Being an Absolute Plonk.

by F. Barton Culp, Mellon Library of Chemistry
Purdue University

Choosing a "top ten" list of things no chemistry librarian can do without is guaranteed to start a (polite) fight – "How could you leave out X?" "Why in the world did you include Y?", etc. Should the list be limited to print resources, electronic resources, or both? And how about the disparate needs of academic vs. corporate libraries? Ah, the thing is almost impossible to do. But does that stop us? Noooooooooooooooooo! A team of the best and brightest minds in the field has come up with the following list – disagree with us at your peril!

1. **The CRC Handbook of Chemistry & Physics** – Nearing its 100th birthday, the good old CRC has managed, under David Lide's careful and capable stewardship, to stay between two covers, even if they are the size of a soccer field. The electronic version is even better (and lighter).
2. **The Aldrich catalog** – What could be better - A compendium of basic properties, CAS RNs, spectral, safety and Beilstein references, plus some art history – all for free!
3. **The Merck Index** – It doesn't contain as many compounds as the CRC, but it's got the best synonym index going. Not free, but a real bargain at about $60.
4. **The NIST Chemistry WebBook** http://webbook.nist.gov/chemistry/. Our tax dollars at work, folks, and (for once) worth every penny. It contains spectra, thermochemical data and much more. Free.
5. **The SDBS spectral database** http://www.aist.go.jp/RIODB/SDBS/menu-e.html. Japan's tax yen at work, and even bigger and better than the NIST WebBook for spectra – IR, NMR, MS, ESR, and even Raman. Free!
6. **The WebElements page** < http://www.webelements.com/>. One of the best online periodic tables going – A nice design, full of information. You might also want to look at the Periodic Table of Rejected Elements http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99aug/9908elements.htm for the ones that didn't make the cut (Examples: Tedium, Visine, and Celenedion).
7. **Hawley's Condensed Chemical Dictionary**. Nothing impresses patrons more than a librarian being able to talk the chemical talk. The technique is to memorize a few esoteric terms from Hawley's, such as "flash point", "octanol-water coefficient", and "degenerate Cope rearrangement", and drop them into a sentence like "Have you thought about trying [*term*]?" The effect is magical.
8. **Google**. OK, OK, it seems like a copout, but that's where our patrons go first, anyway - right? The best thing to do is to learn a few advanced Google search techniques, like adding a tilde (~) before the word to include its synonyms and plurals. Nowhere else can you find the lyrics for chemical songs like "Glory, glory, it's Wolff-Kischner", sung to the tune of "The battle hymn of the republic" http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/chemistry/courses/chem212/songs/
9. **The Chemical Information Sources Discussion List**. Even if you have a book budget of zero and no resources but a computer and a modem, you can get by as a chemistry librarian by joining Gary Wiggins' listserv http://listserv.indiana.edu/archives/chminf-l.html. Nearly every serious question sent to this site, no matter how complex or naïve, is thoughtfully considered and (usually) answered.
10. **April Love's Top Ten List.** If you've read this far, you're probably disappointed, since I haven't provided much new stuff. That's because I knew that April Love, Chemistry Librarian at UC/Irvine, has already compiled a great top ten (eighteen, actually) list already. It can be found at http://www.lib.uci.edu/online/subject/chem_top10.html.
11. **The Dihydrogen Monoxide Website** http://www.dhmo.org. Here's a lagniappe for you from Susanne Redalje, Chemistry Librarian at the University of Washington. I'd stay away from this stuff if I were you – it looks dangerous.