Practical Guide to Using eHRAF

If you are new to the eHRAF World Cultures & Archaeology databases, the following practical guide will help you get started. The guide focuses on Advanced Search and Browse Cultures. For Browse Subjects, Browse Documents (by author), and Basic Search please visit the “Help File” in the upper right-hand corner of the eHRAF databases.

eHRAF at a Glance

• Collection of documents (e.g. books, journal articles, monographs)
• Organized into cultures or archaeological traditions
• Detailed subject-indexing covering all aspects of social and cultural life.
• Powerful searching by cultures, subjects, and keywords
• Cultures organized by regions, subregions and subsistence types

One of eHRAF’s most powerful aspects is Advanced Search, where you can build a search using cultures, subjects and keywords. In order to appreciate this fully, it is important to know how eHRAF is organized. This guide will point you to some essential features.

Browse Cultures

This is a great place to begin learning about the cultures in eHRAF. In the A-Z index, for example, you may find that the Selk’nam, a small indigenous group in South America, have quite a few similar-sounding names. In By Country, for example, you can explore the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan, including the Hazara and the Pashtun (see Fig 1). In By Region you’ll find cultures for eight major regions (e.g. North America) and subregions (e.g. Northwest Coast and California). The cultures included in eHRAF are a sample of all the world’s cultures. eHRAF World Cultures currently contains 280, eHRAF Archaeology contains 88 and new cultures are added regularly.
Figure 1. Information is organized by cultures, including Western and non-Western cultures.

In *Culture Summary* (Fig 1) you’ll find some basic information about a culture, such as its economy, history, environment and sociopolitical organization. For archaeological traditions, you’ll find other important information, such as absolute and relative time periods, diagnostic material attributes and key. If you are teaching undergraduate classes, these may make useful student assignments.

Next is *Collection Description*, where the word “collection” refers to all the ethnographic and archaeological works collected for a particular culture/tradition (Fig.2). Previously they were called “files,” which is still reflected in the name of the organization – Human Relations Area Files. *Collection Description* briefly describes the culture, while *Collection Information* shows the total number of documents in the eHRAF database for that culture. Knowing where to find *Collection Information* may come in handy for hypothesis testing or when evaluating search results weighed against all documents for a particular culture. In *Collection Indexing Notes*, you’ll find a glossary of terms used in the next section, the *Collection Documents*.

![Collection Documents](https://example.com/collection_documents.png)

Figure 2. Titles of ethnographic works on the Aleut in *Collection Documents* in the *Browse Cultures* section of eHRAF

*Collection Documents* is where you’ll find culture-specific texts, including books, dissertations, monographs or journal articles. You may even come across some “classic” ethnographies describing all aspects of cultural and social life. Many cultures included in eHRAF are preindustrial societies that, to this day, practice very traditional lifeways, such as hunter-gathering or pastoralism, without modern amenities, such as running water, refrigeration, electricity or the internet.
Click around a document (Fig. 3) to get a feel for the navigation and unique page layout, including reference made to date and place. On the right-hand side of the page, you'll notice subjects. These are taken from the Outline of Cultural Materials (OCM), a vast thesaurus of indexing terms that covers all aspects of cultural and social life. HRAF trained analysts and anthropologists painstakingly index each and every paragraph in the eHRAF databases. As a paragraph’s content changes, so will the OCM subjects appearing on the right-hand side. In Advanced Search, these subjects can be used to find concepts (e.g. cooking practices) expressed with many different words (boil, broil, roast, etc.), even in foreign language texts. You can become more familiar with them in Browse Subjects before you use them in Advanced Search.
**Advanced Search in eHRAF**

eHRAF works very differently from any kind of search platform that you may be used to. Three steps help refine your search:

1) Building an Advanced Search using subjects, cultures, or keywords
2) Refining the search by geographic regions, subsistence and sample types
3) Using “snippets” of texts for easy viewing and to toggle between paragraph and page view

**Building an Advanced Search**
An eHRAF *Advanced Search* is best described with a search example. Suppose you want to find ethnographies in eHRAF with information on indigenous cooking practices. A *Basic Search* with a word or phrase might be a good start. Because eHRAF uses “free text” word searching, only the exact terms, erroneous spelling and all, are retrieved. eHRAF also does not retrieve related words. In the example “cooking practices,” texts containing related terms (e.g. roasting, boiling, grilling) are not retrieved.

This is where the “Add Subject” function in *Advanced Search* (see Fig. 4) comes in handy, because if you can find an OCM subject that matches your keyword or phrase you’ll be able to find relevant text without being bound to any specific words (Fig. 5). Using OCM subjects is especially useful for hypothesis testing and cross-cultural comparisons.

![Figure 4. Advanced Search using “Add Subject” to match one’s search terms. For example, use OCM subject “food preparation” if you are searching for “cooking practices.” This produces a more complete set of results.](image-url)
5

Figure 5. OCM subjects will find concepts that keywords will not.

Depending on your purpose and the meaning of the word, a keyword search might be sufficient. For example, “enchilada” (a dish made with corn tortillas) may or may not be too narrow, while “corn” might yield far too many results. A word-subject search (see Fig. 6) comes in handy, because you can “pair” your word (e.g. “corn”) with OCM subjects (e.g. food preparation, diet, vegetable crops, etc.) to find relevant texts. This Advanced Search example also uses the Boolean operators “AND and OR.” You can find more on the importance of Boolean operators in the “Search Tips” section.

Figure 6. Advanced Search with a subject and keywords

A powerful aspect of the Advanced Search is the ability to add a second layer, or clause using the “+” function. Using a second clause with Boolean AND function lets you build quite a sophisticated search using subjects, keywords, and cultures (Fig. 7). But, before you do, first read the Advanced Search Tips and eHRAF Search Example & Methods section to better understand how it works.
Figure 7. Building a powerful *Advanced Search* with truncated words, subjects, cultures, clauses (+), and Boolean operators AND and OR.

**Refine a Search by Regions, Subsistence & Sample Types**

A unique and powerful feature of eHRAF is that it categorizes your search results by region and allows you to sort your results by culture, subsistence, sample type and so-on (see Fig. 8).

This enables you to jump from culture to culture within a region (e.g. Amazon) or between major regions (e.g. Africa or Asia) in seconds. It allows you to group all your results by type of subsistence (e.g. hunter-gatherers), sample type (e.g. PSF) or culture. Now you don’t have to figure out which cultures in eHRAF are egalitarian societies because we have done it for you.

This ability makes eHRAF ideal for cross-culture, regional or area studies, or for comparative archaeology.
Figure 8. Unique in eHRAF! Once a search is performed select cultures by regions, subregions, and sort by subsistence or sample types.