

Guide to Searching the Patent Literature at the Centennial Library

A. Locating patents by SUBJECT

1. Scan the headings in the [Index to Classification](#) or the paperback book on the Patent Reference table, or online via the Patent and Trademark Website. The Index consists of an alphabetic listing of terms, phrases, synonyms and acronyms which best describe products, processes and apparatus of patent disclosures. The emphasis is on intended use. Note the class and subclass numbers assigned to the terms selected.
2. Consult the [Manual of Classification](#) (the three-volume set on the patent reference table, or on the Cassis Assist CD-ROM) for the selected class number, taking care to scan from the top of the class and looking at all major coordinate subclasses. Major coordinate subclasses have the same left hand margin. Each dot or series of dots indicates subclasses that are hierarchically part of a major coordinate subclass, with each additional dot indicating a further level of subdivision.
3. Consult the [Patent Classification Definitions](#) for the class and subclass selected. Definitions can also be found on the Cassis Assist File on CD-ROM. The definitions explain which subject areas the Patent Office includes and excludes in the class and its subclasses. Notes explain exceptions and suggest other classes to consult, based on concept.
4. Using PTO's [Searchable Full-text Databases](#) type your class/subclass in the U.S. Classification Field to retrieve a list of related patents. The purpose of doing this is to determine that your idea is unique and to supply prior art for your patent application. Click the "images" button to retrieve the full text of each patent and the drawings. If you cannot load the images in your web browser you need a TIF reader. You can download the AlternaTIF software free of charge or an equivalent TIF reader for Apple Computers. See [PTO's page concerning images](#) for details.
5. The full text of nearly all U.S. patents can now be found on the web from 1790 to the present. Note that prior to 1976 however, the text of patents is not indexed. This means that the only searchable fields from 1790-1976 are the patent number and the class/subclass. Keyword searching online will only retrieve patents from 1976 to the present. In addition the full text of patents are housed in the Centennial Library as follows:

1790-present on DVD-ROM, accessible from the Cassis Workstation. Use the index on USAPat to convert your patent numbers into corresponding volume numbers, and page the disks at Circulation. If you are printing the multiple pages of a patent, it will be ultimately faster to print from the Cassis Workstation rather than the Internet. The reason

is that each page on the Internet must be loaded individually. If you cannot locate your patent, see a reference librarian.

1964-present on microfilm. Request each reel by patent number from the Circulation Desk.

If you are unable to decide which class/subclass to search, there are several alternatives you may try.

-- Obtain a PTO form letter from the Reference Desk. This requests that the PTO staff suggest a class/subclass number for your invention. Their reply will take about 3 weeks.

-- If you locate a relevant class, but are unsure of the subclass number, Reference staff can obtain the phone number for the examiner in that area. You can then contact the examiner for search advice.

-- The easiest method to find the appropriate subclass is to use a patent number from a device similar to your invention, and then cross reference on its subclass numbers.

B. Keyword Searching

You can do keyword searching in the PTO full-text searchable databases back to 1976 or the **Patents Bib** Cassis disk back to 1969. Keep in mind that this kind of a search is indicative only; it is not a comprehensive patent search. You need to go through the classification scheme as explained above for a complete search.

C. Locating a patent by Patentee/Assignee

Patentee/Assignee information may be searched on the ASSIST disk. The **Patentee-Assignee File** has information for utility patents from 1969-present and for other patents from 1977. Patents assigned to a particular company can also be identified using the Cassis/Bib disk.

For information prior to 1969 use the List of Patentees, part of the annual Index of Patents. Indexes from 1847 to the present are shelved after the Gazettes, with the SuDocs call number C 21.5/2:(year). (Titles may vary slightly, but most are called Index of Patents.) The Patent Office Public Search Room in Washington, D.C has a card file covering 1930-50 and microfilm cumulations at five-year intervals since. These files are available to the public or can be searched for a fee if you cannot go there (see Federal Yellow Pages telephone book under **Patent Searchers**).

D. Foreign Patents

CSEL does not collect foreign patents. Check the UNM patent and trademark web page for links to non-US patent and trademark sites. Consider searching [espacenet](#) first, or talk to the patent librarian. The UNM Document Delivery service may be able to obtain foreign patents for you. Call 277-4412 for information. Reference librarians can also provide phone numbers for commercial document delivery services. Alternately, our

"partnership" patent and trademark library is [Rice University](#), and may also be able to locate a foreign patent. For a more extensive discussion of foreign patents and services see **Searching Patent Documents** or **What Every Engineer Should Know About Patents**. Both books are kept at the Patent Reference Table. In addition we have several books designed to help you protect your idea on your own, such as **Patent it Yourself**, and the **Inventor's Desktop Companion**.