

Finding yourself in the collection

The National Library of Australia holds rich collections that support research into areas such as family, community, culture, language, activism and women's history. Our discovery tools, including Trove, can help you uncover where your story intersects with the national record. These tips will help you get started, or you can [Ask a Librarian](#).

Quick discovery map

Tool	Best for...	Try when you want to...
Catalogue	Everything at a glance	Find books, pictures, maps, manuscripts, digital items
eResources	Digital resources	Access online journals, newspapers, databases
Finding Aid search	Manuscripts & archives	Dive into unpublished papers or organisational records
Research guides	Topic overviews and tips	Learn where to start on a subject
Ask a Librarian	Individual help from a librarian	Get expert guidance for tricky or complex research

Using the Catalogue – catalogue.nla.gov.au

The catalogue is your entry point to almost everything the Library holds - books, pictures, maps, manuscripts, oral histories, ephemera and digital collections.

How to search effectively

- Use keyword searching to cast a wide net: names, places, organisations, cultural groups, events.
- Try variant spellings and older terminology, especially for historical or multilingual material.
- Include non-English terms where relevant. Search in languages and scripts and test more than one transliteration.
- Apply filters (format, year range, language) to narrow results. There is a filter for First Nations languages.
- Follow subject headings to discover related material.
- Look for collection-level records that describe large archives or manuscript collections.

Next steps

- [Join the Library](#) to request material to view in the [Reading Rooms](#).
- Check out our more detailed guide to [Get Started with the Catalogue](#).
- Be sure to check the access conditions to see if the material requires permission to view, copy or publish.

Search in language

For example, for Chinese use Pinyin or simplified/traditional characters.

Discovering with eResources – nla.gov.au/eresources

eResources provide access to subscription digitised newspapers, journals, databases and international collections. Many can be accessed from home once you have registered with the Library.

How to search effectively

- Browse by subject or format: look for newspapers, journals, primary sources, reference works.
- Search within databases: use keywords, names, places and events relevant to your topic.
- Many databases include content in languages other than English or allow searching in multiple languages. Try both English and non English terms for the same topic.
- Most resources are available from anywhere in Australia, but a small number are onsite only.

Especially useful for women's and social history

- Historical newspaper collections.
- Thematic primary source databases such as Women's Studies Archive, Gerritsen Women's History Collection, Women and Transnational Networks, and Archives of sexuality and gender.

Trove historic newspapers are just the beginning of what you can explore through the Library's digital resources. Our eResources portal includes Australian dailies, multilingual papers, and some major international titles.

Finding aid search – catalogue.nla.gov.au/finding-aids

Large archival collections, such as personal papers, manuscripts and photographs, are described in detail in **finding aids** - sometimes down to individual boxes or folders. You can use this search to explore people's papers, organisations and movements (including women's organisations and activists) and to find material that isn't always visible in standard catalogue searches.

How to navigate

- Search within the finding aid: use names, organisations, places, campaigns or themes.
- Read the "background" section. It explains who created the collection and what it contains.
- Scan the contents list: series descriptions show how material is grouped (e.g. correspondence, photographs, minutes, subject files).
- Note language details: some collections include material in languages other than English. Look for this in the description or series notes.
- Use for depth: ideal for researching activists, writers, artists, unions, community groups and women's organisations.

How to request

- Record the details from the finding aid. Note box, series, item numbers or date ranges.
- Go to the catalogue record. Check the access conditions – if the collection requires permission to access contact Ask a Librarian.
- Otherwise, click the 'Use in the Library' button and then the 'Select' button.
- You will be prompted to login to the catalogue if you have not already.
- Choose the boxes or series you wish to request. They must be sequential for each request e.g. boxes 12-14.

Research guides

Research guides bring together curated pathways into major topics, communities and collection strengths. The Library has guides on family history, First Nations collections, migration, activism, women's history and more – helping you find and search for stories across the collection. Search the [website](#) or browse our list of [guides](#).

How to use them

- Choose a guide: e.g. Family History, First Nations resources, Pacific studies or protest and dissent.
- Follow the suggested tools: guides link to specific collections or collection items, eResources, finding aids and external sites.
- Adopt recommended search terms: note the keywords, subject headings and alternative terms, (including non English terms), suggested in the guide.
- Use guides as a map: they help you see the main types of sources available before you dive into detailed searching. The Library's series of [Collection Guides](#) are another useful gateway to the collection.

Ask a Librarian

[Ask a Librarian](#) connects you with reference librarians who can help you get the most from your research.

How to reach us



Phone service

Speak directly with Library staff during opening hours for quick questions, guidance on where to start or help navigating services.



Online enquiries

For more complex enquiries, submit your questions through the online form. We will respond with tailored advice, suggested resources and next steps.



Interpreter assisted sessions

Book a session with an interpreter if you prefer support in a language other than English.

What to expect

- Designing search strategies. Our librarians suggest useful keywords, subject headings and databases, and show you how to adapt your searches when you're not finding what you need.
- Navigating the collection. Get guidance on using the catalogue and other discovery tools to locate books, manuscripts, pictures, maps, oral histories and digital material.
- Locating hard to find material. We can point you to archival and manuscript collections, specialist indexes and reference works that are not always obvious from a simple search.
- Understanding what you've found. Librarians can explain collection notes, access conditions and formats, and suggest next steps so you can build on what you've already discovered.