What this is

The Innovative Instructor is an article series (https://ctei.jhu.edu/ii) and a blog (https://ii.library.jhu.edu) related to teaching excellence at Johns Hopkins

Article categories

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Technology
Information about emerging technologies, who is using them, and why you should know

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The Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation partners with faculty, postdocs, and graduate students to extend instructional impact by connecting innovative teaching strategies and instructional technologies

CENTER for **TEACHING EXCELLENCE** & **INNOVATION**

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Fantastic Images and Where to Find Them

Lael J. Ensor-Bennett, Visual Resources Collection (VRC)

What it is

High quality images are large in size, in-focus, and depict color and tone accurately. Useful images are relevant to your courses or research subject. Properly accessible images are easy to find and free of cost to you. Together, these traits reveal the truly fantastic digital image.

However, you may think that hunting the fantastic is often too inconvenient and time consuming. Searching on the open web may seem like the easiest and most expedient way to find images, but you may quickly find yourself in a murky swamp of images so small and blurry they cannot be projected in a classroom. You could also get lost in a deep forest of images that may be crisp and clear but have nothing to do with your original subject matter. Using the resources available through JHU and becoming familiar with the most reliable online platforms will turn an arduous journey into a pleasant walk through the course preparation garden.

Why does it matter

High image quality helps to ensure that ideas are effectively communicated. Additionally, with images representing art, the feeling of the original work can be more successfully conveyed to the students with higher quality images. Using high quality images in class will also help discourage students from using images of low quality; these are often tiny or contain obtrusive water marks.

Similarly, not finding the high quality images you need for class or finding only costly images can lead to either using low quality variants or choosing different images, which may not align well with your goals for the course.
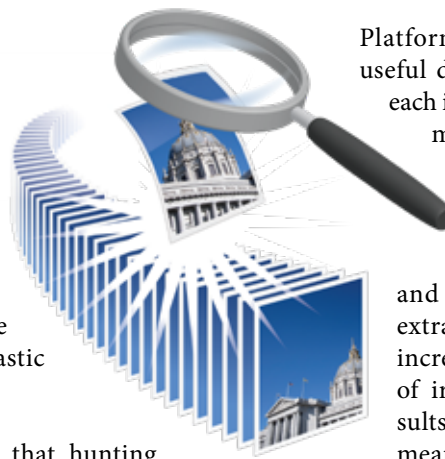
Platforms with the most useful data associated with each image make searching more efficient and effective. The most valuable records are accurate, concise, consistent, and specific. Too much extraneous information increases the possibility of irrelevant search results. Better data often means less time spent searching and more accurate results returned. Platforms that properly adhere to accepted data standards often have the ability to filter out unwanted results. For example, platforms that include an earliest and latest date for a record allow searches to be constrained by specific time periods. Smart search tools will greatly increase the chances of finding the material you want, allowing you to avoid generic results and find images depicting specific subject matter and themes.

How to use it

The following includes three approaches with special considerations for each when searching for truly fantastic images.

I. Image Resources at JHU

The Visual Resources Collection (VRC) in KSAS provides over 164,000 images to its primary image collection. The VRC is continually adding images to the local collection based on the requests and needs of KSAS instructors and often collaborates with faculty, students, as well as with departments across campus, such as the JHU Libraries and the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum. The VRC, and similar services like it at other institutions, can be a great place to start your search.

Faculty, students, and staff at JHU have access to Artstor (link below), a non-profit digital image library available through the JHU Libraries containing more than two million images. The VRC manages its primary image collection in Artstor, which is called the "JHU Visual Resources Collection." Below are some advantages to using Artstor.

- **Types of images**: Artstor images cover the history of art and include images from across the humanities and sciences. Artstor boasts collections from some of the world's leading museums, photo archives, scholars, and artists.
- **Searching and discovery**: With advanced search functionality and extensive data, it is easy to find images in Artstor. Artstor's filtering tools, advanced search, and authority linked metadata (ex. alternate spellings and names included in your search) allow for accurate searching.
- **Tools to organize**: Artstor allows for the creation of image groups that can be carefully curated and shared with your students. You are also able to download images in jpeg format or as ready-made PowerPoint files.
- **Rich image display**: Images may be viewed in a full screen IIIF image viewer with a side-by-side comparison mode.
- **Images for Academic Publishing**: The Images for Academic Publishing (IAP) program makes available publication-quality images for use in scholarly publications free of charge.

In addition to Artstor, JHU has access to other image databases. Links to these resources can be found in the VRC link referenced below.

II. Cultural Institutions and the Move to Open Access

In recent years, many major museums have begun to release large numbers of high quality images in their public domain collections as open access (making images freely available to everyone). For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Rijksmuseum, the National Gallery of Art, and the Walters Art Museum have robust search platforms with zoomable and downloadable images. Museum and library websites with high quality images are generally more likely to have images which accurately reflect the color, condition, and impression of a work of art.

Further, as of June 2018, the one million images in Public Collections on Artstor became accessible to anyone—subscribers and nonsubscribers alike—at library.artstor.org. Universities and institutions, including Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Rhode Island School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, and the Yale University Art Gallery, have contributed collections from their archives, libraries, museums, and galleries resulting in a substantial variety of subjects. These include: artist books, historical photographs, rare books, ornithology, postcards, and scientific papers and artifacts. While you may be able to access images from many of these institutions' websites, each one will have different interfaces, features, and levels of detail in their data records. Artstor provides a unified and consistent searching, viewing, and downloading experience.

In addition to managing and expanding its digital image collection, the VRC assists instructors with developing digital imaging projects, employing best practices for organizing and storing images, and using Artstor and image editing software. The VRC also gives in-class presentations on finding and using images in an academic context.

Aside from databases and cultural institutions, there are also a wide variety of Creative Commons platforms that have high quality images such as Europeana, Flickr Commons, and Wikimedia Commons. Creative Commons makes available free and simple to use copyright licenses, creating a standardized method to grant permissions for anyone to share and use an image. The experiences of using these sites will vary, but each record will include information about the image's Creative Commons status and terms for use.

III. Improving Searches in Google Images

While the VRC recommends first visiting Artstor, image databases, museum/library websites, and relevant primary sources, there are several way to vastly improve your search results in Google Images. Google Images Tools, found beneath the search bar on the results page, allow you to filter by image size, usage rights, type, and date, as well as make the image sizes viewable in the search results. Similarly, the Settings link allows you to access the Advanced Search which will give you more options to narrow your results to high quality and relevant images.

Other thoughts

Finding a high quality downloadable image on the open web, in a library database, or on a museum website does not guarantee how you can legally use that image. Users must consider a number of determining factors, including the copyright status of the image, whether the image is considered fair use or is provided via a complex licensing agreement, and how and in what context the image will be used. Rights will vary from image to image.

Additional Resources

- Visual Resources Collection at JHU provides guidance on Artstor, copyright, and using other image databases: http://guides.library.jhu.edu/visual-resources-collection
- Academic librarians at JHU can also aid with image searches: http://guides.library.jhu.edu/images.
- Artstor access for JHU: https://databases.library.jhu.edu/databases/proxy/JHU03382
- Artstor support site: http://support.artstor.org/

Author's Background

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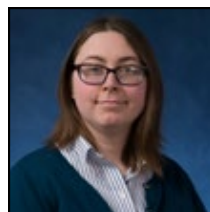
Lael J. Ensor-Bennett has been the Assistant Curator of the VRC since late 2013. The VRC provides images and teaching support for faculty and students in the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences. She holds an MA from the University of Delaware in Art History with a concentration in Early Medieval and Islamic art. As of March 2018 she is a member of the Visual Resources Association's Executive Board.