

# Ebook Platform Usability Report

Aggregators: A Case Study of EBSCO and ProQuest

## Ebook Usability CKG Members

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*Disclaimer:* As is the case with any interface analysis, the information and conclusions of this report are current only at the time of the creation of this document and will become increasingly out of date as the vendors change their interfaces.

November 2024

# Table of Contents

<b>Ebook Usability CKG Members</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Findings and Recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
Discoverability	6
Help and Guidance	6
Presentation and Layout	6
Navigation Features: Browsing, Searching, Downloading, and Printing	8
Browsing	8
Searching	9
Reading and In-book Navigation Experience	13
Book Landing page	13
Chapter landing Page	13
Online Reading Experience	14
Highlighting, Bookmarking, and Citation Export	16
Downloading and Printing	18
<b>ADA Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>New EBSCOHost Interface</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>EBSCO Mobile</b>	<b>26</b>
Reader Compatibility	30
<b>Final Recommendations</b>	<b>32</b>
Recommendations for UC Libraries	33
Recommendations for Both Platforms	33
Recommendations Summary for EBSCOHOST (New interface)	33
Recommendations Summary for EBSCO Mobile	34
Recommendations Summary for ProQuest	34

## Executive Summary

Following the University of California Ebook Usability Common Knowledge Group's (EUCKG) analysis of 3 publisher platforms (Cambridge, Elsevier, and Wiley) and the publication of our [initial report](#), we turned our attention to ebook aggregator platforms. Although only a very limited number of titles are purchased consortially through aggregators by the University of California Libraries, campuses rely heavily on ebook aggregators to provide access to ebooks for which we do not have access directly from vendor platforms. This may be because there is no vendor platform, because we are utilizing the DDA purchasing model from these aggregators, or because the vendor platform is, for some other reason, not a viable choice for individual book purchasing. For this analysis, we determined that the UC Libraries primarily use two major ebook aggregators: ProQuest's Ebook Central (EBC) and EBSCOhost for Ebooks (EH). These two platforms are the focus of this case study. We analyzed these platforms using similar criteria to those used in the first report, so that we could identify larger trends, helpful features, and areas for improvement.

We note that aggregator platforms face different challenges than publisher platforms, particularly given that they supply books from hundreds of different publishers. The format of the ebook and the usage rights and restrictions can vary greatly between publishers, leading to a less uniform experience for users. Books may be available in PDF, EPUB, and/or HTML formats; they may be DRM-free or downloading and printing may be heavily restricted; publishers may only offer a 1-user license while others allow for unlimited simultaneous users, to name just a few differences. While we found that the number of ebooks in different formats can vary greatly between the aggregators and publishers they work with, there is one positive: the percentage of books available DRM-free has been steadily increasing, as has the availability of books in both PDF and EPUB formats.

After completing our analysis, we determined that ProQuest scored significantly higher than EBSCO for ebook usability. This is mostly because the interface for ProQuest is tailored for ebooks while the Ebscohost ebook searching and reading interface appears tacked on to their journal article interface.

As with our analysis of publisher platforms, we also found that aggregators are working to update and improve their services, particularly their user interfaces. For example, in May 2023 [EBSCO announced](#) that it is changing the EBSCOhost user experience and interface<sup>1</sup>. By special request, EBSCO has put UC Libraries on the January 7, 2025 opt out list. Individual campuses may migrate sooner but we have been told that ideally UC Libraries should migrate by the end of July 2025. Independent of this timeline, **the Ebook Usability CKG team does not recommend migrating to the new EBSCOhost interface until certain key features are implemented: transferring existing user notes data in the My Notes area, annotations, and copy & paste text.** The ability to transfer existing patron notes is currently unavailable, and would require significant messaging and challenging instructions for patrons to migrate the data themselves. Further, Annotations are available in the current EBSCOhost Classic online reading interface and lack of these features in the new EBSCOhost interface will lead to a poorer patron experience. Copy

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<sup>1</sup> To access the new platform, go to <https://research.ebsco.com/>

& paste is only available for select ebooks and the lack of this common feature will also negatively impact patron experience.

# Methods

The EUCKG scored both vendor's ebook platforms according to criteria similar to its previous analysis of Cambridge, Elsevier, and Wiley ebook publisher platforms. We also reached out to both EBSCO and ProQuest to gather data on how much of their ebook offerings are available as DRM-free, and in which formats.

One significant challenge we ran into while testing these interfaces is that we do not have a lot of overlapping purchased content on these interfaces, so it was often difficult to reproduce certain experiences across all campuses. This led to us having to do a significant amount of our rating via screen sharing.

There is also a significant challenge in evaluation (and usage) in aggregator platforms because reader functionality is frequently tied to publisher limitations, format choices and access models, creating significant functionality variance across titles. Some of the variance in models that affect evaluation and usability include:

- Unlimited users vs limited users:
  - EH: Indicated by a note at the bottom of the book landing page and the top left of the online reader (1 user, 3 users, Unlimited)
  - EBC: Indicated under Availability at the top of the landing page (Your institution has access to # copies of this book)
  
- Publisher restricted printing and and copy/paste
  - EH: Indicated near the bottom of the book landing page and the top left of the online reader
    - Print/Email/Save # Pages and Restricted or Unlimited Copy/Paste
  - EBC: Indicated under availability (no copy, no print and download, etc...)
  
- EPUB or PDF or both
  - EH: Book format is unclear until the moment of download
  - EBC: Indicates format choice
  
- Public domain and Open Access Books (DRM vs. DRM Free)
  - EH - Variance in permissions even on public domain books (Jane Eyre has copy and paste limits, while Tales of the Fish Patrol does not) both require DRM software and login for download
  - EBC - Some public domain books also have DRM (Jane Eyre), although it is possible to limit searches to Unlimited print, copy, download and those books do not require login or DRM software for download.

These restrictions will be noted as to their effect on functionality in this analysis.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Discoverability

Not all of the books that are available in the various “OA” Collections are findable in UC Library Search. It might not be a good idea for all content to automatically show, but it might be good to select some titles systemwide.

## Help and Guidance

EH had significantly less guidance and context sensitive help, which strongly contributed to its lower overall score.

## Presentation and Layout

No advertisements were seen on either aggregator ebook platform.

### **Platform Landing Page**

Both ProQuest Ebook Central and EH show a top, horizontal interface menu bar that is present on the interface landing page, title landing page, and in the read online experience. Both landing pages have a carousel of featured titles, which campus admins cannot configure.<sup>2</sup> Information is laid out clearly when using the search box and reviewing search results. The ProQuest landing page layout is clear, attractive, and professional and it is easy to find important information. It is easy to get to the search or browse functionality. On ProQuest, ebooks can be browsed by broad subject areas, found as search results from a simple or advanced search, then further refined by access (Owned and subscribed to by my library / Unlimited Print, Copy, & Download). There is another filter checkbox “Course Reserves” that represents titles managed under a unique lending model that allows download for 1, 2, or 3 hours in order to replicate a physical course reserves model in a digital format. Availability of this lending model is dependent on acquiring the specific books that allow it. The EBSCOhost new platform landing page display is much simpler than the Classic version.

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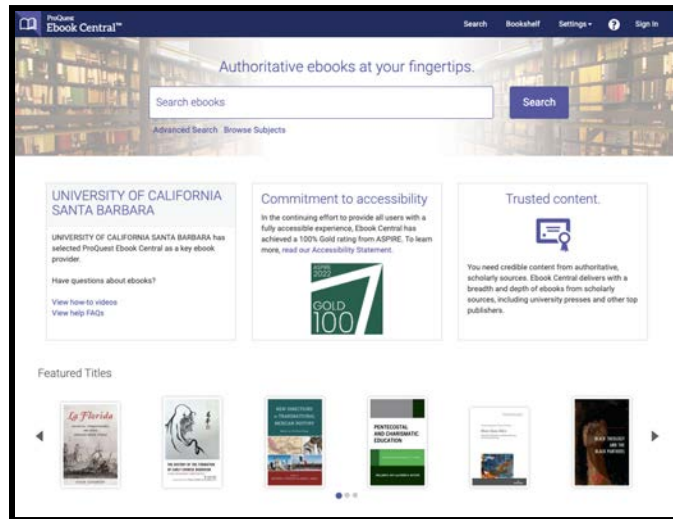
<sup>2</sup> Per email from ProQuest/Clarivate’s former Books Specialist Laura West on Nov 3, 2023, ProQuest Ebook Central’s featured titles are selected based on a predetermined formula: 1) The carousel shows the customer’s purchased/upgraded titles from the past 91 days; 2) Then the customer’s newly subscribed titles from the past 91 days; 3) And after that it will show the customer’s DDA titles. Per email from EBSCO’s Janeen Gieseke on Oct 16, 2023, an enhancement request can be made to configure the Highlights and Featured sections. However, EBSCO Classic will not be developed further and supporting recommendations for the new EBSCOhost platform may be a better choice.

## EBC

The main landing page for EBC is shown in Fig 1. Books can be searched, and a link is prominent for browsing. Links to guides are available and a carousel shows mysteriously selected books (recent, featured, etc.). The library is clearly identified. This is a pretty decent landing page.

**Fig 1. ProQuest Ebook Central**

Links differ by campus.

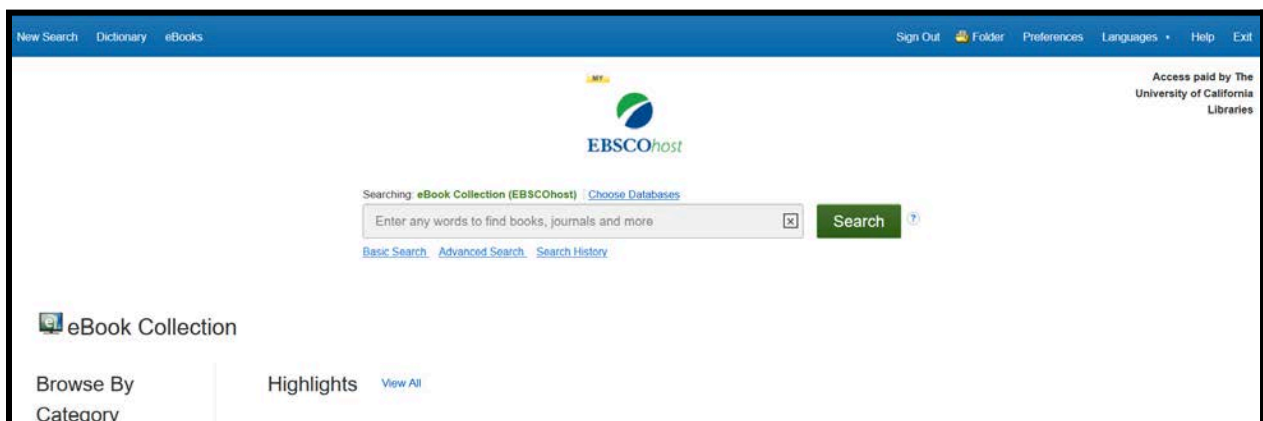


## EH

In EH (Fig. 2), ebooks can be searched or browsed by category. A mysterious highlights section invites users to click on random books. The library is identified. There are no additional links to guides and library information. This is also a pretty decent landing page.

**Fig. 2: EBSCOHost Ebook Platform (Classic)**

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost&defaultdb=nlebk>



## Navigation Features: Browsing, Searching, Downloading, and Printing

### Browsing

Both interfaces have browsing menus for their books which allow users to browse by category. The key differences are that EbscoHost's browsing menu is available on the front page of the interface, and has a simple list of subject options, whereas ProQuest Ebook Central requires users to click on a link to browse subjects and the subject list is large and nested. Both interfaces limit browsing to the subject index, but both offer robust options for filtering and sorting of results, once the subject has been selected. Neither has a particular advantage in browsing.

Fig 3. Browsing - EbscoHost

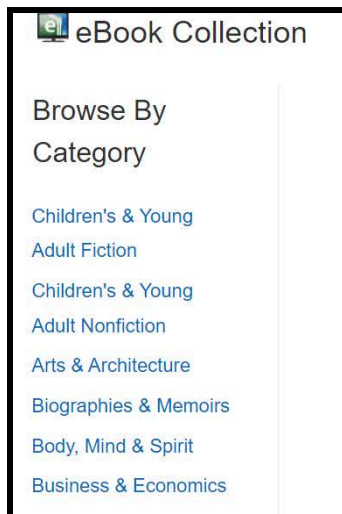
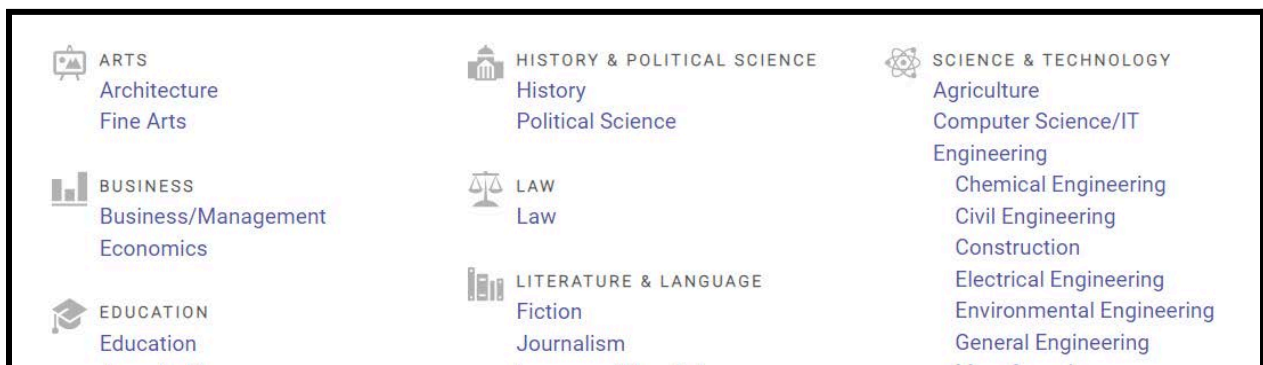


Fig 4. Browsing - ProQuest Ebook Central

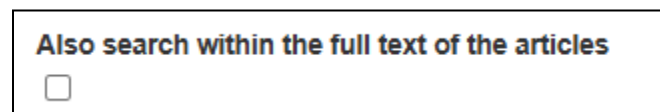




## Searching

Searching is one of the primary functions that differentiates PQ Ebook Central and EbscoHost. EBC has a few more fields for searching, such as LC Call Number, but most importantly allows the user to filter their results by EPUB vs. PDF, and whether the books are available for unlimited download. On the other hand, EH does allow filtering by publisher in the search results, which is good.

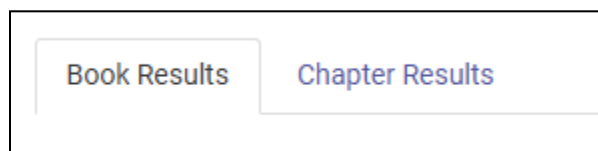
The most incongruent aspect of the EH interface for Ebooks is the number of references that are made to articles and other types of materials. The replaceable text in the basic search for EH says “Enter any words to find books, journals and more.” One of the search limiters for search is:



The only indication that this also means searching the full text of books is that there are so many more search results when this box is clicked. And in the middle of the search results

is a section for video results. It is also unclear what clicking on the box which says “Full Text” would do in this search since all of the ebooks are full-text.

The most significant example of EBC being purpose built for ebooks is that there is a tab in the results for chapters, which clearly indicates the specific chapter titles that matched the search terms.



Neither interface offers search term highlighting in the results, which is not optimal, although EH does offer an option to see the “most relevant pages” from the book.

## Search Results Layout


The search results layout for both ProQuest and EBSCO Classic show useful tools. For ProQuest, filter options are clearly laid out on the left hand side and include Year Published, Subject, Language, and Author. Sort options include Relevance, Publication Date, Title, Contributors, and Publisher. In EBSCO Classic, one can also sort by Relevance, Page Options, and Share. The EBSCOhost new platform search result page provides an additional filter button with choices for Date Range, Source type, Subject, Publisher, and Language.


In the new EBSCOhost platform’s title landing page, the full ebook download button is added next to the Access options button, grouping the different access methods by web access (in Access options button) and downloaded access (in Full eBook download by checking out the book on desktop or a device). The format types (PDF Full Text, EPUB Full Text) are now hidden inside the Access option button. This new design still does not address the problem with users being confused by the difference between PDF and EPUB.

Each interface displays an appropriate amount of information in the search results, e.g. title, author, abstract, etc., although the information on the EH results display seems inconsistent and slightly messier.

Each set of results has some interesting features. The EH result allows you to see the most relevant pages from the book, as mentioned above. The EBC search results have parts of the record hot linked. Clicking those links will bring up similar books.



Fig 5. Search Results Layout - EbscoHost

1. **Tales of the fish patrol** 



By: London, Jack. Champaign, Ill : Project Gutenberg. 1997. eBook. Description: Short stories based on London's own youthful adventures as an oyster pirate and later as a member of the **fish** patrol service. (AN 1033300)

**Subjects:** FICTION / Short Stories (single author); FICTION / Classics; Manners and customs--Fiction; Short stories

 [PDF Full Text](#)  [Full Download](#)



 [Table of Contents](#)  [Most Relevant Pages From This eBook](#)

Fig 6. Search Results Layout - ProQuest



**Nutritional Fish and Shrimp Pathology : A Handbook**

Tacon, Albert; Tran, Loc  
CAB International 2023

ISBN: 9781800629202, 9781800629219  
SERIES: European Association of Fish Pathologists (EAFP) Series  
EDITION: 1

Correct nutrition in farmed animals is essential to healthy stock and an economically sustainable high yield. In aquaculture, nutrition is particularly important as the costs of feed can be 40 or 50% of total production costs. In recent years, the aquaculture feed industry has advanced rapidly with ...

 Available



## EbscoHost:

- More formatting options for search results
- Most relevant pages from this book
- Slightly messier and less consistent record display
- What do “Full Text” and “Download Available” mean?
- Publisher filter
- Save search easily found (under Share)
- Only the licensed content is displayed in **EH** results, therefore access indicators are not used (e.g. available, not available). **Recommendation: We recommend making non-licensed content available for recommendation to purchase if possible, though defaulting to available content is preferred.**

Fig 57. Search Results Layout - EbscoHost

The screenshot displays the EbscoHost search results interface. On the left, the 'Refine Results' sidebar includes sections for 'Current Search' (with 'management' entered), 'Proximity' (set to 'management'), 'Expanders' (with 'Apply equivalent subjects' checked), and 'Limit To' (with 'Full Text', 'Download Available', and 'Exclude Abridged Titles' options). A date range filter is set from 1995 to 2023. The main search results area shows 'Search Results: 1 - 20 of 89'. The top result is '1. Henry's Clinical Diagnosis and Management Methods E-Book' by Richard A. McPherson and Matthew R. Pincus, published by Elsevier in 2017. It includes a book cover, a description, and subject terms: 'MEDICAL / Pathology; MEDICAL / Diagnostic Genetics; Medical laboratory technology; Diagnosis, ...'. Below the title are links for 'PDF Full Text', 'Full Download', 'Table of Contents', and 'Most Relevant Pages'. A second result, '2. 99 Tricks and Traps for Microsoft Project 365', is partially visible. A 'Page Options' dialog box is open over the first result, showing 'Result Format' options: Standard, Title Only, Brief, and Detailed (selected). The 'Results per page' dropdown is set to 20. Other options include 'Main Content Only', 'Filters and Main Content', 'Filters, Main and Secondary Content' (highlighted), and 'Main and Secondary Content'. 'Apply' and 'Cancel' buttons are at the bottom of the dialog.

## Proquest EBC:

- Allows for stemming/auto-stemming, search completion, ignoring punctuation in searches
- The Advanced Search option on the **ProQuest** platform includes a broad number of search fields, including title, series, Dewey, LC Class, LC Subject, Dates, ISBN, and access level.
- Linked terms in search results
- Users can limit a search by owned/subscribed or by the entire collection.
- Search history can be saved if logged into an account, though this functionality was not easily found.
- Full text searching across the platform is available.

Fig 8. Search Results Layout - ProQuest

The screenshot displays the ProQuest search results interface. At the top, it shows '62857 book results for Thinking Globally' with options to 'Save this search' and 'Edit this search'. Below this, there are filters for 'Your refinements: STATUS: Owned and subscribed' and 'Clear'. The interface includes a 'Refine your search' sidebar on the left with categories: BOOK STATUS (Owned and subscribed to by my library, Unlimited Print, Copy, & Download, Course Reserve), YEAR PUBLISHED (2023: 159, 2022: 429, 2021: 958), SUBJECT (social science / sociology / general: 2559, political science / general: 2245, business & economics / general: 2036, political science / international relations / general: 1871), LANGUAGE (English: 62609, German: 122, Spanish, Castilian: 37), and AUTHOR. The main results area shows three book entries: 'Food Safety : Thinking Globally Acting Locally' by von Holy, Alex;Lindsay, Denise (Emerald Publishing Limited 2006), 'Thinking Globally : A Global Studies Reader' by Juergensmeyer, Mark (University of California Press 2013), and 'International Organizations and Higher Education Policy : Thinking Globally, Acting Locally?'. Each entry includes a thumbnail, title, author, publisher, year, ISBN, a brief description, and an 'Available' status indicator.

# Reading and In-book Navigation Experience

## Book Landing page

On the book landing pages, both EBC and EH provide menu links for accessing, saving, and sharing content, satisfactory bibliographic information, and a list of book contents broken down into chapters or sections.

### **EBC:**

The ProQuest book landing page layout is extremely clear, attractive, and professional and it is easy to find important information. It is easy to find the search and browse information. The list of chapters in the table of contents is clear and informative. Each chapter shows the number of pages it contains and the page range. The page shows adequate amounts of useful bibliographic information such as print and ebook ISBN, print and ebook publication dates, LC, Dewey, and BISAC subject headings, publisher and author information. The book display also includes a clear description of access limits, if applicable, and share and save options such as citation, permalinks, and adding to a bookshelf. Previewing this information does not count as accessing the book content or using a user license. Recently, additional information has been made available on the page via Syndetics such as Almetrics, keywords and similar books.

### **EH**

The EH the book landing page is clear, and shows adequate amounts of useful information in the detailed record such as:

- ISBN (no distinction between print and e-ISBN)
- publication dates (no distinction between print and ebook)
- Subjects
- Publisher
- Author
- publisher permission (number of pages allowed for print/email/save) and concurrent access level (number of user access).

The book display also shows access options on the left panel (PDF Full Text, EPUB Full Text, Full Download), and a Tools menu on the right (Google Drive, One Drive, Add to folder, Print, E-mail, Save, Cite, Export, Create Note, and Permalink). Navigation on the page is fairly intuitive.

## Chapter landing Page

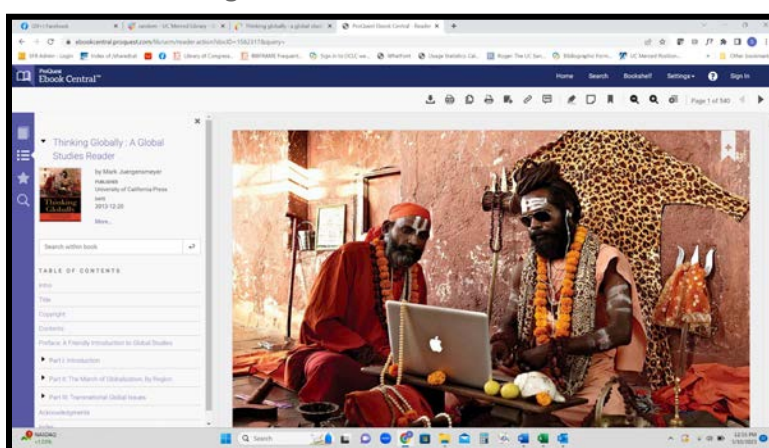
Unlike typical publisher ebook sites, EBC and EH do not have chapter landing pages so the user typically progresses directly from the book landing page to the online or downloaded reading experience.

## Online Reading Experience

The user begins the reading experience in one of two ways:

- At the beginning of the book
  - EH - The user clicks on their format of choice (EPUB, PDF) as available.
  - EBC - The user clicks on the “Read Online” button and may be prompted to select a preference between EPUB and PDF.
- At a specific chapter from the TOC on the book landing page. In some cases, book sections are hidden due to collapsing and expanding menus. This may take the user a little more time to find the chapter of interest. This is true in both interfaces.

Fig 9. Online Reader - ProQuest



In ProQuest, after clicking Read Online to access the book, the interface maintains a top blue horizontal bar of menu items for the platform, while underneath there is a white horizontal bar of menu icons for the book. Another left navigation menu is available for the book that includes Book Details, Table of Contents, Annotations, and Search within the Book. Figures and tables of information are optimized for optical character recognition. There is no option to download figures as image format, but users are able to take screenshots of figures and tables to preserve formatting. Copy & Paste is available on some books depending on publisher’s restrictions. While navigating the online reading interface, the current page is always visible in the top horizontal menu bar to help users understand where they are within the text. Some text in blue font vs. black in the Read Online layout communicates incorrectly the presence of a hyperlink. **Recommendation: present ProQuest linkable/nonlinkable text consistently and clearly.**

Both ProQuest Ebook Central and EBSCOhost Ebook platform (Classic) offer an annotations feature from their Read Online format. This feature requires users to create a personal account to save annotations. In ProQuest, users can copy and paste from their own saved annotations, and export all annotations from each book to a text file. However, once a ProQuest ebook is opened in Adobe Digital Editions, there is no option to add or retrieve annotations. In EBSCO Classic, users can copy and paste from their own saved annotations in a folder and print notes but cannot save into a text file or export. Unlike ProQuest, once

an EBSCO Classic ebook is opened in Adobe Digital Editions, the user can add and retrieve notes and bookmarks. Neither the new EBSCOhost platform nor EBSCO Mobile offer annotations.

***Recommendation: Since annotations are an important feature for users, EUCKG does not recommend adopting the new EBSCO platform until this feature is available, along with the ability to export annotations to a text file. Syncing annotation from a user's ProQuest account in Adobe Digital Editions would be a welcome feature.***

### **In book Searching**

Full text searching within eBooks is available for both interfaces with search terms highlighted.

### **Page Number Display**

Page numbering is inconsistent in both ProQuest and EBSCO Classic. In ProQuest, between Read Online and downloaded content opened in Adobe Digital Editions, the page numbering is the same. Page numbers are displayed inconsistently when comparing a downloaded EPUB in Adobe Digital Editions to its online counterpart. For example, for some titles ProQuest starts numbering front matter with page 1, which does not match what other ebook platforms do. This means that user-created annotations or citations may not lead the user back to the page they were interested in. Only some books have index page number references that are blue hyperlinks, which only work in Adobe Digital Editions but not for Read Online. Alternatively, users can manually type in the page number of interest in the top horizontal menu bar to jump directly to the content, or perform a keyword search in the full text search.

In EBSCO Classic, page numbering is inconsistent, varying from book to book. EBSCO's online version may follow the print book pagination by numbering the frontmatter, table of contents, and preface with roman numerals and starts content with page 1. The downloaded ebook in Adobe Digital Editions provides the print pagination followed by the Adobe Digital Editions pagination (in parenthesis) which starts numbering with the first page of front matter as page 1 (e.g. Cover (1/316)). The pagination of the notes and bookmarks in Adobe Digital Editions follows the Adobe Digital Edition pagination instead of the print version. My Notes in the EBSCO online version displays the page number (following the print pagination) where the note was taken, while the View Context link only brings you to the cover of the book and not the specified page. ***Recommendation: In My Notes, the View Context link should additionally link to the specific page of the annotated text, instead of the book cover.***

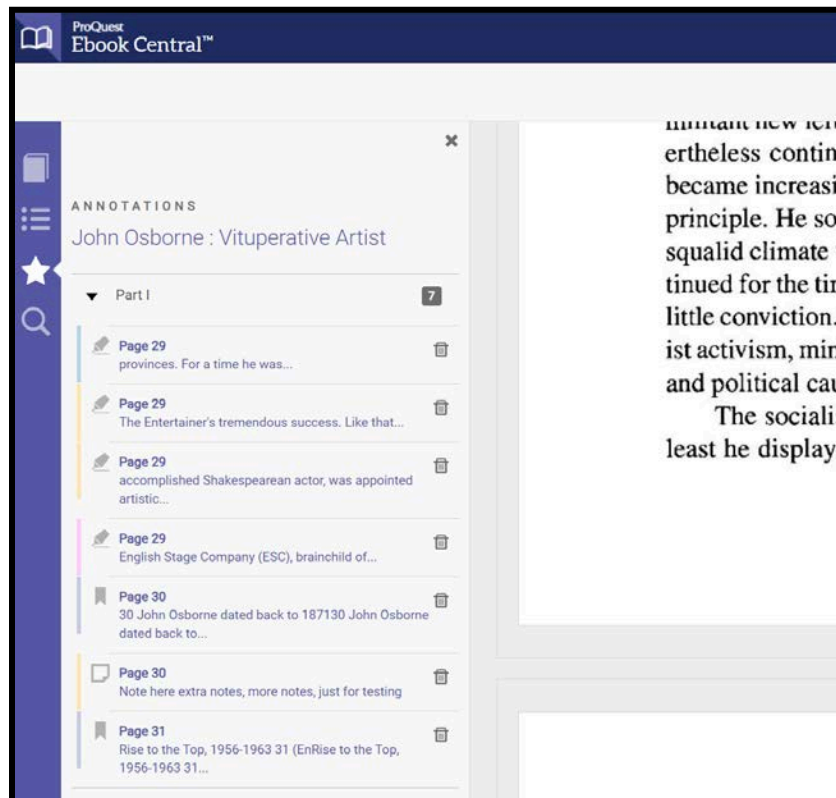
## Highlighting, Bookmarking, and Citation Export

Both EBSCO and ProQuest provide tools that allow the user to interact with ebook content. As a platform dedicated to ebooks, ProQuest's EBook Central succeeds in providing more robust tools for users, while EBSCO lacks some of the desirable features for e-book readers. Both platforms require the user to be logged in to take advantage of highlighting, bookmarking, and exporting features, which is expected. However, EBC uses CAS authentication, while EH requires users to create (and remember) a new login.

### Highlighting and Bookmarking

For highlighting and bookmarking, ProQuest excels while EBSCO seems to lack these features. For example, ProQuest includes three colors of highlighter plus the ability to create notes and annotations for the highlighted text. Bookmarking is available as a simple flag in the upper right corner of the page. Users can bookmark either by clicking on the flag on the page or in the reader tools. These highlights, notes, bookmarks, and annotations appear clearly in the left-side menu (see image below).

Fig 10. Highlighting, Bookmarks, and Notes - ProQuest





For EBSCO, there are no highlighters or bookmarks available with the online reader. However, books that allow for a PDF download would have highlighting and other features available through the PDF reader.

### **Copy and paste**

#### **EH**

For EBSCO, some books will not allow copy/paste of text. This is made clear on the bottom of the book landing page and the top of the online book reader. When copy is allowed, the user can select text and right click to copy. When copy is not allowed, the user cannot select text. When allowed, the paste includes the citation from the book in both APA and MLA style.

#### **EBC**

Currently copy and paste is only available for some of the titles. This is made clear in the Availability section of the book landing page. This is controlled by the agreement between PQ and the Publisher. Copy and paste is accomplished by highlighting text and selecting copy. If it is not available it will be gray.

### **Citation Export**

Both platforms provide excellent options to export citations, and include the most common citation formats such as APA, MLA, Chicago, and Vancouver. EBSCO offers a few more formats than ProQuest, plus gives the edition of the style manual for each format. EBSCO also includes a disclaimer when exporting citations:

NOTE: Review the instructions at EBSCO Connect and make any necessary corrections before using. Pay special attention to personal names, capitalization, and dates. Always consult your library resources for the exact formatting and punctuation guidelines.

***Recommendation: For EBC, the citation format list should specify the version of each citation format. For example, MLA 10 instead of just MLA.***

### **Reading Experience Errors**

One of the primary reasons Ebsco scored lower overall is the number of glitches and errors we encountered during our testing. Sometimes it was impossible to log in. Sometimes the books would not allow download. Sometimes clicking the back button would create a weird error.

## Downloading and Printing

Both **EBSCO** and **ProQuest** allow for downloading and printing content, but differ in how that is accomplished. Proquest offers chapter printing from the table of contents on the book landing page and both interfaces allow downloading from the book landing pages and printing and downloading from inside the book.

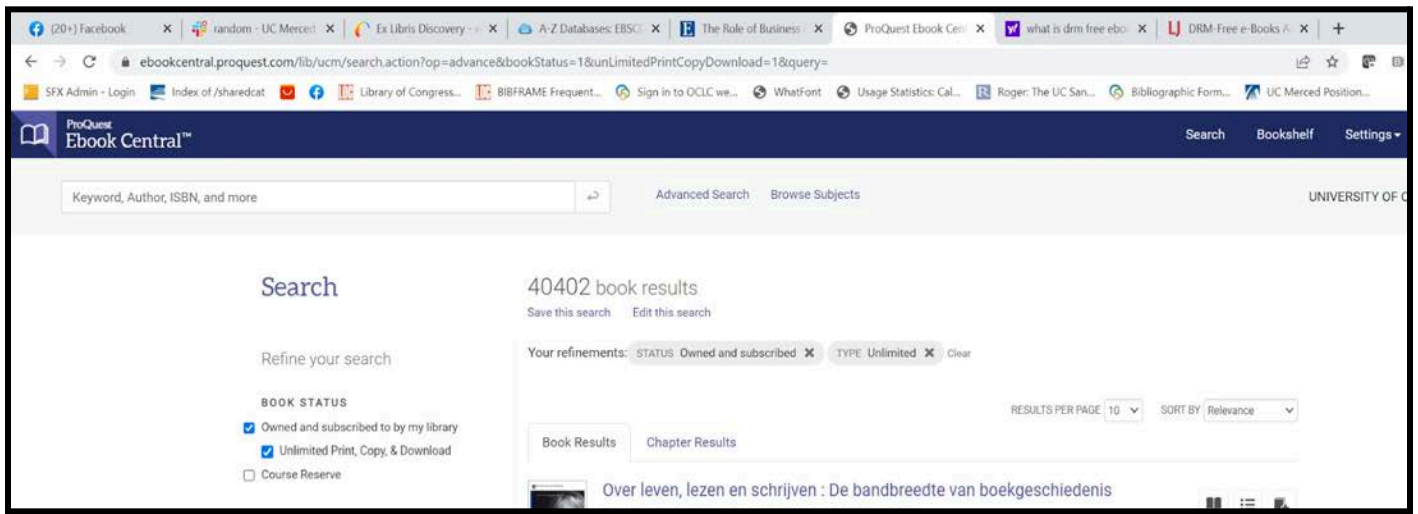
The appearance of the downloaded pages attempts to match how the content would look in print book format (PDF).

Each interface offers multiple forms of downloads:

- Page/Chapter/Section PDF Download (DRM Free) - Limited by publisher to 0-33% of the book
- Limited full book reader - downloads into specific reading apps such as Adobe Digital Editions or Bluefire
- DRM-Free full Book Downloading in PDF (very limited titles)

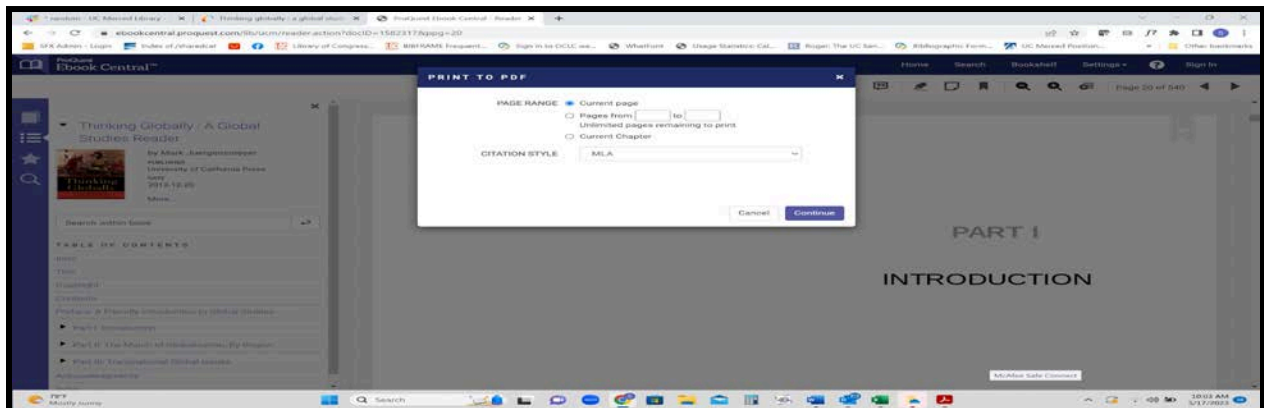
ProQuest has a selection of DRM-free books in PDF format, which is also available as a search filter.

Fig 11. Search limiter in EBC showing limitation to DRM free titles



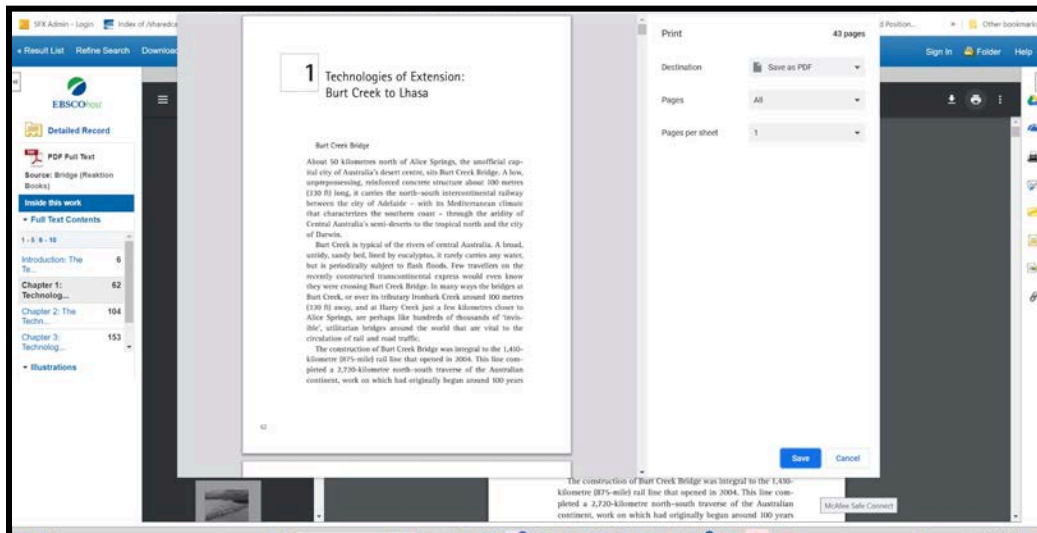
In EBC, downloading chapters or books with DRM requires logging into the system with CAS authentication. The login box will pop up when clicking on any downloading or printing buttons (except on DRM free titles). Clicking on the PDF icon brings up the Chapter Printing Dialog Box. The only option is to print the current chapter. Clicking on the printer icon brings up a more flexible PDF creation box which allows current chapter or page ranges. This is fairly confusing, since they both create PDFs.

Fig 12. Download Options - ProQuest



In EH, selecting chapters or pages to download is easy within the pop-up box. The save and print options are nearly identical in what they allow, but intuitively move the user forward toward either saving or printing. EH also allows saving to Google Drive.

Fig 13. Download Options - EbscoHost



### Full Download - PDF vs EPUB, non-intuitive vocabulary, and the requirement of other Apps

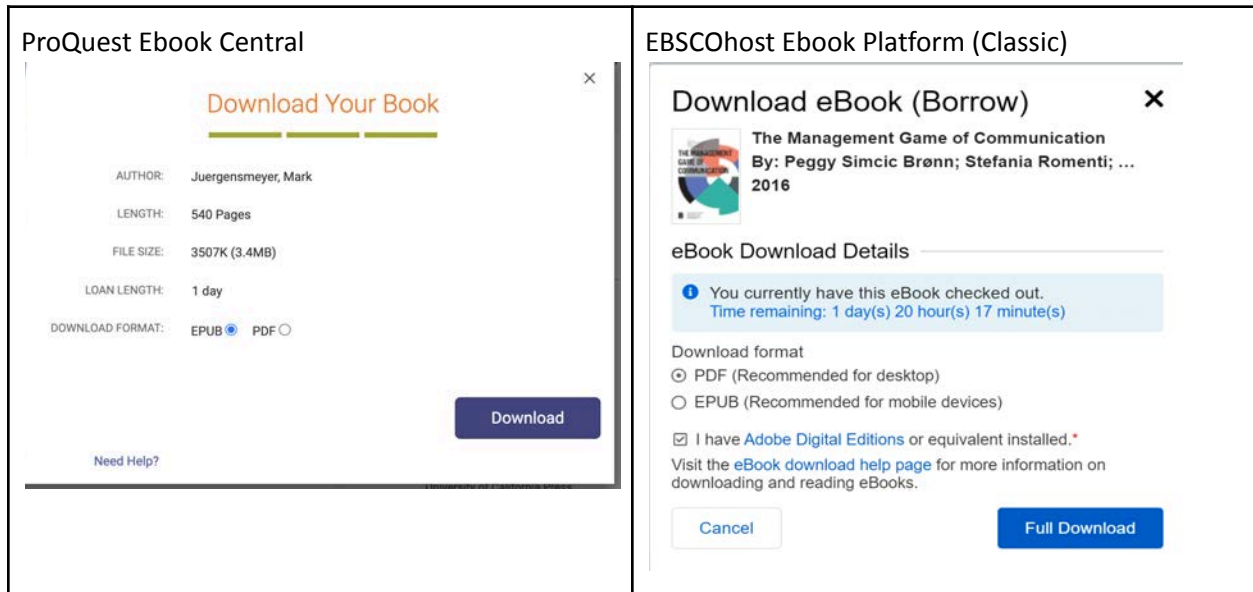
Both EBC and EH use non-intuitive terminology to discuss download options. “PDF” can refer to the DRM free version of PDF that is downloaded in pages chapters and sections. Full ebook download with DRM options are referred to as PDF and EPUB but the downloaded file types for both formats are actually \*.acsm, which requires Adobe Digital Editions. Proquest never really explains what an EPUB is, as opposed to a PDF.

***Recommendation: in the dialog box for download, include the file format that is being downloaded right away and reiterate the requirement of third-party software.***

Fig 14. PDF and EPUB download options. Users click the “Download Book” link for the entire ebook or the “Download PDF” link for each chapter title listed to see format options. Adobe Digital Editions is a required separate software download for \*.acsm files. An \*.acsm file is the only option for full book download (whether DRM-free or not) and chapter downloads for DRM titles (user-limited licenses).

Ebscohost does a better job of explaining why a user would choose one over the other.

Fig 14. Full-book Download Options, ProQuest vs. Ebsco



The greatest limitation of aggregator platforms is the need for additional apps to read most of the full-book downloaded content.

EH even puts DRM by mistake on books in the Public domain which consequently requires special software for reading, log in for downloading. These books should be reported to EH to remove the DRM.

# ADA Assessment Criteria

In the EBSCO ebook platform assessment, we noted that EBSCO describes accessibility compliance levels that cover compliance of its various ebook interfaces, the content of the ebooks themselves that are provided by publishers and other aggregators, and third party tools that they utilize on their interface. [As they explain on their website](#), they have more control over the accessibility of their platform's interface while the accessibility level of their content and third party tools are more variable since the content is coming from different publishers and content providers, and the tools are created and developed by third parties. There are currently three different entry points for users to search and locate ebooks: The EBSCO eBooks classic interface, the new EBSCOhost interface, and EBSCO Mobile. In terms of their ebook formats, EBSCO notes that, as of February, 2024, [55% of their ebooks](#) are in EPUB format which the W3C recommends for the most accessible reading format.

In the ProQuest Ebook Central platform, their team also describes the accessibility of both their publisher content and their interface in a high degree of detail. They [note where their interface is compliant with WCAG 2.1 AA standards and where they are not](#). ProQuest takes great care to map out how users who need accessibility features can navigate and access content. They also note how their product is tested and with which combinations of tools and browsers. One feature that they do not have is a Text to Speech feature. However, they do indicate how a user can access this feature via certain browsers.

Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates (VPATs) describing how their platform's interface and content comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 and 2.1 are available for both the EBSCOhost classic interface and the new EBSCOhost interface. A VPAT for EBSCO Mobile was not found on their website but was [available upon request](#). EBSCO's interface VPATs declare that they are mostly compliant with some partial support at Level A and AA. They note where they have control over an issue and their plans to address the issue and a general timeline. They also note when they do not have control over the issue due to publisher content or third party ownership of a tool. The mobile application is also partially conformant with WCAG 2.1 Level AA with the majority of compliance issues pertaining to the content.

ProQuest also has a VPAT that they recently updated in December, 2023. This VPAT notes that they are mostly compliant to WCAG 2.1 Level AA with the majority of compliance issues pertaining to the content. This is similar to EBSCO's VPAT. Of note, ProQuest states that there are some places in their application where information is not fully ordered in a hierarchical way and that they have plans to address this issue in 2024. They have also provided instructions on how to work with certain content formats in Text Only mode to access the structure of content more fully. They also have some color contrast issues that they have a roadmap date to address. They also call out some keyboard accessibility issues surrounding their PDF reader that they hope to address through 2024. In general, their VPAT indicates continuous progress on known issues.

As of February, 2024, the University of California’s accessibility policy states that electronic information must meet WCAG 2.0 at level AA success criteria. (Note: the University of California’s WCAG standard will be updated to WCAG 2.1 level AA compliance by the end of 2024.) Based on review of EBSCO’s VPATs and accessibility statements, EBSCO’s ebook experience does not fully meet the University’s WCAG compliance standards. ProQuest’s Ebook Central platform also does not fully meet the University’s WCAG compliance standards.

Overall, however, we note that when not fully compliant, [EBSCO](#) and [ProQuest](#) offer remediation paths for users to request an accessible copy of an ebook. This additional request pathway in addition to their continued accessibility interface evaluations and work plan to fix issues within their platforms does demonstrate EBSCO’s and ProQuest’s commitment to working towards a full WCAG level AA compliance.

***Recommendation: We recommend that UC libraries creates an accessibility compliance body that conducts annual monitoring to confirm that accessibility areas that EBSCO and ProQuest identified to fix within a given timeframe has been completed and that any new features or interfaces have been created that these features and interfaces have been tested and evaluated according to current WCAG standards. We also recommend that EBSCO, ProQuest, and the library community continue to apply pressure to publishers and third party tool developers to produce content or tools that fully meet accessibility standards and that where possible they eliminate use of third party tools that fail WCAG Level AA standards.***

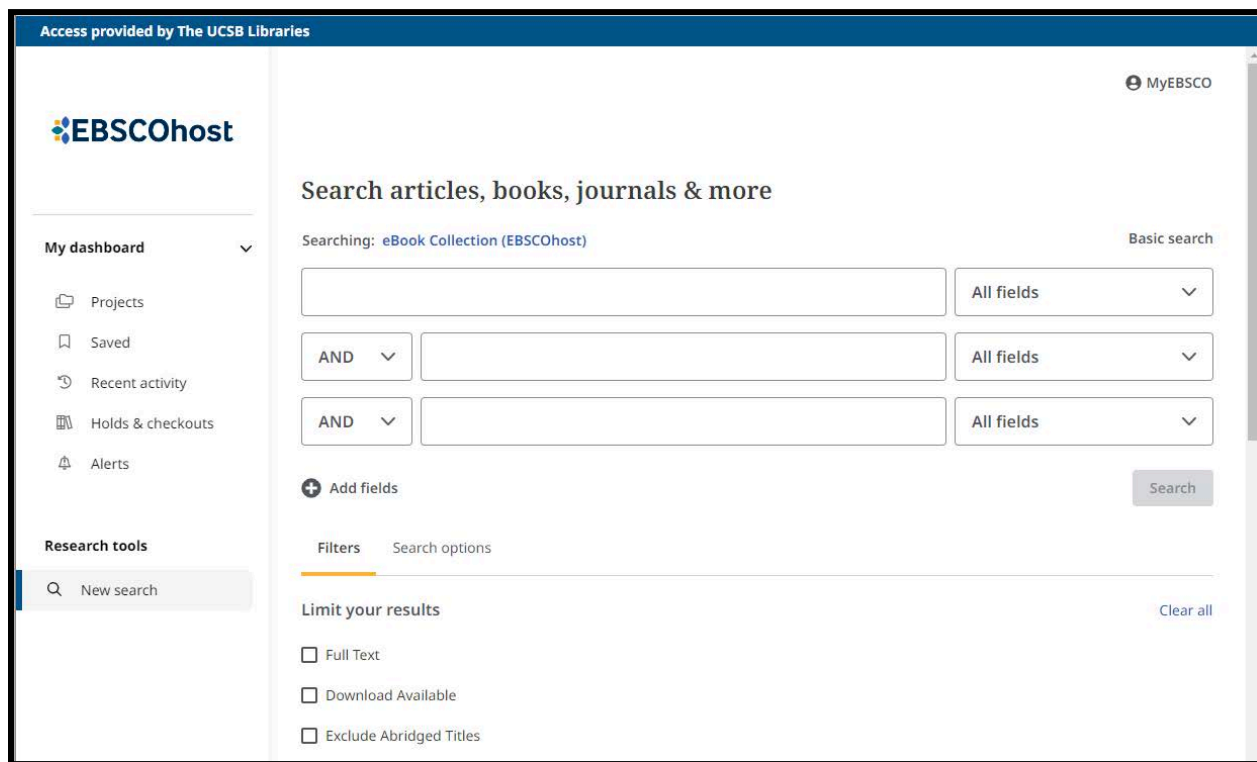
# New EBSCOHost Interface

The EUCKG tested the new interface preview from November 2022-October 2024. The appearance of the new interface feels more spare and less cluttered than the current view. EBSCO's new platform no longer requires separate permalinks since the browser link is functional.

In the new EBSCOhost interface, the landing page navigation is now replaced by My Dashboard on the left panel (Fig 15).

The new Advanced Search Menu takes a step back from the current Advanced Search in some ways and a step forward in others. It starts with "Search articles, books, journals & more" even though the user is in the ebook collection. This is confusing. Unchanged from Ebsco Classic is the option for "Full Text," which is assumed in ebook platforms, while "Download Available" is just confusing. On the other hand, it does have a cleaner look. (Also Fig 15).

Fig 15. Advanced Search - EbscoHost (new interface)



At that time, most of the same functionality for searching, printing and downloading was comparable with the exception that a few key features are still not available that were in the Classic interface. When downloading from the book details page, filenames for downloaded titles include Author, Year, Title, and Chapter name if relevant, which was felt to be an overall improvement. Only subscribed content was viewable. **Recommendation: Allow for the ability to search the whole database of eBook content.**



In the new EBSCOhost platform, copy and paste functionality has issues. After highlighting the text to be copied, there is no copy button on the page. It can only be copied by right-clicking with a mouse and selecting copy from the option menu.

### **Book landing page**

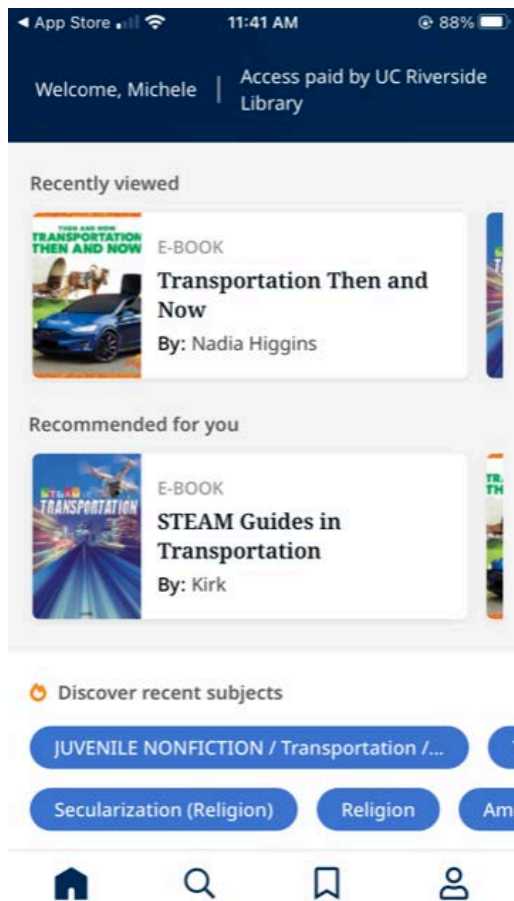
In the new EBSCOhost interface, the book display for access options has been changed to the middle panel with two buttons: “Access Options” (pulldown menu for PDF Full Text, EPUB Full Text) and “Full Download.” This new book page layout is supposed to address the confusing terms of PDF Full Text and EPUB Full Text of the EBSCO Classic, but does not seem to be effective. The tools presented include “Save Item” (saves the book to the Dashboard under Saved), “Cite,” “Add to Folder,” “Share” (Google Drive, OneDrive, Create link, E-mail), and “Download.”

# EBSCO Mobile

The free app for EBSCO content can be downloaded onto a mobile device and accessed by personal login and password even when not authenticated. At a guess, the login would need to be done at least once from campus or VPN before working remotely.

The EBSCO mobile landing page has “Recently Viewed,” “Recommended for You,” and “Discover Recent Subjects” for all formats (Fig 16).

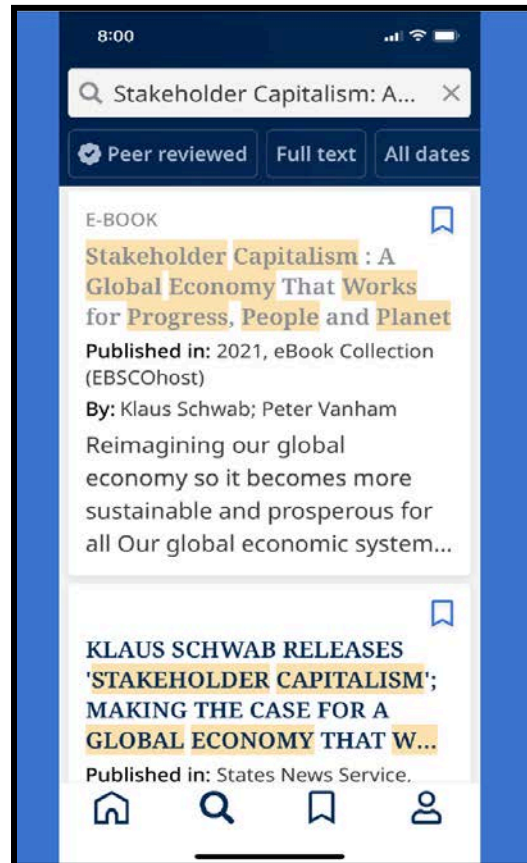
Searching is done by click on the search icon on the bottom of the page.



Though it currently lacks an Advanced search option, a limited number of search filters can help narrow a search to Peer-reviewed content, Full text availability, and Date of publication

The Search box, limiters and results are shown in Fig 17.

Fig 17. Search and Results - Ebsco App

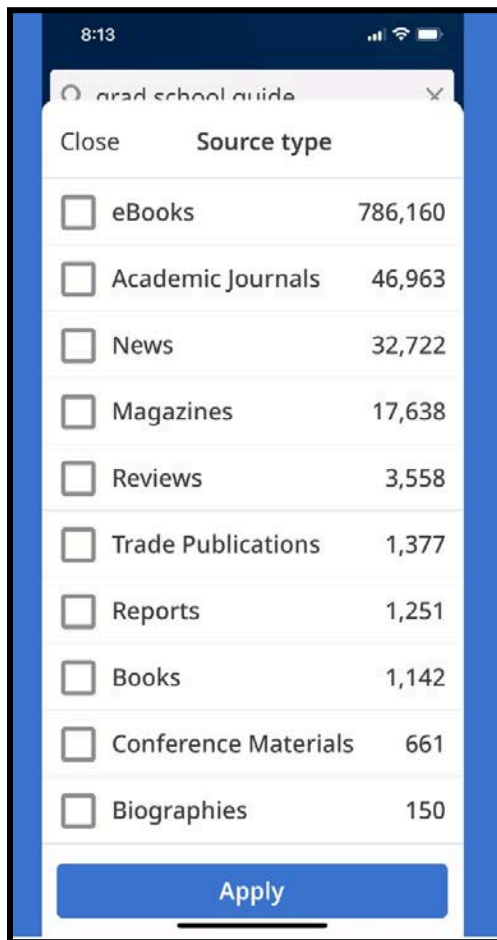


After searching, the user can limit to Source/type of content. The “Source Types” filter is extremely difficult to use. Source Types are displayed by the number of items found in the initial search. Also, new searches always default to showing all material types ordered by the number of results for each Source Type. Because of this, books are usually at the bottom of the list due to lower number of records. Once the user chooses a source type, they can only add additional Source Types by deselecting the current types, applying that change and then filtering again. **Recommendation: EBSCO should update the main mobile landing page to make filter by ebooks more visible and understandable.**

Furthermore, Source Types include both “Books” and “ebooks” (Fig 18). This is confusing. Also both options include articles, reference entries as well as eBook content where the search term is found.

**Recommendation: Source Types should be better defined and search results categorized appropriately.**

Fig 18. Source Types - Ebsco App



In EBSCO Mobile, the book landing page is clear and useful (Fig 19), and shows condensed information such as ISBN (no distinction between print and e-ISBN), publication dates (no distinction between print and ebook), subjects, and author information, but no publisher information. It includes Abstract and EBSCO Collection.

Users may have options to view “PDF Full text” “Listen” or “Online Full Text” (EPUB). The PDF is difficult to read on a phone, so “Online full text” is a better option for phones.

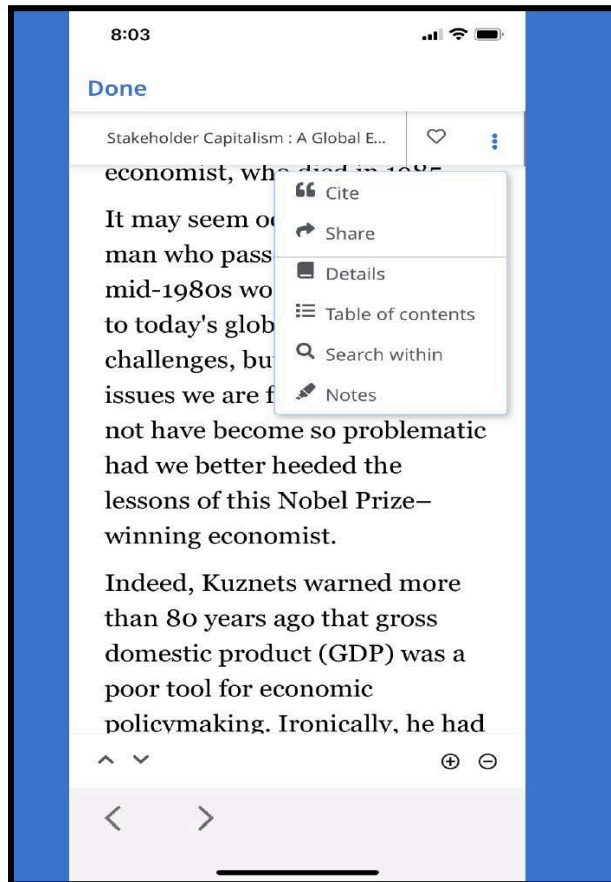
Fig 19. Book landing page - Ebsco App



Downloading and printing are not available in the EBSCO Mobile platform.

Tapping on the screen while reading “Online full text” brings up some additional tools. These options differ between iPhone and Android. For iPhone, Copy, speak and share are available when text is selected. Android options are shown below (Fig 20). Once shared, a link is created to the content which can be sent to another device to download and print. Appearance, page/chapter selection and limits on download/printing are the same as on the regular EBSCOhost platform.

Fig 20. Ebsco App - Additional Tools



### Recommendations

- Improve the mobile search function by Source Types to make it more user friendly and allow users to re-select source types when adjusting their search criteria.
- Define Source Types to make the categorization apparent to the user (ebook vs. book is confusing)
- Check that EBSCO Mobile users on Android mobile devices are able to see options to download ebooks

## Reader Compatibility

Books from the two aggregators are available for a variety of devices, including mobile devices, in several different ways:

- Individual chapters can be downloaded as DRM-free, and read on any device with a pdf reader.
- An entire book can be read online as PDF and/or EPUB in the ProQuest or EBSCO web-based ebook reader, or “checked out” and downloaded into a DRM-enabled reader such as Adobe Editions or Bluefire.
- It is also possible to use EBSCO Mobile to read EBSCO books.
- Neither aggregators’ books are integrated into the Palace Project app.

Each methodology has advantages and disadvantages and strengths and weaknesses across vendors.

### **Downloading Pages/Chapters/Sections DRM-Free**

In EBSCO, the methods used to download are “Save Pages,” “Email Pages” or “Print Pages” as well as clicking on the down arrow next to the chapter name while in reader view.

In ProQuest the same thing is accomplished by clicking on download PDF next to the chapter name in the TOC or selecting the PDF symbol in the reader view and selecting “Current Chapter” in the reader view.

These files are readable with a number of PDF tools, though some may be better than others for annotation, highlighting, etc..

### **Reading Online**

In both ProQuest and EBSCO, whether PDF or EPUB (or both) are offered is determined by the publisher. EPUB is preferred for smaller devices. It should be noted that offering (even some) books in EPUB is an advantage that both of these vendor aggregators have over native publisher interfaces, which quite often seem to offer only PDF.

### **Full Download (Checkout)**

There is no essential difference between EBSCO and ProQuest in relation to DRM Download features, only between Bluefire and Adobe Digital Editions.

***Recommendation: Copy and paste text option for ProQuest limited license ebooks in Adobe Digital Editions.***

### **Kindles and Other e-Readers**

A user of a Kindle Fire or other similar e-reader would be able to use both the ADE/Bluefire apps and EBSCO Mobile. ***Recommendation: Remove the suggestion of Bluefire Reader for Android devices, as it is no longer offered.***

### **Reader Recommendations**

- Mobile apps should be designed specifically for ebook reading, or with ebook reading needs taken into account (e.g. search filtering for ebooks, epub formats available, and robust highlighting and markup options)
- Palace Integration, or some other form of massive ebook reader integration would mean that users do not need to download and learn many different ebook reading platforms and apps.
- Employ or advocate EPUB as a more standard format, with clear explanation for epub vs pdf at the point of selection



# Final Recommendations

## Recommendations for UC Libraries

We recommend that UC libraries creates an accessibility compliance body that conducts annual monitoring to confirm that accessibility areas that EBSCO and ProQuest identified to fix within a given timeframe has been completed and that any new features or interfaces have been created that these features and interfaces have been tested and evaluated according to current WCAG standards.

## Recommendations for Both Platforms

- Make EPUB a more available format, with a clear explanation of the difference between pdf and epub at the decision point.
- Improve PDFs so that they are more interactive (for example, hyperlinks, citation, annotations).
- Explore DRM-Free options when available
- Make copy/paste more available, even if it has to be limited for limited books.
- We recommend that both EBSCO and ProQuest, and the library community, continue to apply pressure to publishers and third party tool developers to produce content or tools that fully meet accessibility standards and that where possible they eliminate use of third party tools that fail WCAG Level AA standards.

## Recommendations Summary for EBSCOHOST (New interface)

- Enable My Notes (available in Ebsco Classic) where highlighted text can be copied and pasted into a new note (includes book citation and hyperlinked page number) in the new Ebsco interface.
- Include the ability for individual user's My Notes to transfer from Classic to the new EBSCOhost user interface prior to migrating users to the new interface.
- In My Notes, the View Context link should additionally link to the specific page of the annotated text, instead of the book cover.
- Include the annotation feature on the web interface and the ability to export annotations to a text file in both the mobile and online platforms.
- Allow discoverability of non-licensed content in search results, but make the default be off.
- In the dialog box for download, include the file format that is being downloaded (i.e. \*.acsm EPUB or \*.pdf PDF) and reiterate the requirement of third-party software.
- Work with publishers and libraries to improve PDFs so that they are more interactive and accessible (for example, hyperlinks, citation, annotations); make ePub a more standard format, with clear explanation; and explore DRM-Free options when available.
- Remove the suggestion of Bluefire Reader for Android devices, as it is no longer offered.

## Recommendations Summary for EBSCO Mobile

- Improve the mobile search function by Source Types to make it more user friendly and allow users to re-select source types when adjusting their search criteria.
- Define Source Types to make the categorization apparent to the user (ebook vs. book is confusing)
- Check that EBSCO Mobile users on Android mobile devices are able to see options to download ebooks

## Recommendations Summary for ProQuest

- Show more clearly on the book landing page what format is available for each book (PDF/EPUB).
- Specify the version of each citation format in citation exports. For example, MLA 10 instead of just MLA.
- Add the ability to sort or toggle between the bookmarks, highlights, or annotations in the online reading left-side menu.
- Include the ability to sync annotations from a user's EBC account in Adobe Digital Editions.
- Hyperlinks and page numbering presented consistently across publishers and book formats, including when viewed in Adobe Digital Editions.
- Nice to have: a Read Online feature to search the annotations, and syncing annotations between EBC and Adobe Digital Editions.