

Book Browsing at CCEL

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One of the aspects of CCEL's mission is to encourage people to read these classic books, so one of the key functions of the CCEL website should be a browse experience that works well and is enjoyable. However, an advisory board member commented that discovery in fact doesn't work very well. More context is needed in browse lists. Simply seeing a list of authors or titles tells nothing about why you might want to read a book. There are few good tools for helping find something interesting to read, depending on a user's needs and desires. This document describes a new book browse capability at CCEL designed to address these issues. By adding a good browsing and discovery facility, we could replace all of the different browse pages and the recommendations page. This facility could also replace the "read" homepage.

For each book we could define a full-width, 1.5" high view that contains lots of context—cover art, title, author, date written, first part of blurb, subject, star ratings, importance, popularity last week/month/year, estimated error rate, reading level, first couple lines of blurb, etc.—visually interesting, with enough data to encourage browsing and aid discover. We could get star ratings for many books from the Goodreads API. We could also use popularity at CCEL as a component.

We could then offer a single browse page showing the first few books. The page could be ordered by author, title, popularity, importance, date of first publication, etc. There would be widgets for narrowing the list of books shown: a place to type in a keyword, a subject selector via LC call number, language, formats available, whether recommended by ccel, etc. There would also be a widget for controlling the sort order: alphabetically, by popularity, rating, etc. It should be possible to construct a URL to display a particular list of books, such as the most popular of the last week.

In order to be a comprehensive tool for finding good Christian books, we'll have to display copyrighted modern classics as well as PD books included in our library. However, the number of such books in the list should be strictly limited so that most of the books in the list are in the library.

This arrangement doesn't work well for sidebar ads, but it would be a natural for inline ads the same size as book entries. We could one ad on each browse page couple books down.

We could also offer a topic drill-down widget on the research page. This widget would offer high-level subjects from the Library of Congress hierarchy, with users able to click to drill down to more particular subjects, ending in books.

Book information pages

After looking through a browse list, users may click on a book for more information. These book information pages also need more context, so that users are better able to decide whether to read the book. They should be more encouraging of users to read more about the book and think about it, and they should offer more information about the book, in a way that encourages browsing. We need a full treatment for books.

The full treatment should be graphically interesting and have many sections, like Amazon's book pages or Hymnary.org hymn pages. Long sections should show just the first two inches or so of content, with a link to expand or bring you to another page with full details.

To help users decide whether to read a book, helpful context could include

- Cover art, title, author, LOC subject, language, date of first publication
- Measures: readability, importance of book, popularity, proofing status, number of citations, length of Wikipedia article, star rating from CCEL users
- Search inside this book
- Blurb about the book
- Other references – what we're reading articles, mentions in topical articles
- A note about the author, with picture and link to author page
- Info about this edition and other editions available (automatically generated)
- People, places, concepts addressed in this book (automatically generated)
- Links to reviews at Amazon or elsewhere
- Link to Wikipedia article
- Formats available
- Study guide (for use in small-group study, etc)
- Amazon, CBD links for buying in print

Reviews of books should be a key component, but we have few reviews at CCEL. However, Goodreads has many reviews for important books, and they have an API that would make it possible for us to include helpful reviews from that source.

Therefore, full treatments of books should include the following elements:

- Blurb
- Cover art
- OCLC id number (for MARC record)
- Wikipedia or VIAF identifier
- Amazon, CBD identifiers
- Optional: notes (expert-written literature guide for terms and books)

Note that we are already accumulating much of this data, and some may come from the semantic treatment process.

The pages described here should be fully responsive, working on computer screens all the way down to mobile phones, and showing high-resolution graphics on high-resolution screens. Click targets should be big enough for fingers. There should be user testing on desktop screens, tables, and smartphones.