

Using Browser Extensions to Enhance Your Online Research

Your web browser is your primary window to everything the internet has to offer. Many small and free tools exist that can expand how you use this window, and they can help you with the research you do. The most common browsers today are **Google Chrome**, **Firefox**, **Safari** (only for the Mac), and **Internet Explorer** (and its recent replacement, **Microsoft Edge**), but many other browsers exist. Browsers can be modified using tools called *extensions*. Extensions are browser-specific, so each browser creator has a website that displays extensions and offers them for download. Search for, say, “Chrome extensions” or “Firefox extensions” to find the appropriate collections. After installing any extension, you’ll see a small square icon for it, usually to the right of the URL address bar at the top of your browser.

“**Library Extension**” is one such example. This extension will tell you which libraries near you have a given book when you search for it on Amazon and a few other book-focused sites. You define which public libraries you want it to search (no academic libraries are searched with this extension), and then a new box appears on the Amazon page that shows search results. “Library Extension” does not require that you create an account, and is completely free. (Search for “library” in the extensions store, or visit <https://www.libraryextension.com>.) Click on “Add to Chrome” and it will install itself. At present, Library Extension only has a Chrome extension, but Firefox is supposed to release a Firefox extension in the near future.

Zotero is a common and popular bibliographic management tool; it also has a Chrome extension that simplifies adding an entry to your bibliography when looking at a listing of an article, book, website, dissertation, or other resource. Zotero is free, and requires a download of the main program from <https://www.zotero.org>. It offers extensions for all the major browsers.

Many people swear by **Evernote**, the very popular note-storing application (<https://evernote.com>). It offers several extensions, including **Evernote Web Clipper** (all major browsers), which collects web pages and screen shots of web pages to your Evernote account. Several extensions will use **Google Translate**’s program to quickly provide translations of web page text. If you do a lot of legal research, **Jureeka** (<http://jureeka.blogspot.com/>, available for Firefox and Chrome) may be useful. This extension identifies legal citations in text and generates links to online versions of the cited statutes or court cases.

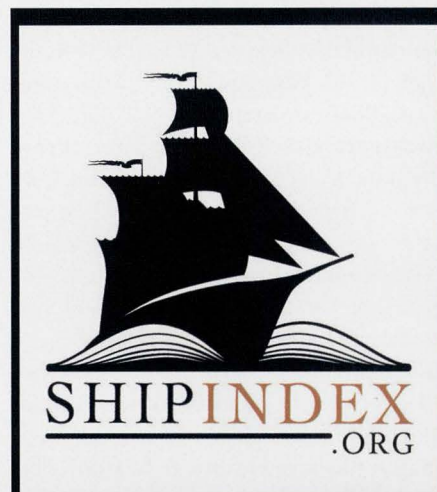
Pocket (<https://getpocket.com/>) stores web pages for easy reading later. It’s free, and can be used without an account, but if you are logged in, you can save articles across devices—after you save certain web pages on your desktop, you can read them later on your laptop or phone.

Generally, extensions will not cause problems, but be careful and read reviews about specific extensions before installing them. Each extension inserts itself into the browsing process, so it has access to a lot of data and can be a legitimate security risk. Some may insert ads unexpectedly.

Less intentional problems can also appear. I found a useful extension for Chrome that highlights text and is helpful when creating a screen shot with certain text emphasized. Later, all research databases from a specific vendor failed to return any results at all. I contacted the database vendor, and they told me everything was working properly. When I tried a different device, the database worked fine. I tried using Firefox, found it worked OK as well, and realized there was a problem with the Chrome installation on my desktop. I then disabled the highlighter extension and found the database worked fine. Eventually, I deleted the extension completely. In this case, I think the two programs just didn’t agree with each other.

Generally speaking, however, extensions can be useful tools to improve how you and your browser explore the internet.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at peter@shipindex.org. See www.shipindex.org for a free compilation of over 150,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓



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