

Looking for a Good Book: Searching for Fiction using Computer-Mediated Retrieval Mechanisms

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Abstract

Finding a “good” fiction book is perhaps more challenging than finding subject-specific information. Multiple fiction access points have been proposed in the literature, though due to their complexity, few were adopted for library use prior to the advent of the World Wide Web. A comparison of Web-mediated sources of book information finds that online booksellers make greater use of fiction access points than libraries or reader advisory databases, but that some fiction access points are seldom used at all.

Fiction Access Points

Fiction access points can be divided into two types: objective (facts about the book or author) or subjective (feelings or judgments about the book). Objective search points proposed by previous investigators include 1) known author, 2) particular setting, 3) genre, and 4) subject/topic coverage. Subjective search points included 1) mood of reader, 2) emotional content the author intended to convey, 3) pacing of the book, and 4) intended audience of the book.

From 21 books and articles analyzed, a list of 140 criteria were identified. After testing and reduction, our final list was ultimately comprised of 28 fiction access points, both objective and subjective.

Method

A content analysis method was used to determine whether fiction access points are being used in WWW-mediated retrieval mechanisms.

Sources: online library catalogs, reader advisory databases, online booksellers

Subjects: 28 novels published in the United States within a 23-year period (1977-2005)

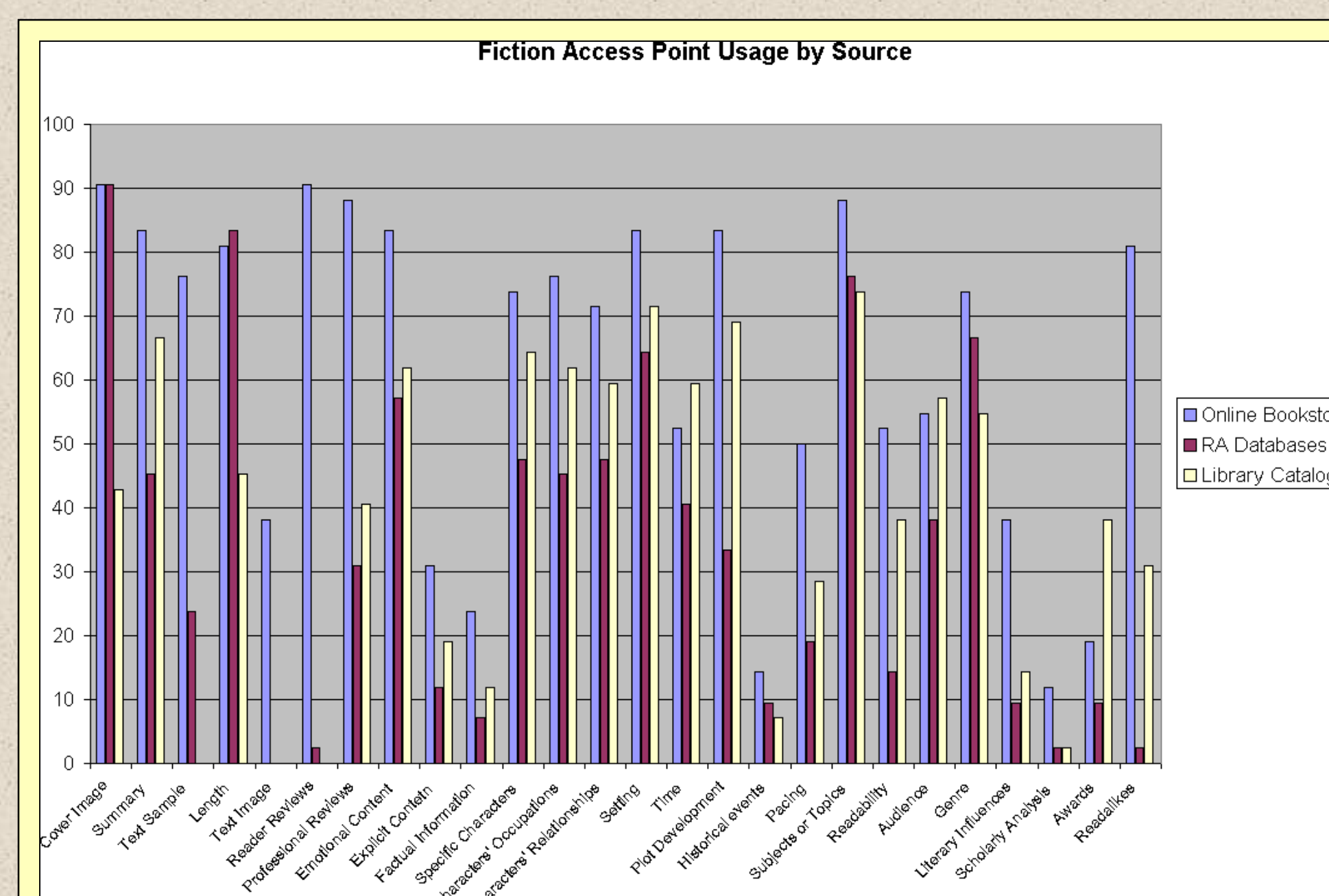
Instrument: a list of 32 fiction access points and schemes summarized from 100 years of library & information science literature.

Introduction

Numerous schemes for improving subject access to fiction have been proposed in the past 100 years. Recent research suggests that for readers seeking “good books,” the criteria for making that decision may be more subjective. Ultimately, very few fiction access schemes have been widely adopted.

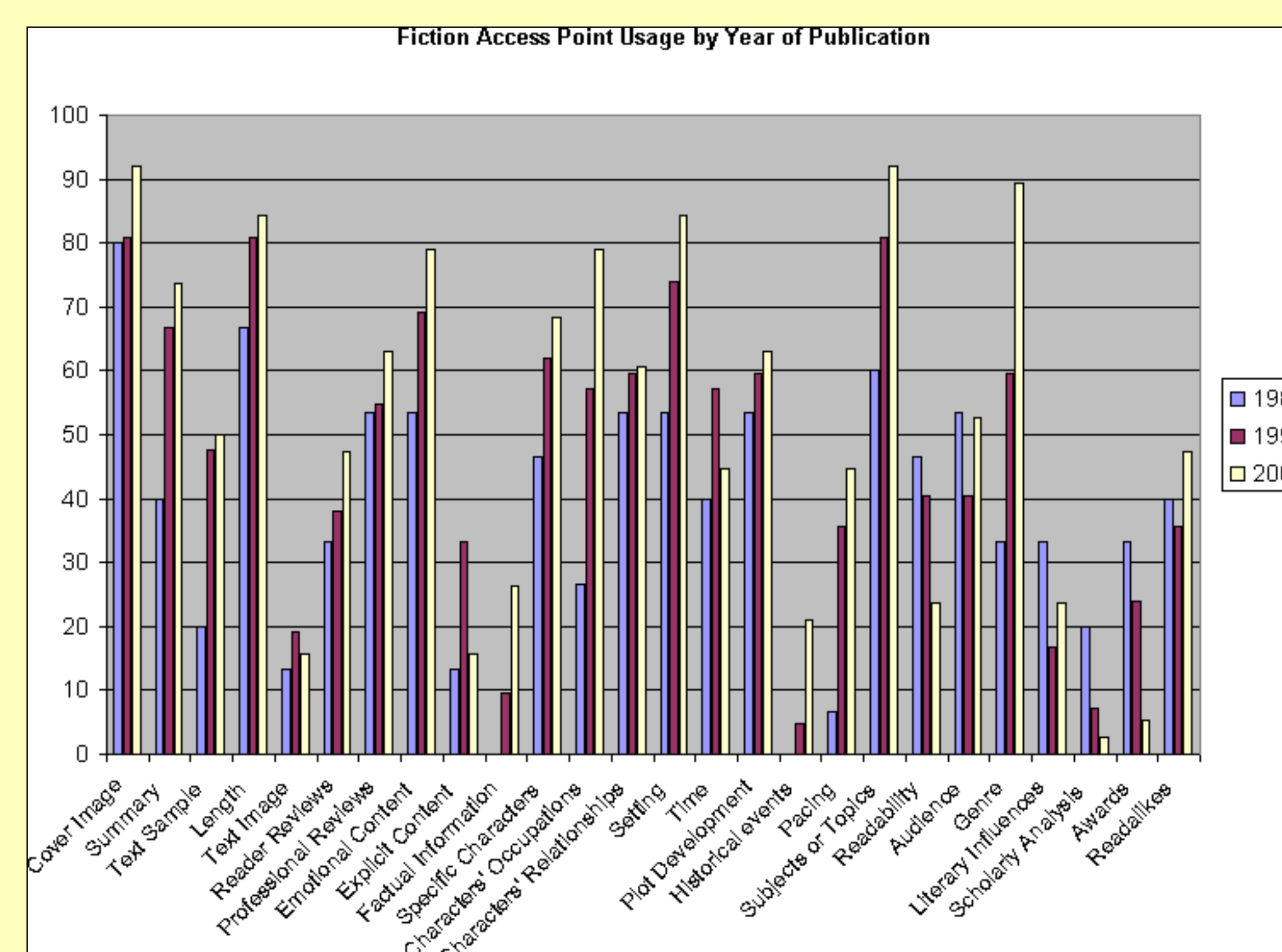
However, the development of commercial sources for seeking works of fiction, such as online booksellers, and the increased need for commercial fiction-finding tools in libraries, present opportunities to incorporate previously developed and new fiction access points. We compared bibliographic records between three different types of sources, guided by two research questions:

- Are fiction access points utilized in computer-mediated environments such as library catalogs, reader advisory databases, and online bookstores?
- Are there differences between access point utilization between these sources?



Online bookstores make much greater use of fiction access points than libraries or reader advisory databases. However, factual indicators such as setting and time get treatment in library catalogs and databases.

Older books are less well-indexed in all sources. However, older books have more coverage in such categories where time lag is essential, such as determining literary influence, scholarly analysis, and receiving awards.



Results

Preliminary results suggest the following: Fiction access points are utilized inconsistently in Web-mediated book information sources. Newer works have more access points than older works. Further, subjective, connotative access points are usually inferred through text about the book – not actually articulated as a search point.

Information sources that are working from a profit motive use more fiction access points than those that do not. Online bookstores use more fiction access points than do reader advisory databases, and reader advisory databases more than library catalogs

Another important difference that was revealed was the creation of a community around books and readers’ perceptions of those books. This primarily was found in online bookstores. Subjective responses to books was often found in professional and reader reviews.