ABSTRACT. AgeLine is the definitive source for information related to people over the age of 50, and for issues concerned with aging. AgeLine is available free from the AARP Web site, and it provides an excellent search engine with many search options. AgeLine is also available by paid subscription from major database vendors. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service. 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. AgeLine, AARP, aging, gerontology research, geriatrics research, database searching
INTRODUCTION

AgeLine is a database produced by the Research Information Center of AARP, and is available without charge from the AARP Web site. AARP is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization dedicated to the improvement of life for people 50 years of age and older. AgeLine is also available via paid subscriptions from CSA (Cambridge Scientific Abstracts), Dialog, Ovid, and Silver Platter. The AARP interface will be the main subject of this column, with a very quick look at the CSA interface. CSA is used by many universities for access to other databases besides AgeLine, such as ERIC, PAIS International, PsycINFO, Social Services Abstracts, and Sociological Abstracts.

AgeLine is updated monthly, and coverage goes back to the year 1978. Please note that there is some selected coverage of indexed publications from 1966-1977. AgeLine indexes journal literature, books and book chapters, research reports, gray literature, educational videos from different organizations, including AARP, plus selected consumer content. In October 2004, ProQuest Information and Learning partnered with AARP to include doctoral dissertations that go back to the year 1999 from Dissertation Abstracts International. Gerontology and aging-related content from psychology, social work, economics, sociology, political science, health sciences, and other disciplines is the focus of the dissertations indexed in AgeLine, as it is the main subject area of the whole database.

As of December 2004, AgeLine consists of more than 75,000 records and indexes the contents of over 600 journals. The list of journal titles currently indexed is available from the “About AgeLine” section of the AARP AgeLine Web site at <http://research.aarp.org/ageline/jrllist1.html>. AgeLine uses controlled vocabulary from its own Thesaurus of Aging Terminology. This thesaurus is available in print from AARP and is also searchable via the multiple options search by browsing the subject field, and also in the advanced subject search mode of the AARP version of AgeLine. Both AARP AgeLine and CSA AgeLine records contain hotlinks to the descriptors from the Thesaurus indexed in each record, so that any descriptor can be searched by clicking on it.

SEARCHING AARP AgeLine

When you first visit the AARP AgeLine home page, you immediately see the logo for the AgeLine Database—“Books and articles about life at 50+.” Directly under this logo is the link to Search AgeLine® (see Figure 1).
Also available for immediate viewing here are some specially featured new research and policy publications, news about the AgeLine database’s recently updated features, a link for the latest AgeLine e-newsletter, plus links to Web resources on aging, and even excerpts from the appendix of a book by Harry Moody on how to research a term paper in gerontology! You get all of this before you even begin your search. Needless to say, the CSA interface for AgeLine looks somewhat plain and boring compared to this AARP site. It is the standard CSA search engine used for all CSA databases. Of course, this interface does ensure uniformity in searching the other CSA databases and allows for ease in multi-file searching. However, I was surprised to see when I clicked on the (CSA AgeLine information button) in the advanced search mode that the information found here has not been updated since October 2001, with only half of the current 600 titles indexed. Also, AARP is incorrectly listed in the CSA information as the American Association of Retired Persons. This is no longer the legal name of the organization and has not been used for about six years.

**AARP AgeLine Search Mode Options**

The AARP AgeLine search menu (see Figure 2) offers four different search options:
1. Basic
2. Advanced
3. Multiple-Options
4. Advanced Subject

For the novice user, there is a helpful section devoted just to explaining the various features and advantages of each search mode that is aptly called, “Which option is best for me?” AARP also provides more in-depth search help via links on both the top and the bottom of the main search page to “HELP Topics.” These Help Topics include extensive tips on the best use of the four different ways to search, plus specific hints on how to refine your search, such as how to use Boolean operators and the AgeLine Thesaurus. All of the search modes carry a twenty-minute time-out for inactivity, and there is a prominent warning to that effect on the main search menu screen. It is useful to see a statement clearly displayed on the far right side of the home page with the date that AgeLine was last updated.

Another useful feature in all of the AARP AgeLine search modes is the optional ability to limit search results by:

- Year;
- Audience Type: Research/Academic, General/Consumer, Public Policy, Professional/Provider;
- Document Type with the default to All Documents and specific limits to Book/Report, Chapter, Dissertation, Journal/Magazine Article, or Video;
- Maximum Items Displayed with the default set to 200 and the option to display 400, 600, or no limit to the amount of available records displayed.

**AARP AgeLine Basic and Advanced Search**

The AgeLine Basic Search is meant for very simple searches (single word or phrase) about one topic, such as advance directives, baby boomers, dementia, etc., and where the term is typed into a single search box. Only information about the older population group is indexed in AgeLine, so there is no need to qualify by age. A search query of more than five words in the basic mode will most likely result in no hits, and you will get a screen with links for helpful tips on how to improve your search strategy and retrieval (see Figure 3).

A search for “signs of mental deterioration and memory loss” brought up this no retrieval message screen. Besides helpful hints on clearing searches and other basics, there is a link to the guide, “Why am I getting zero results?” for tips on increasing retrieval. Searchable fields here are title, author, journal
FIGURE 2. AARP AgeLine Search Menu Options

AARP AgeLine

Please choose a search option below:

- AgeLine BASIC Search
- AgeLine ADVANCED Search
- Search by MULTIPLE OPTIONS: Title, Journal/Magazine, Author, Subject, Any Word
- AgeLine SUBJECT Search

Welcome! You are now connected to the AgeLine database as an active searcher.

If you are inactive for more than 20 minutes (not keeping or moving among AgeLine screens), you will be automatically disconnected to allow others to search.

Please click Exit Search to disconnect.

AgeLine is the property of AARP and is copyrighted by AARP. Refer to Webpage copyright statement for permissible uses of the database.

Reprinted with permission.

FIGURE 3. AgeLine Basic Search Message for Zero Retrieval

AgeLine Basic Search

YOUR SEARCH DID NOT RETRIEVE ANY RECORDS.

- Try clicking Clear Form between searches.
- Check your search query for spelling errors.
- If you want to AND two or more search concepts, see the Advanced Search screens.
- For assistance, click HELP FOR THIS SCREEN or click the help topic WHY AM I GETTING ZERO RESULTS?

* Click for brief instructions at bottom of this page.
* Important: Before starting a new search, click Clear Form.

Reprinted with permission.
title, abstract, and subject fields. Both the Basic and the Advanced modes use the Boolean NEAR to locate words within five words of each other, in either direction, of the phrase that is entered into the search box. Both modes also truncate automatically. However, in basic mode, words are truncated only after the seventh letter, but in advanced mode, words are truncated after the fifth letter. This means, for example, that the word “guide” would not be truncated using the Basic search, but it would be truncated in the Advanced search. Thus, the terms “guides” or “guiding” and so forth, would not be retrieved in the Basic option, while the variations would be found in the Advanced version. A search for “assisted living guide” in the Basic mode returned 104 hits, while the same search in Advanced mode found 220 results (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. Search in Advanced Mode for Assisted Living Guide or Guides

AgeLine Advanced Search

- Click for brief instructions at bottom of this page.
- Important: Before starting a new search, click Clear Form.

AgeLine Search: guide

Example: long term care, health care

AND OR NOT

AgeLine Search: assisted living

Example: guide

AND OR NOT

AgeLine Search: assisted living guide

Example: coverage

Limit Results: (optional)

Year: from through

Audience type(s): Research/Academic General/Consumer Public Policy Professional/Provider

Document type: All document types

Maximum items displayed (most recent first): 200

Enter 1-4 words per search query (upper or lower case). To perform Boolean OR, enter semicolon (;) between search queries in each box. Click on AND, OR or NOT to link search boxes with chosen Boolean operators. To narrow your search, fill in boxes under Limit Results. See Help Topic Using Boolean Operators to Search AgeLine for more information.

Important: Before starting a new search, click Clear Form.
If you want to be sure to get all word variants of a term containing less than five letters, the convention in the Advanced mode is to enter the term followed by a semicolon, which serves as a Boolean OR, e.g., baby boom; baby boomer. The Advanced mode provides three different search boxes with a choice of connecting the terms entered into these boxes with any of the Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT)—more than just the one search box provided in the Basic search.

**AgeLine Multiple-Options Search**

AgeLine’s third available search mode, the Multiple-Options Search, allows for a great variety of search methods—by Title, Journal Title, Author, AgeLine Subject heading, and Any Word. The Boolean AND can be utilized to further refine the search. This search option may be used in the way that the PubMed Citation Matcher is used to verify citations by entering whatever information is known. A quick way to find the article by Anthony Mann on Cognitive Function that appeared in a geriatric journal is to enter these terms in the Author, Title, Any Word, and/or Journal Title box, if all correct information is available (see Figure 5).

This Multiple-Options Search function can also be used to browse the indexes of the first four search fields by clicking on the desired link on the left side of the search screen, either Title, Journal Title, Author, or Subject. If you want to see the journals available in this database with the journal title, “Journal of Geriatric . . . ,” click on the Journal Title hotlink and enter a letter or as much of the name of the journal as you would like to see (see Figure 6). Check the box of as many journal titles as you wish, click on the “Paste” button and your selections will be entered into the journal box, along with the semicolon to OR the titles if there is more than one.

**AgeLine Thesaurus Search**

The AgeLine Thesaurus can be searched by clicking on the Subject link on the Multiple-Options Search page, and selecting one or more subjects from the more than 2,000 controlled vocabulary subject headings available here. Multiple postings are again automatically separated by a semicolon that serves as the Boolean OR operator when pasted into the Subject Search box.

**Advanced Subject Search**

The fourth and final AgeLine search function, not to be confused with the Advanced Search, is the Advanced Subject Search. This search mode is for
searching only the AgeLine Thesaurus’ assigned subject headings. Each AgeLine record is indexed with six to fifteen subject headings to describe just the major focus of the book or article. The Thesaurus is searched here in the same way as in the Multiple-Options Search by clicking on the Subject hot link and browsing the index of the controlled vocabulary terms. There are three search boxes here (unlike the five in the Multiple-Options Search mode), but all can be combined using the Boolean AND, OR, NOT by clicking on the appropriate radio button (see Figure 7).

While searches will be understandably limited by restricting to the Thesaurus’ subject headings, it is sometimes difficult to find the exact term needed without the use of a permuted index. The browse index function here is strictly an alphabetical list. This can be problematic if you are searching, for example,
for guides, and you do not know that guides are indexed in the AgeLine Thesaurus as consumer guides, personal guides, and professional guides. In many cases, it seems more prudent to use the combined approach available in the Multiple-Options Search, where it is possible to search by keywords and subject headings, along with the other search fields. As with any database, it can take a bit of getting used to all the available options, but AARP’s AgeLine offers a good choice to both experienced and inexperienced searchers alike.

**UPCOMING NEW FEATURES IN AgeLine**

In 2005, AARP’s AgeLine team will be implementing a new and more flexible version of the Cuadra Associates’ STARWeb software that is currently used. The new version will enable the inclusion of a basic search box on the
AgeLine home page, but the basic structure of the database won’t change. Plans are also underway to explore how to make AgeLine via the AARP site compatible with Reference Manager and ProCite.

**CONCLUSION**

With the aging of the “boomer” population, the increased demand and cost for the care of the aged, and the uncertainty of Social Security benefits, it is most timely to have free access to AARP’s AgeLine database. This database is a rich resource that provides a wealth of current information on these topics and more, and it has much to offer to both professionals and consumers alike.
CONTACT INFORMATION

AARP
Research Information Center
601 E Street, NW
Washington DC 20049
ageline@aarp.org
1-888-687-2277