

Book review

Hedda Shulz, Ursula Georgy: From CA to CAS on-line, Databases in Chemistry. 2nd ed., Springer-Verlag, New York Berlin Heidelberg, 1994, 311 pages, 174 illus./Hardcover US \$59.00, DM 98.00 ISBN 3-540-57483-2, ISBN 0-387-57483-2

The aim of this book is to teach the reader how to develop effective strategies for searching on-line and printed literature. The authors emphasize (1) developing systematic search strategies *before* the search begins and refining the strategy as the search proceeds, and (2) being knowledgeable of the content and organization of the database being searched. They present many sample searches through the literature and on-line databases in a tutorial fashion to show just how search strategies should be formed. Patent searches are covered in detail. The 174 figures contain excerpts of the Chemical Abstracts Service's printed materials as well as listings from actual on-line database searches on STN.

The first part (chapters 1–5) provides a comprehensive tour of the Chemical Abstracts printed services, including the abstracts themselves, the index guide, the various indices, and the registry and ring systems handbooks. In this section the authors demonstrate the development and use of effective search strategies through nine sample searches of the printed literature.

The second part of the book deals with online searching. While all sample searches were conducted on STN using their MESSENGER command language, the search strategies and database descriptions provided are general. Chapter 6 gives a quick introduction to on-line retrieval systems, on-line databases in general, and basic database query concepts. Chapter 7 contains the meat of the book. Therein the main databases available on STN are presented: the Registry File, Chemical Abstracts, the World Patents Index, CAPreviews, CAOLD, CASREACT, MARPAT, CIN, Beilstein, and Gmelin. There is a section describing each database and the information it holds. These sections contain many sample searches, each accompanied by figures depicting the exact dialogue between the researcher and the computer. The author's experience in data retrieval shows as they provide hints and detailed advice regarding searches in each database.

As a relatively inexperienced, infrequent user of online databases, I found a lot of good information in the book. I also found a great deal of material devoted to patent and structure searches, something most theoretical chemists will seldom use. However, the basic techniques and database-specific information are general enough to apply to the types of literature searches that I do. I recommend this book to beginning or casual users of on-line retrieval services interested in bettering their search skills and thus decreasing the amount of on-line time spent searching. The book is also aimed at experienced information specialists, but they should be warned that this is not a reference manual for the expert due to the tutorial nature of the writing.

Gregory J. Atchity
Ames Laboratory USDOE
Iowa State University
Ames, IA, 50011, USA