

Locating Patents

What is a Patent?

A patent is a legal right granted by a government to inventors that prevents others from making, using, or selling the invention. To qualify for a patent, an invention must be new, useful, and not obvious to someone skilled in the field.

Examples of patentable inventions:

- Products
- Chemical compositions
- Machines
- Processes
- Improvements to existing inventions

Patents are **valid for a limited time** and only for the country that issued the patent. In Canada, patent protection is for 20 years from the date the patent application is filed.

Why Search for a Patent?

Personal: If you want to patent an invention, a search of existing patents will help you to determine if your invention is novel or unique, or if it has already been patented.

Business: A patent search can help a business keep informed of trends and developments in a specific field and can show what the competition is doing. The information found in patents may offer solutions to technical problems or uncover new products available to be licensed (or used freely if the patent has expired).

Scholarly Research: Patents are a primary source of technical information. They contain detailed information and drawings about new technologies that are not normally published in other sources such as books or journal articles. Searching the patent literature may help prevent duplication of research.

Note: Patents may contain useful information, however, they are not considered authoritative or scholarly sources. Patents are not peer reviewed. Just because a patent is granted, it does not mean that the processes or technologies described in the patent are viable.

Patent Offices and Databases

[Canadian Intellectual Property Office \(Canadian Patents Database\)](#)

Over 150 years of Canadian patent descriptions and images.

[United States Patent And Trademark Office \(USPTO\)](#)

United States patents and patent applications.

European Patent Office (Espacenet)

Patent documents from over 100 countries.

World Intellectual Property Organization (PatentScope)

International patent applications filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), as well as patent collections from participating countries and organizations.

The Lens

Global database to patent documents with links to scholarly and technical literature.

Google Patents

Patent information from over 100+ patent offices worldwide.

Search Tips

Most patent offices/databases provide detailed information, guides, or tutorials on how to use their search interfaces. Read the documentation provided by the individual offices or databases. Here are some general tips to keep in mind when searching for patents.

Search by patent number: If you have access to the product, check to see if it is stamped with the patent number. Patent numbers may also be found on packaging, user manuals, or product information. Company websites may also be a source of patent numbers.

Search by keywords: When searching for patents, make a list of words that describe the invention, words that you think might be in the description of the patent you are looking for. Think about what the invention does, what it's made of, and what it's used for. For example, if you were searching for the patent for Swiffer Sweeper, a cleaning product manufactured by Procter & Gamble, you might try searching for words such as: cleaning, floor, duster, sweeper, and mop.

Patents don't usually include product names as most inventions are patented before they are given a brand name or trademark. For example, the title of the Swiffer Sweeper patent is "Cleaning Implements Having Structures for Retaining a Sheet." The name Swiffer is not found in the patent.

Search by classification number: If you don't find the exact patent you are looking for, review patents that are similar and note the classification number. A patent classification number is an alphanumeric number that represents the subject of the invention. Most patent databases allow for searching or browsing by classification number.

Search by name of inventor or owner: Inventors may sell or transfer a patent to someone else who then controls the patent, e.g., the company or organization that they work for. Many patent databases enable you to search by inventor or owner name. When searching for names, consider abbreviations, name variations, and possible misspellings.

Links to Additional Resources

For more information about patents and how to search for them:

[What is a Patent? \(Canadian Intellectual Property Office\)](#)

An introductory guide to patents in Canada.

[Patent Basics \(United States Patent and Trademark Office\)](#)

A guide to patents and the patent process in the United States.

[Patents and Designs \(Queen's University Library\)](#)

Information resources relating to patents and industrial designs.

[Directory of Intellectual Property Offices \(World Intellectual Property Organization\)](#)

A worldwide directory of national intellectual property offices.

For More Help

Contact the **[Research Help](#)** desk.