Hi and welcome to today’s lecture. In this lesson, I am going to discuss Libraries and Portals. Have you ever tried to find information to complete an assignment or to write a report? Maybe you needed the information for academic or research purposes, for your work or simply for a topic that you are interested in? You might have gone to a well-stocked library at a university, or a public library to access information but found the amount of information overwhelming. You might then have visited the library’s website but still found it difficult to find what you were looking for. Whether you are studying at a tertiary institution, working or just searching for personal reasons, access to information is important. Do we agree that access to information is important? Bravo

In this lesson we will look at what a library is, the type of libraries we have, library website and catalogue and library portals

I. Library

Do I have your attention? Good, Library is derived from the Latin word “liber” which means-A BOOK. Earlier a library was “a place where books were written or kept”. This term was frequently used as a “collection of books” and a librarian as a keeper or guard of books. This word has taken centuries to become central point of all social actions and has got recognition as a social institution.

Libraries are gathering of sources of information that are accessible for borrowing or for reference. The first libraries date back almost 5,000 years and consists of collections of clay tablets, later replaced by the printed books, in modern times, the contents of libraries are not restricted to physical formats, for example books, magazines or journals. They may also make electronic sources of information available to borrowers. In fact, libraries do not even need to be in physical space.

There are broadly four different types of libraries. A library may be defined in terms of the subject matter contained with it, the format of the resources or even in terms of who has access to the library. Let us look at them.
i. Public Library

Public or community libraries are funded and maintained by local, country, provincial or national authorities. Anybody can access a public library for reference or research but usually only local residents can borrow physical sources and they need to register. Some public libraries are reference libraries only and do not allow lending.

II. Special Library

Special libraries on the other hand are funded and maintained by many different types of organizations including: private companies (e.g. Law firms and engineering firms), public authorities (e.g. municipalities), international organizations (e.g. UNESCO), research institutions (e.g. museums and hospitals) and professional societies and organizations (e.g. association and computing Machinery (ACM) http://www.acm.org). The use of company libraries is usually limited to employees, while government bodies may also allow bonafide researchers to access the library.

III. National Library

However, National libraries are the repository for the information of a nation. These libraries have a right of legal deposit, which means that every document published in that country, a certain number of copies have to be supplied to the national library for safe keeping.

IV. Academic Library

Academic libraries, defined as libraries which are associated or attached with any educational institution to support its educational programmes. Academic library is an integral part of formal education system which provides time bound education from primary school level to university level. It also works as a base for teaching, learning, research etc.

Academic Library can be categorized under three types:

- School Library
- College Library and
- University Library

There are three main forms of Libraries namely Traditional, Electronic/e-library/digital and Hybrid Libraries.

- **Traditional Library**

  When we talk about a Traditional library we mean it’s operations (activities) are done manually without the aid of computer technology and its resources are in print format. Non-print materials (audio-visual materials such as audio and video tapes,) are virtually nonexistence. It has some advantages namely; stable collection, free and universal access to the collection, can be used without electricity, documents can easily be photocopied and no computer expertise is required on the part of the library staff. Some of its disadvantages are: limited access points, ccentralized
management, one way interaction, individual objects not directly linked with each other and slow evolution.

- **Digital Library**

A digital library has all information resources in digital form and access to such resources is through the use of digital technologies. It is therefore a library in which collections are stored in digital formats and accessible by computers. To be considered as a digital library an on-line collection of information must be managed by and made accessible to a community of users. The digital content can be stored locally, or accessed via computer networks. Some advantages of a digital library include the following: it allows users to directly access and use the documents or information they have found, information can be accessed anywhere and at any time (there are no closing hours) since one does not need to be physically present in the holding library, digital library collections can be delivered on CD-ROM to users with inadequate network connectivity, digital library can provide access to content in different and more appealing forms including animation, graphical, audio and video formats, it provides a starting point for all research, and it is ideal in support of students receiving their schooling using distance learning education. It also comes with some short comings which include: access is an equity issue, enough but too many resources, cut and paste and obsolescence of books to name a few.

- **Hybrid Library**

The hybrid library has its information resources in both print and non-print formats. It also means that some of its operations or services (such as acquisitions, cataloguing and circulation) are performed with the aid of computer technology. This implies that the users of a hybrid library have access to physical collections as well as digital collections (electronic resources) like full text online journals, e-books, audio books and full text databases on CD - ROM etc. The main advantage of this form of library is that, information can be accessed in print and non- print form.

2. **Portals.**

Let’s now look at what a library website is. The digitization of document also allows libraries to place many of their information resources online. As a result, most libraries today have websites. If the homepage of the site is well-designed, it will lead you to a wealth of information.

Library homepages serves as portals to services and resources offered by the institution. As you can see from the example provided below, there is no standard layout for s library homepage. Each is uniquely designed in terms of what the library has on offer.

*Figure 4.1 showing uhas library homepage*
3. Catalogue

Library catalogue is a database of all the information sources in the library (and sometimes includes related institutions as well). Here you can search for any document, for example books, journal titles, maps and videos, contained in the library, as well as special and electronic collections of sources. Library cataloguing is the most important functions of a library to organize all these sources of information so that they can be found again.

Figure 5.1 displays the interface of University of Ghana library catalogue; it offers a simple search interface and an advanced search interface. At this stage, it is more only necessary to take note of the fact that such interface exist, look at the results of the search and understand how you should use these results to obtain access to the actual information object.

The advanced search interface allows you to combine various concepts with Boolean operators to search for single terms or phases and to customers the display of results.

![Figure 5.1 showing the interface of university of Ghana catalogue.](image)

Portals or web portals are websites that serve as single point of access to collections of information sources and resources. Wikipedia defines a portal as a specially-designed web page at a website which brings information together from diverse sources in uniform way. Usually, each information
source gets its dedicated area on the page for displaying information (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/web_portal)

Some portals allow a user to be able to personalize and customize the interface. This means that users can create profiles and set preferences, so they can have information delivered to them that is relevant on an individual basis. A portal can also offer employees or users the facility to share information with each other, for example through the use of chat facilities, email, shared calendars and central scheduling of meetings. As different levels of users need different types of information, security may be set on a portal so that people only have access to information relevant to their jobs.

4. Gateways

Gateways, on the other hand, do not offer all these features. They simple serve as a single point of entry to many information resources. There are many definitions of portals and gateways and not all of them are in agreement. This is mainly because the web is a rapidly evolving environment. The terms gateway and portal are often used interchangeably. For example, the Estonian website at http://www.eesti.ee/eng/ is referred to on the website as the gateway to Estonia and state portal. In this chapter we will use the term portal to refer to both portals and gateways, taking into account that there are differences between various portals and gateways including between how literature defines them and how they are experienced in practice. Portals are created with certain goals in mind. They are usually limited to a particular audience such as a company or organization, to a specific geographic area or a specific discipline such as Geography. Now we will look at the characteristics of specific websites that will serve as example of particular types of portal.