Search aid software is simply telecommunications software designed specifically for online database searchers. Search aid software is typified by DIALOGLINK (DL), marketed by Dialog Information Services, and PROSEARCH, marketed by Personal Bibliographic Software (who also market PROCITE). DL offers features for the database searcher that are better designed and more user-friendly than the features of general telecommunications software (e.g. Crosstalk, Smartcom, Qmodem). DL has been used in the SIO Library by the reference librarian, reference and ILL assistants for approx. eighteen months; it is used for subject-oriented database searching, bibliographic verification, electronic mail, ACQUISITIONS LIST production, and general telecommunications.

DL supports telecommunications access to any destination; DL can access Dialog, BRS, STN, NLM, and Melvyl databanks, electronic mail systems, campus computers, etc. DL presents a directory of destinations and has one-keystroke logon. DL's capabilities are next utilized to minimize connect time. Commands can be keyboarded while online or while offline. Offline keyboarding in advance of logon is supported if the destination has a consistent command prompt; Dialog, BRS, STN, NLM, and Melvyl all have consistent command prompts (Melvyl's is an arrow). Offline-formulated commands are uploaded line-by-line to the destination; the searcher can keyboard ahead of the processing of the commands. Any command can be edited before it is processed by the database service. The last command sent can be recalled and after-the-fact edited to remove typos without having to rekeyboard the whole command.

DL automatically downloads the entire session into RAM buffer to allow scrolling up and down through the session while online or offline. This is very helpful for looking back at what was done earlier in the session. Since the entire session is automatically downloaded, the searcher, while online, does not have to invoke printing and
Results are reviewed while offline and then printed or downloaded-to-disc. By handling results after logoff, online connect time is minimized by directing the searcher's effort toward one thing only -- the search session.

DL offers post-session line-editing of results; results can be cleaned up before printing or downloading-to-disc. For example, Phyllis Lett produces the Library's bimonthly ACQUISITIONS LIST by searching for new books on Melvyl in broad-subject category batches and then line-editing the Melvyl session before capturing the cleaned-up records to a disc file. The disc file is then wordprocessed into the published LIST by adding headings for the subject categories. LIST production using DL requires minimal proofing and involves less keystroke effort compared to using INNOVACQ records.

DL offers one-keystroke access to help screens and has cost accounting features. A Dialoglink Account Manager (available for Dialog sessions only) produces printout coversheet, session invoices and monthly reports by database service, database, searcher, client, or charge code; it cannot add in an overhead fee. The operational needs of the SIO Library do not require this capability so it is not used.

DL's shortcomings are few and not fatal. It cannot upload whole files; it is oriented to line-by-line uploads. Thus Crosstalk is used for CLASS ONTYME access by the ILL staff. DL's directory does not support two-password access to any destination (e.g. one password for recharged searches and one for ready reference searches). DL only supports multiple telecommunications network access for one Dialog password; the searcher has to set up separate menu choices for accessing BRS or a second Dialog password through Telenet and Tymnet.

DL cost $125; the accounting module costs $45 additional. An evaluation disc is available for $15. Contact Pete Brueggeman, SIO Library, if you want a demonstration. DL will run on IBM PC, XT, AT and compatibles, Compaq, and AT&T 6300. DL runs on DOS Version 2.0 or later, needs 256K RAM minimum (more is very desirable if you have RAM-resident software), and supports 300/1200/2400 baud modems.