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An Instructor's Guide to Electronic Databases of Indexed Professional Literature

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**AN INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE TO ELECTRONIC DATABASES
OF INDEXED PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE**
(1999 OTRP Instructional Research Award)

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Wright State University (2000)

Overview

This document reviews 20 databases that are relevant to psychology but that are used primarily by professionals in other disciplines. Each database is described, any corresponding paper index is indicated, searching tips are provided, and, when available, free Internet access sites are identified.

Outline of Contents

Introduction

Database Selection

Database Search Strategies

Database Reviews

AIDSLINE
AgeLine
Biosis Previews
Books in Print
CANCERLIT
Compendex
Contemporary Women's Issues
ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center)
HaPI (Health and Psychosocial Instruments)
LEXIS/NEXIS Academic Universe
MEDLINE
Mental Health Abstracts
National Criminal Justice Reference Service
Periodical Abstracts PlusText
Proquest Digital Dissertations (Dissertation Abstracts Online)
PsycINFO
SIRS Researcher (Social Issues Researcher)
Sociological Abstracts
SPIN
Web of Science: The Social Sciences Citation Index and Science Citation Index

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Introduction

Many instructors of psychology are interdisciplinary in their instructional approaches and research. Correspondingly, it is important to be interdisciplinary in course preparations and searches. Literature and research that are integral to psychology are often indexed in databases primarily used by other disciplines. Accessing more than one database provides a more comprehensive approach and broader perspective to teaching. In addition, it is helpful to learn whether researchers in other fields are conducting the same or similar research as psychologists. This often inspires collaboration among instructors across disciplines, and provides a more multidisciplinary approach. Moreover, a multicultural approach to instruction and research is facilitated because researchers can now become aware of instructors and researchers in other countries who share similar interests. Finally, redundancy in scholarly literature is avoided.

Database Selection

All databases descriptions in DIALOG, a commercial database provider with over 450 listings, were examined to determine the level of appropriateness for inclusion (<http://library.dialog.com/bluesheets/html/blf.html>). Next, 30 to 40 databases were examined more closely and reduced to approximately 20. All databases available through OHIOLINK, a statewide library consortium, also were accessed to determine whether any further databases should be reviewed (<http://www.libraries.wright.edu/libnet/indab/>). Approximately five new databases were included from OHIOLINK searches. Factual information from DIALOG and OHIOLINK database descriptions was incorporated into our reviews. Databases were selected for inclusion because they represented the best resource available for particular areas of psychology or psychology in general. Other criteria that were considered were ease of use, cost effectiveness, and accessibility. All of the databases that were selected are considered excellent resources. Some reviews mention other related noteworthy databases.

Database Search Strategies

Elaboration of search strategies was not possible for all databases because many are specific to the provider of the database. For instance, MEDLINE is available through the National Library of Medicine, Silver Platter and DIALOG. Each provider has a unique system of searching, so general search tips could not be offered. However, each provider offers search tips for their database, and it is recommended that the researcher review these tips. Common search features include the use of Boolean operators, controlled vocabulary and truncating. Boolean operators allow the researcher to refine his or her search by using connectors (e.g., and, or, not) that combine search terms. Controlled vocabulary is a list of established subject headings that usually can be found in the thesaurus for the database. These subject headings are assigned to each entry in the database to capture the main points of the entry. Finally, truncating is the use of special characters such as an exclamation point, question mark or asterisk so that all variants of a search term can be located. For instance, mother! would retrieve entries using the words mother, mothers, mothering, mothered, motherhood, and so on.

Database Reviews

Note: All database titles that are followed by an asterisk are available for free at the National Library of Medicine web site (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>).

AIDSLINE*

AIDSLINE is produced by the National Library of Medicine. Citations are derived from numerous other databases such as CANCERLIT and MEDLINE. In addition to journals, conferences and symposia related to clinical aspects and health policy issues of HIV/AIDS are included in the database. Most citations are in English and include abstracts. DIALOG indicates over 20,000 entries are added each year. AIDSLINE can be accessed free at many Internet sites. One site, located at www.aegis.com, claims to be "the largest HIV/AIDS web site in the world." It is an extensive and comprehensive site with information regarding personal aspects of living with HIV/AIDS as well as scholarly literature. There is no specific search engine for AIDSLINE at this site, but the site search engine can be limited to include just AIDSLINE literature. One can limit by time frame as well. There is a page devoted to search tips. The table of contents of all AIDSLINE entries for each year, separated by month, is available from 1980-present. A more sophisticated search engine for AIDSLINE is available free at www.healthgate.com. At this site, the database includes a feature known as ReADER that automatically translates any terms used into recognizable index terms (controlled vocabulary). AIDSLINE does not have a print counterpart, but entries likely would be indexed in Index Medicus.

AgeLine

AgeLine is compiled by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). The database has citations from books, journals (scholarly and non-scholarly) and research reports. AARP indicates that in the future, the database will include citations to dissertations, videotapes and newspaper articles. The references come from the gerontology collection at AARP's research information center. AARP indicates over 50,000 abstracts are included in the database and DIALOG estimates journal citations compose approximately two-thirds of the database. Keywords come from the Thesaurus of Aging Terminology. The database is updated regularly and includes selected material from 1966-1977 and more thorough coverage since 1978. Most documents are in English although some non-English literature is included. There is no print counterpart to the database.

An AARP representative indicated that they hope to have the database available for free at their web site in 2000. In the meantime, AgeLine can be accessed through online services, CD-ROM and the Internet (try www.healthgate.com/res/index.shtml), but all providers charge a fee. The list of providers can be found at <http://research.aarp.org/ageline/access.html>. The fees are relatively inexpensive with access under \$10.00 per month from one provider. The AARP web site provides good search tips including Boolean searching and limiting fields.

Biosis Previews

Biosis Previews provides information on research in the biological and biomedical fields. The print counterparts to the database are Biological Abstracts and Biological Abstracts: Reports, Reviews, and Meetings (previously named BioResearch Index). The database covers the time period from 1969 to the present. The database contains a total of 550,000 citations of original research from 6,000 journals, books, book chapters, symposia, meetings, monographs, patents, and institutional and government reports. Citations cover topics such as behavioral sciences, pharmacology, anatomy, pathology, clinical medicine, occupational health, physiology, public health, genetics and biotechnology. DIALOG indicates that this database includes a classroom instruction program. However, the instruction program was not available for review. Biosis Previews is available on CD-ROM or by subscription. For more information contact www.biosis.org.

Books in Print

Books in Print is the database version of the book with the same title. DIALOG indicates it is the most comprehensive source of information on books published in the United States. It includes some out-of-print titles from the last ten years, advance titles, audio and video listings and reviews. The publisher indicates there are 2.4 million bibliographic records with over 400,000 annotations added each month. Books in Print is available through most university libraries. It also can be accessed at the publisher site, www.bowker.com. However, fees are charged for web site use. Site license rates are available. A relatively advanced search engine allows searches to be limited using numerous fields. In some records one can link with the publisher web site and purchase the reference book online. A similar database is called WorldCat (for World Catalog). WorldCat claims it contains 35 million records including books, manuscripts, computer data files, maps, computer programs, musical scores, films and slides, newspapers, journals, sound recordings, magazines, and videotapes, but there is generally no annotation or review. There are also fees for WorldCat, and site licenses are available.

CANCERLIT*

CANCERLIT is available free at many Internet sites such as www.healthgate.com/res/index.shtml or the National Library of Medicine (NLM) web site. It is produced by a branch of the U.S. National Cancer Institute. It dates from 1963 to the present and most records have abstracts. The database includes a feature known as ReADER which automatically translates terms used into recognizable index terms. Full text articles are available for a fee. CANCERLIT does not have a print counterpart, but entries likely would be indexed in Index Medicus.

Compendex

Compendex is an interdisciplinary engineering and technology database that provides abstracts from over 2,600 international journals, government reports, technical reports, and conference papers and proceedings from 1980 to the present. Summaries cover engineering topics such as air and water pollution, waste management, quality control, transportation safety, management issues, and civil, environmental, mechanical,

chemical, aerospace, and biological engineering. The database is offered with a Web version search interface that may be tailored to the individual user's level of computer knowledge. This is an excellent resource for industrial/organizational and engineering issues in psychology. The corresponding paper index is The Engineering Index. Subscriptions are available to institutions only.

Contemporary Women's Issues (CWI)

The vendors of CWI claim it provides over 1500 unique sources. Journals, newsletters, directories, bibliographies, guides, fact sheets, pamphlets and reports (such as those available through non-profit organizations and government agencies) are indexed in this database. Much of this literature is not necessarily "scholarly" in nature but rather informational, appropriate for the individual consumer and related to important current issues such as reproductive rights, pay equity, legal status, lesbian concerns, violence, exploitation and health. It is similar to having access to the information available at an enormous women's center. CWI is multidisciplinary including resources in psychology, sociology, health, education, political science and business administration. Full text access is provided. CWI provides global information with women from over 190 countries represented. CWI indexes information from mainstream publishers and alternative presses. Subscription information can be obtained at Responsive Database Services (www.rdsinc.com). Pricing plans are available and discounts are offered for high schools. There is no print counterpart to this database and no similar databases.

ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center)

ERIC contains documents and journal articles on topics related to education practice and research. The database is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. ERIC indexes articles from over 750 professional journals, as well as conference papers, teaching guides, research or technical reports, government documents, course descriptions and lesson plans from 1967 to the present. The database covers topics such as vocational education, counseling services, early childhood education, rural and urban education, linguistics, reading skills and educational evaluation. This database is a valuable source for school and counseling psychology. The corresponding paper indexes are Resources in Education and Current Index to Journals in Education. ERIC can be accessed for free at <http://www.askeric.org/>.

HaPI (Health and Psychosocial Instruments)

HaPI is a database that lists both published and unpublished tests and measurements in the behavioral and health sciences dating from 1985 to the present. The types of measurement instruments that are covered include questionnaires, interview schedules, checklists, index measures, coding schemes/manuals, rating scales, projective techniques, vignettes/scenarios, tests, and more. The subject areas that are covered include health sciences, medicine, nursing, public health, psychosocial sciences, psychology, social work, sociology, communications, education, and organizational behavior. There are currently more than 45,000 records in the database and many include an abstract describing the instrument. HaPI is produced by Behavioral Measurement Database Services and is available through Ovid Technologies on the web, through telnet, or on CD-ROM. Online searching through Ovid costs \$40.00 per hour. HaPI has no print counterpart but is similar to the publication titled Tests in Print (TIP) except that TIP only includes published tests.

It is important to point out that HaPI does not include the actual research instruments. However, citations to journal articles and books where the instruments were used or evaluated are provided. Entries for published tests include the name of the publisher so that instruments can be purchased, while unpublished tests contain the name of the test author. In the case of unpublished tests it is usually necessary to contact the author in order to get a copy of the instrument. Researchers would be well advised to search HaPI first before developing a new research instrument to see if a suitable instrument already exists. This could save countless hours in instrument development and validation.

One drawback to HaPI is that some records do not include an abstract and when abstracts are available they are brief and do not provide detailed evaluations of the instrument. For this reason it is often helpful to use HaPI in combination with such printed works as Mental Measurements Yearbook, published by the Buros Institute of Mental Measurements or Test Critiques, originally published by the Test Corporation of America and now published by Pro Ed. Both of these publications provide in depth evaluative reviews written by subject experts. A good research strategy is to use the computerized HaPI database to quickly and efficiently identify tests and measures and then to look them up in the printed works if a more detailed description or a critical

evaluation is needed.

LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe

LEXIS/NEXIS is an enormous database divided into smaller databases covering business, medicine, news, law or general reference. Equally thorough counterparts exist elsewhere, and are more reasonably priced, for the medical, business and general databases (i.e., MEDLINE, Business Week, Periodical Abstracts, respectively). However, the news database, NEXIS, is unparalleled. NEXIS provides full text articles and publications from newsmagazines, regional and national newspapers, newsletters, trade magazines and abstracts. Documents are organized by headings such as General News, Today's News, U.S. News, World News, Wires, Transcripts and Foreign Language. The years covered by NEXIS vary by subject. There is no paper equivalent for NEXIS, although there are paper indexes for specific sources. This information is available within the database's online catalog. Another news database that is worth considering is Newspaper Abstracts. This database is not as comprehensive as NEXIS. The database covers articles from newspapers such as the Washington Post, The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and The Wall Street Journal from 1989 to the present. Articles cover local, regional, national and international news, editorials, obituaries of prominent individuals, business and finance, and arts and leisure.

The legal database, LEXIS, has few counterparts (the only one that comes close is WESTLAW). The legal database includes, among other things, full text statutes and regulations from all levels, opinions from cases from the state appellate court level up and law reviews. The database includes a unique feature where the user can switch from full text to kwic cite to identify places in the document where the key search terms were found. This is helpful because the term may be used only once in the document or is used out of context. There are also legal news publications available and even Martindale-Hubbell, a directory of lawyers and law firms from around the world. The primary downside is that LEXIS/NEXIS can be quite pricey, although site licenses can be arranged. One can learn more about pricing at www.lexis-NEXIS.com/lnc/. There is no single corresponding paper index.

MEDLINE*

MEDLINE, with its MeSH controlled vocabulary, is one of the most sophisticated and feature rich databases in existence. MEDLINE is produced by the National Library of Medicine (NLM) and is the database version of Index Medicus. It provides worldwide coverage of literature in biomedicine and also includes the fields of psychiatry, nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, the health care system, and the preclinical sciences. MEDLINE covers the years 1966 to the present and is indexed using NLM's extensive "MeSH" (Medical Subject Headings) system of controlled vocabulary. MeSH allows searchers to easily expand or narrow a search. In the MeSH system, main topics branch into smaller and more specific topics to form "tree structures." Searches can be expanded by moving up the tree to broader terms or narrowed by moving down the tree to more specific terms. A popular way to quickly expand a search is to take advantage of MEDLINE's "explode" function, which automatically expands a search to include every term on a given branch of the MeSH tree. MeSH also incorporates sub-headings that fall under the subject headings. Sub-headings are more specific aspects of the subject heading but do not constitute a distinct topic. For example, among the sub-headings listed under the subject heading of schizophrenia are such terms as diagnosis, drug therapy, history, pathology, rehabilitation and surgery. By taking advantage of sub-headings searchers can quickly perform a highly focused search.

There is some overlap between MEDLINE and psychology databases but it is surprisingly small. There are some real gems in the psychiatry literature that are rarely indexed in PsycLIT or PsycINFO. This is an excellent database and searches on MEDLINE likely would be worth the time investment to any psychologist. MEDLINE would be particularly useful for literature searches in areas such as psychophysiology, health psychology, abnormal psychology, neuropsychology, and sensation and perception.

Most colleges and universities pay for access to MEDLINE through the commercial database provider that supplies their other databases and as a result MEDLINE will use the same search interface as other databases such as PsycINFO or ERIC. A common searching interface provides convenience to the user but it is not necessary to pay a commercial database provider to have full access to MEDLINE. MEDLINE can be accessed for free from numerous web sites and in various versions. The most centralized, current and comprehensive free version is called PubMed and comes directly from the National Library of Medicine, the original architects of MEDLINE, at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>.

In addition to MEDLINE through PubMed, the National Library of Medicine also maintains a search interface called Internet Grateful Med (IGM) where one can search MEDLINE and a number of other health related databases free of charge. IGM can be found at <http://igm.nlm.nih.gov/>. Some of the databases that can be searched through IGM include: AIDSLINE, for research on AIDS and related topics; AIDSDRUGS, for information on substances being tested to treat AIDS; AIDSTRIALS, for factual and referral information on clinical trials of substances being tested for use against AIDS, HIV infection, and AIDS-related opportunistic diseases; BIOETHICSLINE, for research on ethics and related public policy issues in health care and biomedical research; HealthSTAR, for research on health services, technology, and administration; HISTLINE, for research on the history of medicine; OLDMEDLINE, for biomedical research between the years 1960 to 1965; POPLINE, for research on family planning, population law and policy, and primary health care, including maternal/child health in developing countries; SPACELINE, for research on space life sciences; and TOXLINE, for research on toxicological, pharmacological, biochemical and physiological effects of drugs and other chemicals.

Mental Health Abstracts

The Mental Health Abstracts database covers information regarding a variety of mental health issues. The database includes 500,000 references to national and international articles from over 1,200 journals, book reviews, grant reports, conference proceedings and non-print materials. Sources represent collections from 41 different countries from 1967 to the present. Topics include child development, treatment and therapy, psychopharmacology, aging, substance abuse, forensic literature, ethics and mental retardation, among others. There is no print counterpart. Mental Health Abstracts is available online or on CD-ROM from DIALOG.

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)

This database contains abstracts of more than 150,000 U.S. and international publications, including federal, state and local government documents, books, journal articles, published and unpublished research reports, dissertations, audiovisual media and symposia from the early 1970's to the present. Subject areas include corrections, courts, forensics, defense and technology, juvenile justice, crime statistics, victimology, facility design and community crime prevention. There is no corresponding paper counterpart. A limited number of documents are available in full text online. However, the database also provides contact information for the organization that distributes the document. Documents are available from NCJRS through interlibrary loan for \$4.50 per document. The database is available for free at the NCJRS web site at www.ncjrs.org or on CD-ROM or by subscription through the DIALOG service.

Periodical Abstracts PlusText

This is a guide to more than 1800 general-reference periodicals and many non-scholarly popular magazines, some of which are full text. The database is relatively cross-disciplinary and is the counterpart of print indexes such as Periodical Abstracts and Readers Guide to Periodical Literature. Citations are available back to 1986. The database is a good starting place for undergraduate research. Similar databases can be found such as InfoTrac General Periodicals Index, which also is available for a fee through the Internet or on CD-ROM.

Proquest Digital Dissertations (Dissertation Abstracts Online)

Dissertation Abstracts Online provides abstracts to 1.4 million international doctoral dissertations and masters theses. Included are most dissertations by students from accredited academic institutions from 1861 to the present. In addition, the database includes certain Masters theses from 1962 to the present and abstracts to dissertations from 50 British universities from 1988 to the present. Approximately 47,000 new dissertations and 12,000 new theses are added to the database each year. Dissertations may cover topics such as Psychology, Sociology, Education, Statistics, Health Sciences, Religion, Biological Sciences and Chemistry. Print counterparts include Dissertation Abstracts International, Comprehensive Dissertation Index, American Doctoral Dissertations and Masters Abstracts International. Full text PDF files are available for certain documents from 1997 to the present. However, the price for downloading full text dissertations ranges from \$20-\$32 based on format type. The database is available on CD-ROM and by subscription. For more information contact <http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/main>.

PsycINFO

PsycINFO is the single most important research database in the field of psychology. Produced by the American Psychological Association (APA), PsycINFO is the database version of Psychological Abstracts. It is the primary research database in psychology providing worldwide coverage of all specialty areas in both the academic and professional literature. The PsycINFO database covers all types of publications that contain psychologically relevant material, including journal articles, dissertations, reports, English-language book chapters and books, and other scholarly documents. Disciplines related to psychology, such as social work, education, medicine, nursing, and others also are covered. The main PsycINFO database covers the years 1967 to the present and is indexed using controlled vocabulary from the Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms. By using index terms (commonly referred to as subject headings) searchers can easily perform efficient and comprehensive searches. PsycINFO also makes use of a variety of special codes that make it easy to limit searches in useful ways such as by publication type, language, age group, type of study (e.g., empirical, longitudinal, clinical case report, etc.) and many more.

Access to PsycINFO can be found at most colleges and universities, through commercial database providers such as DIALOG and through some internet service providers. Access also can be purchased from the APA web site and discounts are available for members. Non-APA members can search PsycINFO for \$9.95 per day through PsycINFO Direct at <http://www.psycinfo.com>. However, before purchasing access to PsycINFO, it would be wise to check with the library at one's own institution to see if it is already available there.

A recently released supplement to the PsycINFO database is Historic PsycINFO. While it is not as richly indexed as the main database, it provides computerized access to the psychological literature dating all the way back to 1887.

SIRS Researcher (Social Issues Researcher)

SIRS Researcher is a database of full text articles that explore a variety of social, scientific, health, historic, economic, business, political and global issues. According to SIRS Mandarin Inc., producer of SIRS Researcher, the database contains thousands of full text articles from over 1500 newspapers, magazines, journals and government publications. The dates covered are from 1989 to the present. There is no print counterpart to SIRS Researcher. The SIRS Researcher database is not as richly indexed as MEDLINE or PsycINFO but it makes use of subject headings and also allows for keyword and phrase searching. In addition to full text articles, citations and abstracts are provided. Because the articles included in the database explore social issues, much of the database content is relevant to psychology.

The SIRS Researcher database is an excellent resource for undergraduate research. It can be used to develop debate topics and persuasive essays to access reports on social issues and current events, and for assignments that require students to think critically about an issue. SIRS provides access to their information products through libraries (both academic and public) and through other institutions. According to the SIRS web site, it is an established information and technology provider to more than 40,000 libraries and institutions worldwide. Institutions can access this database for \$1350.00 per year.

Sociological Abstracts

Sociological Abstracts is the database version of the printed source of the same name. It covers the discipline of sociology as well as related disciplines in the behavioral and social sciences. The database covers the years 1963 to the present. Information in the database is abstracted from over 2,600 international periodicals, books, conference papers and dissertations. Like PsycINFO, which is indexed using the Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms, Sociological Abstracts employs the Thesaurus of Sociological Indexing Terms as its controlled vocabulary.

Access to Sociological Abstracts can be found at many colleges and universities and through commercial database providers such as DIALOG. Access can also be purchased through the Internet Database Service from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (<http://www.csa.com/>). However, before purchasing access to Sociological Abstracts, it would be wise to check with the library at one's own institution to see if it is already available there. Sociological Abstracts is a good place to look for citations to the literature in social psychology. It is also a good way to research the sociological perspective on many issues in psychology.

SPIN

This is one of the most comprehensive databases available for grant sources, but there is no one database that should be searched when it comes to grant funding. It is possible to limit searches on a number of dimensions including using keywords and Boolean operators, and specifying such things as award and applicant types, sponsors, geographical restrictions, deadline dates and citizenship. SPIN is easy to use and multidisciplinary. Some direct links to funder web pages are provided. There is no paper index that corresponds with SPIN. This database can be quite costly (several thousand dollars a year). Pricing information options can be found at www.infoed.org.

Another useful but even more costly grant database is the Community of Science database at <http://fundingopps2.cos.com>. This database provides advantages over SPIN such as funding updates via E-mail and a networking database to allow researchers at different universities with similar interests to connect. However, the database can cost twice as much as SPIN.

A free and useful starting place for grants information is the APA list of funding opportunities at www.apa.org/science/bulletin/html. The APA site also provides numerous links to valuable sites such as the Foundation Center, a database for foundations grants. In addition, at the APA site one can register with the URL-minder which will send automatic e-mail notices every time the page is updated.

Web of Science: The Social Sciences Citation Index and the Science Citation Index

For decades the printed versions of the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Science Citation Index (SCI) have proven to be invaluable tools for researchers in the sciences. Like other bibliographic indexes, the citation indexes provide access to the world's literature through subject searching and author searching but they also provide a unique feature called citation searching. Citation searching allows researchers to determine whether a given author or a specific publication has been cited in other published works subsequent to the original publication. In this sense, citation searching allows researchers to track a subject forward in time because it can be assumed that if a publication is cited by others they must have something new to add to the ideas being presented in the originally cited work.

Both the SSCI and the SCI cover the discipline of psychology though the SSCI covers it much more extensively. Both indexes are multidisciplinary with the SSCI covering all of the social sciences and the SCI covering all of the "hard" sciences. (A humanities citation index is also available.) Unlike some other databases, the citation indexes only index the journal literature. The SSCI indexes more than 1,700 leading social sciences journals and includes individually selected citations from 3,400 physical science journals. The SCI indexes approximately 3,500 of the world's leading science journals covering more than 150 disciplines.

Computerized access is available on CD-ROM, magnetic tape, online through commercial database providers, or directly from ISI through their Web of Science web site. The years covered vary according to the type of access but generally date back to the early 1970's, though more limited coverage can be purchased for a lower price. Computerized versions of the citation indexes go by different names depending on the type of access. The SSCI is also called Social Sci Search while the SCI is also called Sci Search and Science Citation Index Expanded.

The unique feature of citation searching makes the citation indexes extremely valuable research tools. Those who have used the printed versions of these indexes can attest to the fact that they are time consuming to use and contain very small print. Computerized access makes searching much faster and easier on the eyes. The multidisciplinary scope of these databases also makes them a good choice for interdisciplinary research topics.

Notes

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2. Correspondence regarding this guide may be addressed to Scott Kidd at kidd.3@wright.edu.