Web of Science Tips & Tricks

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Web of Science is a search platform that includes 12 databases. It offers broad coverage of many scientific subjects such as medicine, the biological sciences, linguistics, geography, animal science, kinesiology, and communicative sciences and disorders. It also has tools for tracking citations and publication outputs.

One of the largest databases on the Web of Science platform is the Core Collection. The Core Collection covers sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. Coverage goes back to 1900 for some of the 12,000 indexed journals and, additionally, it searches over 150,000 conference proceedings and 50,000 books.

Other databases available on the Web of Science platform have more specialized topic coverage than the Core Collection. Examples of topic-specific databases include Biological Abstracts and CAB Abstracts.

The Web of Science databases have different content but the search tips and tricks in this document will apply to all of them since they are on the same platform. You can switch between databases on the platform by choosing the one you want to search from the dropdown menu next to “Select a Database”. The default selection is “all databases” but it is often easier and more efficient to search individual databases rather than all of them at one time.

Accessing Web of Science
The Web of Science platform can be accessed from the Health Sciences Digital Library under “Popular Databases”. If you are off-campus you will need to login with your NetID and password. This will identify you as an MSU-affiliated user and provide full-text access to journal articles that the MSU Libraries subscribe to that you may find when searching Web of Science.
Basic Search Techniques

Web of Science is designed so that, much like Google, you can type in keywords that represent your research concepts directly into a search box and it should be able to match these terms to relevant results in the database.

It is recommended that you start with a general keyword search and then use the various search techniques discussed in this document to narrow down your results. When starting a search be as specific as possible, use keywords significant to the concept(s) you are searching for, don’t use punctuation, and don’t worry about capitalization.

Filters

Filters limit search results based on different criteria. They can help narrow your search or find more precise results related to your topic. Commonly used filters include language, publication date, article type, or species.

1) Filters are displayed in the frame to the left of the search results. They are divided by category including document type, research area, and author.
2) Expand the category to see the filters included within it – the numbers in parentheses (....) display how many results will appear on the results page after applying that filter.
3) Click on “more options/values…” to display all of the filters available in each category.
4) To apply a filter to your search results put a checkmark in the box next to it and click the “Refine” button.
Subject filters can be useful for narrowing down a search by a specific field or discipline. One important difference between databases in Web of Science is what the subject filters are called in the filters menu. In the Core Collection they are called “Web of Science Categories” and in Biological Abstracts, and several other databases on the platform, they are called “Major Concepts”.

A point of caution when using filters: apply each filter individually and pay attention to what they do to your search results. Applying too many filters at once may narrow your search too much and you may find yourself with no results.

**Quotation Marks**
Putting keywords in quotation marks (“…”) will tell the database to search for the exact phrase, exactly how the words are entered. Use caution with quotation marks – all the words must be spelled correctly and appear in the exact order entered or else you may receive no search results.

**Truncation**
Putting an asterisk (*) at the end of a word searches for variations of that keyword. For example, searching for gene* will show results that include gene, genes, genetic, genetics, genetically, etc….

**Search Connectors**
Search connectors are used to connect your keywords. The connector **AND** narrows your search, while the connector **OR** broadens your search. The connector **NOT** can be used to exclude terms from a search.

When using **AND** only results that include all the terms connected together appear. For example, searching for **genetic AND engineering** will only find articles that have both the terms genetic and engineering.
Using **OR** will result in articles that include any of the keywords. For example, the search *genetic OR engineering* will retrieve articles that contain: only the term genetic, only the word engineering, and those that contain both genetic and engineering.

Using **NOT** will exclude terms from your search results. The search *genetic NOT engineering* finds articles that only contain the keyword genetic. This connector is used less often than the others and should be used with caution because it may exclude relevant articles.

Tip: When using connectors the terms will appear as appropriate but maybe not in the same order as entered.
Viewing an Article

The default search results page in any database on the Web of Science platform is a list of article titles. Clicking on one of these titles will bring up a detailed view of the article called the abstract.

1) Full text access to articles from journals the MSU Libraries subscribes to can be found via the white “Find Text @ MSU” button.

2) If you find an article that is of interest, you can see similar articles by clicking on the “View Related Records” link to the right of the abstract. This will bring up a list of articles that share at least one citation with the original article. By sharing at least one citation between them the database determines that these articles must then be on the same or a closely-related subject.

3) A unique feature of the Web of Science is its strong Citation Network. When viewing an article you can easily click on the “Times Cited” link to see other articles that have cited it, or click on the “Cited References” link to see the articles that it cites. Similar to viewing related records, the cited or citing articles should be on a similar topic to the current article you are viewing and may be helpful for your research.

4) Under the article abstract is a section for Keywords or Categories/Classification. This includes information such as research areas that the article is classified under, major concepts of the article, and keywords. These terms can be useful to review and use in searches when looking for more articles on a similar topic.
Personalization
A free Web of Science account can be created and used for personalizing your Web of Science experience and saving searches. To create an account click on the “Sign In” link at the very top of the page and choose “Register” from the dropdown menu.

A Web of Science account allows you to save searches and create alerts.

1) To save a search, click on the “Search History” link in the black toolbar near the top of the page. All your searches, called sets, for your current session will be displayed.

2) If there are any sets you would not like saved as part of the search (for example, ones that did not provide good results), delete them by placing a checkmark in the appropriate box and clicking the “Delete” button.

3) To save the sets, click on the “Save History/Create Alert” button and follow the prompts in the dialog box that appears. In addition to saving the sets you can also choose to have alerts emailed to you monthly or weekly when there are new results.

Additional Help
Click on the “Help” link at the top of the page for more information about what terms in Web of Science mean and how applying different options will affect your search results.