## **Using Scopus**

Databases are the heart of academic research. We would all be lost without them. Google is a database, and it receives almost 6 billion searches every day. Believe it or not, however, there are *better databases than Google* out there – especially when it comes to academic research. UNB Libraries subscribes to MANY databases to make sure that you have access to the most high-quality research and to the best tools for accessing it.

#### Scopus

Scopus is the world's largest abstract and citation database of scholarly works. In addition to providing a number of unique and useful search options, Scopus also provides several smart tools that allow you to track, visualize, and assess a number of bibliographic categories to a limited degree.

Scopus is a multidisciplinary database, but focuses mainly on the sciences with some resources in the arts and humanities. In general, Scopus is a good database for research on the following topics:

- Science and technology
- Medicine
- Social science
- Arts and humanities

To access Scopus, go to the Article Databases tab on the library home page and browse by title.

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## **Scopus User Interface**

Below is the main search window that appears upon arrival at the **Scopus database**. Above and below the screen capture are text boxes highlighting some of the main components of that first page. These components will be explained in greater detail in coming sections.

Add Search Fields allows you to increase the number of terms you use to define your search. Fields can be connected with AND, OR and AND NOT. Document Search is the equivalent of Advanced Search in other databases. Author and Affiliation Search allow you to view research from specific individuals and institutions, and Advanced Search is a complicated Expert Search option that is similar to (but more versatile than) Document Search.

This drop down menu lists the **Searchable Fields** that are immediately available in Scopus's **Document Search**. More options may be coded in using codes available under the **Advanced Search** option.



Use **Subject Areas** to limit your search results to articles (etc) that fall within one or more of the four subject areas listed. Select **Date Ranges** to limit your results to articles and other resources that were published only within a certain time frame. You can also limit results to resources that have only recently been added to Scopus. Select Document Type to limit your results to only include a certain type of document (article, review, chapter, editorial, etc.).

# Searchable Fields

Searchable fields are the search narrowing options that are offered by a particular database. The most common of these fields are:

**Keyword**: Keyword searches allow you to search the entire text and associated record available for an article – including bibliographic information and subject headings.

• In Scopus the field *called* **Keyword** does not perform the traditional keyword search. Instead, it searches keywords that have already been assigned to an article by its author(s) or a professional cataloguer, and these terms tend to be fairly limited in nature. To obtain a *typical* keyword search in Scopus, try the fields **ALL FIELDS** or **Article, Title, Abstract, Keywords**.

Author: Author searches are great for a number of reasons. For instance:

- If you have found a great paper, you can find papers by the author(s) that wrote it. Often these will cover the same, or similar, topics, so this is a great way to increase your relevant results.
- You may simply be interested in learning about someone's research. This could be because you want to know more about a new doctor coming in to your workplace, or to learn more about a professor you want to work with.

Typically, an author search should be attempted first using only the last name of the author (unless it is something ubiquitous like 'Smith') because some articles don't list authors' full names in their text or records. You can always try both, but be aware that this is an issue.

Scopus also has an **Author Search** tab above the main search box that allows you to search for authors and obtain brief profiles that include all the works their published works that are located in Scopus, a list of the fields in which they have published, and information about their affiliations.

**Title**: Title searches seem like a great idea, and they can be. If your search term appears in a title, then it usually follows that the article is all about that topic. However, in order for this to work, you have to pick the *exact right term* or list every possible variation in the search boxes. It is sometimes worth a shot, but is not necessarily your best option.

• Title searches are excellent in one way: if you are looking for a specific article and you know the title of that article, you can go straight to it using this searchable field.

**Abstract**: Abstract searches are also great to try, but have the same pitfalls as title searches. You either have to get the term right, or you have to list a lot of terms. Approach these searchable fields with caution.

Subject Terms: Many major databases include some form of subject searching, which is dictated by controlled vocabulary. Scopus has an option similar to this, but it is unstable and unreliable due to the breadth of the subject and journals covered by the database. In general, searches in Scopus must be keyword and other basic level searches.

## **Boolean Search Operators**

Boolean search operators are words or commands that allow you to determine the relationship between two searchable fields.

The three most common Boolean operators are:



In Scopus (and most other databases) the operator AND automatically connects the searchable fields when there are multiple search boxes. This can usually be changed to OR and NOT via drop-down menus, and in most cases it is also possible to add more search boxes to your search screen to connect multiple fields.

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**However**, searches results can become complicated and difficult to predict if you use multiple *different* Boolean operators in consecutive search boxes. Instead, it is best to change operators *within a single search box* by using the operator and then the search term, and surround the search term by brackets.

For instance, to connect the keywords maternity nursing and infant development with OR, you can write it as: ("maternity nursing") OR ("infant development")

The same format works for AND and NOT operators.

## **Grouping Terms**

In the last example, note the use of brackets to 'group terms' together. This is a way of telling a search engine how to interpret the text you are asking it to search.

In a search string without any brackets, the database reads the string according to *its own specific rules of precedence* and then in order from left to right.

Scopus's order of precedence rules are unique to Elsevier, and are such that OR is read before AND, which is, in turn, read before NOT.

Are processed as....

(A OR B) AND C

For instance,

These searches...

A OR B AND C

C AND B OR A

A B C

## Wildcards, Truncation and Proximity Searching

Wildcards, truncation and proximity searches are another excellent way to improve the reach of your database searches.

**Wildcards**: wildcards allow you to insert an undefined letter into a search term. Some wildcard options also allow you to search for a word where the added letter *may or may not* be there.

Wildcard – "?" : when using a ? wildcard, insert the ? in place of a letter. Scopus will search that term with all the 26 letters of the alphabet in the place of the ?. For instance:

If you type ne?t You will receive search results with next, newt, nest and neat.

Wildcard – "\*" : when using \* as a wildcard, insert the \* in place of *O or more* letters. Scopus will search that term with all letters and combinations of letters in the location of the \*. *If you type* ca\*t *You will receive search results with* cat, cast, cannot and caught (and more).

**Truncation**: truncation is a means of instructing the search engine to look for the search term, as well as all other terms that share the same beginning letters (the letters that come before the truncation symbol). For instance:

*If you type* **comput\*** *You will receive search results with* **computer, computing, computational**, *etc*.

Truncation can also be used to represent a word in an exact phrase search. For instance:

If you type "a midsummer \* dream" You will receive search results with "a midsummer night's dream".

**Proximity searching**: sometimes you will want to find two related words in a document, but you know that they may be separated by another (or several other) words. In this case, you can do a proximity search – that is, you can use the command PRE/ or W/ and the number of intervening words to direct the search engine. For instance:

Preceding Proximity Search: place PRE/# between the words you want to search. Scopus will retrieve cases where the first word *preceded* the second word by that many (or fewer) words:

#### If you type: (type II) PRE/2 (diabetes)

*You will receive search results with* the words 'type II' is two or fewer words before the word diabetes.

Within Proximity Search: place W/# between the words you want to search. Scopus will retrieve cases where the two words are separated (without regards to word order) by that many or fewer words:

If you type: (type II) W/2 (diabetes)

*You will receive search results with* the words 'type II' is within two or fewer words of the word diabetes.

**NOTE**: every database has its own specific symbols for wildcards and truncation. It won't always be ?, # and \*. This information is typically found in the 'Help' screens of databases under *searches* or *searching*.

## **Phrase Searching**

Sometimes when you are doing a search, you will know exactly what you are looking for, and exactly the right words to retrieve it. You may know a title, or have a quote from the text to guide your search.

For instance, you may be looking for the book *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, by O. W. Sacks.

It's possible that if you typed this phrase into a search engine you would get the actual book as your first result. **However**, search engines prioritize their results in mysterious ways. They take into consideration popularity of a search result, the uniqueness of the words used, and frequency of word-use in text, while sometimes de-prioritizing things like connector words (the, and, etc.) and word order.

In order to avoid these issues of prioritization, it is possible to tell a search engine to search for *an exact phrase* through the use of quotation marks.

For instance, a search for:

"The man who mistook his wife for a hat"

Will *only* produce results that contain that exact phrase in their text (in this case, it would most likely be the book itself, reviews of the book, and/or works that cite the book).

Phrase searching can also be used to search for terms that consist of more than one word, like **nurse practitioner** and **type II diabetes**.

## **Reading your Search Results**

In an effort to provide its users with the greatest possible amount of useful information, Scopus (like most other databases) packs each record in its results lists with text and symbols. This is extremely useful when you know what you're looking at, but extremely daunting when you don't. To simplify things, here is a (brief) breakdown of the most useful parts of the records in a search result:

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### **Understanding Records**

When you click on the title of an article in the results list, you enter the *record* associated with that title. This record consists of all the information Scopus uses to index that article – from title, to author, to journal, to article type, to keywords. It also provides you with many options related to that article.

Below are summaries of some of the most useful options you are likely to see upon entering a record:



# **Additional Features in Scopus**

#### **Search History**

Scopus allows you to go back and repeat or review an old search as long as the session has not been closed or timed out (i.e., as long as you are actively using Scopus).

This option allows you to:

- Return to previous searches to view their results
- Review alternate terms you have used previously
- Combine different searches and search results using Boolean search operators

**Search History** is display prominently on the Scopus search page, and can be accessed by clicking the Search button in the top left-hand corner of the screen (just below the main Scopus logo). The Search History is located directly below the search boxes on that main page.



#### **Keyword Limiter**

While Scopus does not have a controlled vocabulary in the same sense that other major databases do (like most ProQuest and EBSCO databases), it does offer a unique Keyword limiter that can be used to refine searches after they have been performed.

Scopus's Keyword limiter samples all the keywords used to describe documents in the results for a given search, and lists up to 160 of the most common keywords from those results. Beside each of these keywords is a count (in brackets) of the number of articles that use it as a keyword within your search results. You can then select the most appropriate keywords and limit your results to only include the documents containing those keywords.



#### **Scopus Accounts**

Scopus allows users to create accounts in order to preserve information from one search session to the next. In general, the main uses for a Scopus account is:

- 1. Saving search histories to review and use at a later date.
- 2. Saving articles and records for later use.
- 3. Receive alerts when new articles on a topic or by an author are released.

To create a Scopus account select **Register** at the top of the Scopus search screen (above the search boxes) and enter your information.

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## Stumpers

## Additional Tips for Finding the Article you Need

- If you can't find the right subject term, or the subject term you are using isn't getting you where you need to go, take a look at an article that is close to your field and use the subject term(s) it uses in future searches.
- Find an article in a field close to your topic and look at:
  - Who cited that article
  - Who that article cites (read the reference section)
  - What articles are listed as related to that article (either through an option in the database itself, or using Google Scholar)
  - What other works the author(s) of that article has produced.
- Try a different database.
  - Every database subscribed to by UNB contains different information. While some articles may repeat across databases, there will always be substantial new content with each new search engine.
  - When doing any research project, a *minimum* of three databases is recommended.
     When doing a comprehensive literature review, you should use *every* available database that touches on your topic to avoid missing relevant information.