

The Value of an Index is *Inversely*  
Related to Search-Time

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Some time ago a librarian proposed a novel but misleading method of judging the value of an index in his library. He suggested that an automatic device be devised to measure the amount of time *Chemical Abstracts*, *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup>, and other indexes were actually in use. He could not comprehend why I labeled this proposed experiment *reductio ad absurdum*. By comparing the use-time of indexes in this way he penalized any index which accomplished the purpose of its design--the *reduction* of search-time.

A more sensible measuring device would count the number of *separate* uses made of the *SCI*<sup>®</sup> or other indexes. Even more relevant might be a device to measure the research time saved. These measures would be legitimate indicators of the value of an index.

At the present time ISI<sup>®</sup> has in press its Five-Year 1965-1969 *SCI* Cumulation. On the average, this cumulation will reduce, by a factor of five to one, the time routinely required for a typical *SCI* search. If you wish to know where or by whom a specific paper has been cited between 1965-1969, you can now do so in one look-up instead of five. Thus, one might expect that the cumulation will *reduce* the present "traffic" for the *SCI* in any

library which now has the five individual annual indexes. From experience, however, we know that such reductions in search-time stimulate further use. The easier or faster an index is to use, the more people use it. Thus, inevitably the savings in research effort should increase.

Usually, as the coverage increases, your chances improve for finding an answer to a highly specific question. As the traditional word index grows larger, more time is usually required to search it due to changes in terminology. The search-time in the five-year *SCI* "cum" is primarily confined to the time required to find the desired cited reference in the *Citation Index* section. The same time would be required to locate it in each annual *SCI*.

The format of the Five-Year *SCI* Cumulation is quite new. Indeed, it wasn't even completed until after the preparation of the article on "Citation Indexes"<sup>(1)</sup>. The third and last installment of Weinstock's article appears on pages M-27-30 of this issue. If you would like to examine a sample of the new *SCI*, write him at ISI. Mr. Weinstock will not only send reprints to your students or colleagues, but also an "embossed" sample showing *SCI*'s new look and, possibly, some unexpected places where your work has been cited!

1. Weinstock, M. "Citation Indexes". in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (New York, Marcel Dekker, 1971) Vol. 5, pp. 16-40.