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A *Current Contents*® Odyssey  
from 200 to 1100 Journals plus  
a *Weekly Subject Index (WSI)* with Zero Time-Lag

January 5, 1972

This first 1972 issue of *Current Contents/Life Sciences* includes the first issue of a new *Weekly Subject Index (WSI)*.<sup>1,2</sup> During the first few weeks of 1972, we plan to include the index in all copies of *CC*®/*LS*. This is a direct way of letting each reader test the dual usefulness of *WSI*. For the *Weekly Subject Index* to *CC/LS* will not only help with current awareness or alerting, but also for retrospective search.

There is a tendency for information experts to generalize about the uses of indexes—why and when they are needed, who should use them, and how. But scientists, like all humans, are complex and dynamic people. What is true one week may not be true the next week. Depending upon my other commitments, I may scan every title in *CC* for a particular issue. I enjoy browsing because this enables me to vicariously enjoy the thrill of new findings by scientific colleagues that are reported every day with such accelerating rapidity. Enjoying the excitement of science and research is part and parcel of the enjoyment of using *Current Contents*.

But suppose that three days after scanning *CC* I am talking to a colleague and quite unexpectedly the conversation turns to ainhum. I recall having seen an interesting title on this subject in this week's issue of *CC*. I was not

familiar with the author nor do I remember the journal. Using the *WSI* I can quickly “retrieve” the otherwise elusive paper.

Librarians know all too well how often this occurs. Until now they and their scientist clientele have had to spend a lot of time looking for current references. It is ironical that such an index should not have been available for this purpose at the moments when it is most in demand.

It is not coincidental that at the very time we are introducing the *WSI* we and others are testing computer systems for doing the same thing. In fact, for almost six months we have been testing the *SCISEARCH*™ computer system which enables one to locate references on a particular subject. But quite frankly, for many situations you will find that elusive reference in *CC* long before you are even connected to the computer system. It all depends upon the nature and scope of your particular need at the moment.

Undoubtedly another reason why *WSI* became necessary is the increased coverage of *CC* which has at least quintupled the number of articles and journals listed. *CC/LS* began 14 years ago with coverage of about 200 prime journals. Subsequent citation studies have proven that this starting point was quite rational because these jour-

als turn out to cover the "really" important journals of science. If 200 journals was a good start, 400 was a "desirable" continuation, 500 an "expected" accomplishment, 600 a "necessary" goal, 700 not at all unthinkable, 800 certainly not excessive in view of the number of journals actually being published, 900 no more trouble to scan than 800, 1000 journals a good round figure as a base for a current awareness service, and 1100 journals, the number now covered by *CC/LS*, nothing more than routine growth at the tail end of the typical Bradford distribution! Notice the not-so-subtle shift in thinking that has characterized this eventful history: timely coverage of the 200 journals is essential; coverage of 1100 is so much routine. And from the letters we receive each week the appetite of readers appears to be almost insatiable.

Scanning of weekly issues of *CC* is still quite feasible. Even as coverage has doubled, trebled, quadrupled, etc., readers still continue to thumb through *CC* to scan pertinent journals. But there are times when, in spite of some readers' insatiable appetite, the *Weekly Subject*

*Index* will be helpful and only you can be the judge of that.

It is not a perfect index, mainly because there isn't any such thing. *WSI* is as current as the material itself. Its natural vocabulary is "controlled" by the daily usage of authors who are also *CC* readers. In more hectic weeks, the reader can pinpoint, without scanning every page, articles that meet his most pressing interests. So can his secretary, technician, or student assistant. Scanning and browsing through each weekly issue can be done with less anxiety in those otherwise unprofitable or unusable times and places, like subways or suburban trains, in carpools, shopping centers or laundromats or parking lots, in waiting rooms, in laboratories between titrations, or during otherwise dull, interminable meetings, or before going to bed. When you wake up you may feel a little less anxious or a little less frustrated—and, who knows, maybe even a little happier. And I hope you will agree that this is the best issue of *CC/LS* ever published.

1. Garfield, E. ISI announces availability of a *Weekly Subject Index* to *Current Contents/Life Sciences*. *Current Contents* No. 34, p. 5-6, August 25, 1971.
2. -----, The *Weekly Subject Index* to *CC/Life Sciences* makes for zero delay in current awareness and information retrieval. *Current Contents* No. 37, p. 4-5, September 15, 1971.