

# Current Comments<sup>®</sup>

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We Invite You to Try ASCA, the  
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This essay discusses *Automatic Subject Citation Alert (ASCA<sup>®</sup>)*, ISI<sup>®</sup>'s literature alerting service. *ASCA*'s function is analogous to that of a clipping service or to the technical information department of a large industrial firm—systematically alerting clients to the latest publications regarding a given topic or field. *ASCA* and its related services, in effect, constitute a "personalized journal," providing the exact information specified by the user, eliminating the need to scan extraneous material. As such, *ASCA* and its related services might be termed the "ultimate science clipping service." Readers are invited to inquire about a free, four-week trial subscription.

In discussing ISI<sup>®</sup>'s *Automatic Subject Citation Alert* (better known as *ASCA<sup>®</sup>*), I have described this service as one of ISI's best-kept secrets. This may sound strange, but the fact is that, despite considerable promotion, *ASCA* remains unknown to the vast majority of potential users. As we'll see, there are a number of reasons for this, but the upshot is that many scientists, scholars, and researchers are not taking advantage of a highly effective, highly affordable service for keeping in touch with personally relevant scientific and technical articles. In this essay we'll look at *ASCA* and its related services and also discuss how you can sample *ASCA* free for four weeks.

*ASCA*—for those unfamiliar with the service—brings you a customized weekly report that precisely corresponds to the research interests and needs that you specify. By providing ISI with certain information, you design your own "profile." This listing contains information pertinent to the field in which you are working, such as relevant authors, institutions, and significant words, phrases, and word fragments that occur frequently in article titles in your subject area. Each week, you receive a self-contained, laser-printed report containing a list of articles relevant to your interests, based on a computer search of over 7,100 journals. Figure 1 is an example of an *ASCA* report. *ASCA* eliminates the need for exhaustive

searching or scanning to keep up with what is being published in your field; *ASCA* performs this task automatically. It might be described as the "ultimate research assistant."

*ASCA*, in its way, can also be considered a modernized, more sophisticated version of a clipping service. Such services have been in operation for about a century. One particularly successful firm, Burrelle's Information Services, Livingston, New Jersey, for example, was founded in 1888.<sup>1</sup> The typical clipping services were one of the original cottage industries. They mostly employed housewives, who scanned newspapers and magazines for any mention of the service's clients, designated products, or company names. Of the dozens of small clipping services that flourished years ago, only a few remain.

However, the purpose and scope of this type of activity expanded considerably during the twentieth century. For example, during World War II, government intelligence services would scan newspapers and other periodicals, both foreign and domestic, for clues to enemy activities. Much of this work, in fact, was performed by social scientists, including anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists. As noted in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, US government intelligence demands during the war gave tremendous

Figure 1: Sample page from an ASCA® report.

COL. 1	COL. 2
<p>26,517 PUBLISHED ITEMS SEARCHED THIS WEEK</p> <p><b>COLDS</b> IS HISTAMINE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SYMPTOMS OF RHINOVIRUS COLDS - A LOOK AT THE INFLAMMATORY MEDIATORS FOLLOWING INFECTION.</p> <p>(AUTH HIT) Naclerio RM Proud D Kagerisob A Lichtenst LM Hayden JO Gaffney JM 21 REFS</p> <p><b>PEDIAT INF</b> 7(3): 223-228, MAR 1988</p> <p>THESE ITEMS IN YOUR PROFILE WERE CITED:</p> <p>CHALTHREY JM ACTA OTO-LARYNGOL 5 5 43 43 84</p> <p>TURNER (CHALTHREY) J INFECT DIS 345 844 82</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M5246</p> <p>RM NACLERIO, GOOD SAMARITAN HOSP, PROFESS OF BLDG, SUITE 402, 5601 LOCH RAVEN BLVD, BALTIMORE, MD 21239</p>	<p><b>KININ:</b> LOCALIZATION OF DNA-SEQUENCES GOVERNING ALTERNATIVE MESSENGER-RNA PRODUCTION OF RAT KININOGEN GENES</p> <p>Kakizuka A Kitamura H Mahanish S 23 REFS</p> <p>J BIOL CHEM 263(8):2823-2827, MAR 15 1988</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M6037</p> <p>A KAKIZUKA, KYOTO UNIV, FAC MED, INST IMMUNOL, SAKYO KU, KYOTO 606, JAPAN</p>
<p><b>COMMON C</b> INEFFECTIVENESS OF ORAL TERFENADINE IN NATURAL COLDS - EVIDENCE AGAINST HISTAMINE AS A MEDIATOR OF COMMON COLD SYMPTOMS</p> <p>Gaffey MJ Kaiser DL Hayden FG 32 REFS</p> <p><b>PEDIAT INF</b> 7(3): 223-228, MAR 1988</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M5246</p> <p>FG HAYDEN, UNIV VIRGINIA, SCH MED, DEPT INTERNAL MED, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA 22908</p>	<p><b>KININ/</b> EFFECTS OF ILE, SER-BRADYKININ (I-KININ) RELATIVE TO BRADYKININ ON ELECTROLYTE SECRETION ACROSS RAT COLONIC MUCOSA INVITING (MEETING ABSTR.)</p> <p>Tsien KY Mellace LJ Kachur JF Gagnon JJ 15 NO REFS</p> <p><b>FASEB J</b> 2(4):A733, MAR 15 1988</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M6121</p> <p>KY TSIEH, OHIO STATE UNIV, COLL PHARM, COLUMBUS, OH 43210</p>
<p><b>RHINOVI</b> A DOUBLE-BLIND, PLACEBO-CONTROLLED CLINICAL-TRIAL OF THE EFFECT OF CHLORPHENIRAMINE ON THE RESPONSE OF THE NASAL AIRWAY, MIDDLE-EAR AND EUSTACHIAN-TUBE TO PROVOCATIVE RHINOVIIRUS CHALLENGE</p> <p>(AUTH HIT) Doyle MJ McBride TP Skoner DP Maddern BN Gaffney JM Lichtenst J 24 REFS</p> <p><b>PEDIAT INF</b> 7(3): 229-238, MAR 1988</p> <p>THESE ITEMS IN YOUR PROFILE WERE CITED:</p> <p>P SOC EXP BIOL MED 122 1137 64</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M5246</p> <p>MJ DOYLE, CHILDRENS HOSP, DEPT OTO-LARYNGOL, 2705 5TH AVE DESOIS ST, PITTSBURGH, PA 15213</p>	<p><b>KININ/</b> HIGH MOLECULAR-WEIGHT KININOGEN BLOCKS PLASMIN-INDUCED PLATELET-AGGREGATION AND CLEAVAGE OF AGGREGIN BY INHIBITING PLATELET CALPAIN (MEETING ABSTR.)</p> <p>Puri J Zhou F Colman RF Colman RM 14 NO REFS</p> <p><b>FASEB J</b> 2(4):A908, MAR 15 1988</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M6121</p> <p>RM PURI, TEMPLE UNIV, FROND RES CTR, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19140</p>
<p><b>RHINOVI</b> CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KININ GROUP RECEPTOR OF HUMAN RHINOVIIRUSES</p> <p>Mischer H Neubauer C Kuechler E Blasas D 32 REFS</p> <p><b>VIROLOGY</b> 163(1): 79-75, MAR 1988</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M5186</p> <p>D BLASAS, INST BIOCHEM, HARRINGERSTR 17, A-1090 WIEN, AUSTRIA</p>	<p><b>KININ/</b> ADULT RESPIRATORY-DISTRESS SYNDROME (ARDS) - THE PATHOPHYSIOLOGIC ROLE OF CATECHOLAMINE-KININ INTERACTIONS</p> <p>Deolivei GG Antonio MD 48 REFS</p> <p>J TRAUMA 28(2): 246-253, FEB 1988</p> <p>-----&gt; CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----&gt; ( ) #M5300</p> <p>GG DEOLIVEIRA, UNIV ROCHESTER, SCH MED &amp; DENT, DEPT PREVENT MED, DIV CLIN PHARMACOL, 601 ELMWOOD AVE, ROCHESTER, NY 14642</p>

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Author(s)	Title of Item	Number of References Cited by Author(s)
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Journal Title, Volume, Issue, Pages, Month, and Year of Publication

Journal Accession Number \_\_\_\_\_  
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impetus to the wide-scale use of "content analysis"—the process of studying, quantifying, and analyzing various forms of communication.<sup>2</sup> After the war, such information-gathering operations were greatly expanded, and the scope of the coverage was extended far beyond the newspapers and popular magazines, ultimately encompassing scientific journals.

As information grew more abundant and complex, housewives doing part-time work for clipping services gave way to trained analysts and catalogers, who sifted through material in dozens of languages. The extension of this kind of activity into industry de-

veloped gradually. I first heard about the industrial use of clipping services over 30 years ago as a consultant with Smith Kline & French. While the public relations department followed the popular press, it was the science information department that had the job of learning about any mention of their products in the scientific journals. Many companies, such as E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, Inc., had "intelligence" departments, which were also referred to as "technical information" or "competitor analysis" departments. Essentially, all such science-technical information groups were charged with keeping abreast of current de-

velopments in industry and in the scientific literature.

But even the largest industrial firms have finite resources, as do thousands of smaller companies that also need such services. So, inevitably, as this scanning task fell to librarians and information scientists, it was necessary to find more efficient ways to scan the world's vast riches of sci-tech and economic information.

### **Current Contents and ASCA**

About 30 years ago, *Current Contents*® (CC®) was born. It gradually became apparent to a lot of people that this was a relatively painless and cost-effective way of providing what amounted to a clipping service for scientists and scholars. Then, as now, users could scan CC each week and selectively order required articles from ISI or other sources. If speed was not essential,

users could write authors for reprints. CC was eventually to become the world's most widely used weekly catalog of articles published in scientific and technical journals.

ASCA appeared in 1965.<sup>3</sup> As I explained in a 1983 essay, ASCA complements, but does not replace, CC.<sup>4</sup> ASCA delivers your customized report each week and, unlike CC, can also tell you who has cited your work or the work of a colleague (this includes *all* authors on a given paper). And ASCA offers multidisciplinary coverage, combining the contents of all seven CC editions. In the accompanying box, we present a brief sampling of research questions that ASCA can help you answer.

ISI also offers another current-awareness service that is closely related to ASCA: *ASCATOPICS*®. With *ASCATOPICS*, you can pick one (or more) topics from ISI's established list of over 400 topic fields. You then receive a weekly report on all the new articles in our database published on that

#### **Research questions that ASCA® can help you answer:**

##### **What was published this week on disease "X" or drug "Y"?**

ASCA will keep you up-to-date on all the important literature in the subject fields you specify. Your weekly search can be based on keywords, word phrases, and even word fragments appearing in article titles—ensuring that you see all articles pertaining to your research needs and interests.

##### **What is coming out of laboratory "Z"?**

With ASCA, it is possible to retrieve articles by institution, enabling you to follow research at leading universities and organizations.

##### **What papers have cited journal "X" this week?**

Your ASCA profile can include a "cited journal" listing, allowing you to keep track of weekly citations to papers in the journal or journals you designate.

##### **What has scientist "Y" published this week?**

ASCA can keep you informed of the very latest publications by an author or authors of your choice. Each listing includes ISI®'s journal accession number, making it easy to obtain the full text of papers from ISI's *The Genuine Article*™ service.

##### **Who is quoting this key publication today?**

ASCA uses ISI's unique citation database to locate all *current* sources that have cited a given work that you specify. This makes it easy to keep abreast of how an author's theories, methods, or discoveries have been evaluated, modified, or applied in the current literature. This applies to *all* authors of a work, not just the first author.

topic. Ordering the full text of any article is easy with another ISI service, *The Genuine Article*<sup>™</sup>. To order the full text of any article contained in any *ASCA* or *ASCATOP-ICS* report, you simply use the ISI journal accession number contained in the article listing. The article will be sent to you within 48 hours after your order is received. Copies of articles can also be ordered in various electronic formats. We can send clippings by Telecopier for those rare occasions when you need them yesterday. ISI's library is at your disposal, and every article is furnished to you with payment of royalties to the copyright holder included in the price.

*ASCA* and its related services are all based upon the full ISI database, which includes *CC* and companion databases, such as the *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup>, *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>®</sup>, and the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*<sup>™</sup>. Now in its 23rd year, *ASCA* can claim to be the oldest operating commercial selective dissemination of information (SDI) service in existence. Some of its thousands of customers have used it continuously from the beginning.

However, as noted earlier, it has always been somewhat puzzling to me that more people have not taken advantage of *ASCA*. There are, in my view, complex reasons for *ASCA* not having more subscribers. Perhaps the most paradoxical reason is *ASCA*'s low price. Marketing experts know that the price of a product can be set so low that the value and credibility of the product are seriously impaired. Suppose a banker promised you an immediate \$1,000 for every \$100 you invested; understandably, you would be incredulous. No matter how the banker might try to convince you that there is no trick or hidden agenda, you would suspiciously resist such a giveaway. Yet, since *ASCA* is a by-product of the other costly ISI databases, it can be provided at an exceedingly low price. However, the minimum price of \$150 per year is then perceived as being too low in relation to its great, actual value. (I have not included, however, the cost of document delivery.) By way of comparison, you would only have to consider the price of \$1,500 a month charged by some established clipping services in the US,<sup>5</sup> or the cost of one or two research assistants (who could not cover the same range of articles), and then

begin to appreciate the paradoxical problem facing *ASCA*. This does not mean, however, that we intend to raise *ASCA*'s price. We simply argue against the assumption that, just because a product is inexpensive, it must not be worth purchasing. *ASCA*, we feel, convincingly disproves this notion.

Of course, competition also helps determine what can be charged for any service. As I described 15 years ago in *CC*,<sup>6</sup> many people use *CC* to provide a clipping service within their own firms or labs, and so it is easy to forget that the labor costs involved in doing this are actually overhead that is, in effect, hidden. Once that is taken into the equation, the much higher price charged by a commercial clipping service in science makes financial sense.

#### Toward the "Personalized Journal"

I have, of course, taken liberties in describing *ASCA* as a science clipping service. How can you have a clipping service without clips? So, in order for *ASCA* to be a full-fledged clipping service, we provide access to the articles, or tear sheets, as mentioned earlier, via *The Genuine Article* service. Recognizing the limitations of such an approach, we long ago began to offer what we call *ASCAmatic* service. *ASCAmatic* provides the full text of articles that match the reader's particular interests and needs. If you choose, you can limit *ASCAmatic* coverage to specific terms in your profile, rather than drawing on the entire profile. This is, in fact, nothing less than the personalized journal imagined by the genius crystallographer J.D. Bernal, the "sage of Cambridge" whom I've discussed previously,<sup>7</sup> and by other dreamers.

I suggested the idea of a personalized journal to readers many years ago, but only a few accepted the suggestion. Again, this problem seems related to the perceived value of a service that would deliver all needed articles *before* they were ordered. *ASCAmatic* is provided on a contractual basis, requiring a deposit account with *The Genuine Article* service. Although the cost may vary depending on the individual profile, the price of an *ASCAmatic* report compares very favorably with the \$1,500 per month that is customarily charged by a clipping service—

so favorably, in fact, that the real value and utility of *ASCAmatic* may not be appreciated by the potential user.

Many scientists and scholars do not recognize the "bargain" represented by a subscription to a large-circulation journal. Such journals are produced by societies or other publishers in large quantities, and so you must accept the chaff with the wheat. It is prohibitively expensive for them to provide a personalized journal—one designed just for you or for a small group of your colleagues. *ASCAmatic* represents a remedy to this problem. It is one means of obtaining *exclusively* the articles that pertain to your requirements and interests.

#### Try ASCA for Four Weeks—On Us

Five years ago I described the *ASCA* service in great detail for the new generation of *CC* readers and for those who had forgotten still earlier descriptions of the personalized journal.<sup>4</sup> It would serve little purpose for me to describe the details of this service once again. Whether you choose to go the route of the personalized, full-blown clipping service (*ASCAmatic*) or whether you use *ASCA* as an insurance policy (to make certain that you see those articles that cite your work, or that cite into one of our thousands of research fronts, or that come out of one of your competitor's labs—all of which might be missed by casual scanning), we'll be happy to send a reprint of our essay describing *ASCA* in detail.<sup>4</sup> And, what's

more, we invite you to try *ASCA* for four weeks—free.

In the 1983 essay, I described an experiment in which we created "automatic" profiles for *ASCA* subscribers using keywords, institutions, and the subscribers' names as cited and source authors. If you would like to participate in a similar experiment and are interested in a free four-week trial subscription to *ASCA*, I invite you to send us two or three of your latest reprints. They can serve as the basis for your own "automatic" *ASCA* profile. We won't object to receiving a few keywords or abstracts over the phone or by FAX to help get things moving. Your first four weekly reports will be free of charge (please note that this pertains solely to *ASCA* and not *ASCAmatic*). If you like what you see and decide to stay with *ASCA*, you can modify your profile as your interests change.

Over 25 years ago, information revolutionaries forecast that every professional in the world would be using an SDI system of some kind. It remains incomprehensible to me that this vision is so far from the reality. However, I have resolved to achieve the following: If you are not thoroughly familiar with *ASCA* or its equivalent before the millennium, it won't be our fault.

\* \* \* \* \*

*My thanks to Elizabeth Fuseler-McDowell and Christopher King for their help in the preparation of this essay.*

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