

Current Comments®

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All the Information You Used to ASCA
For: We Invite You to Try *Research Alert*

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ASCA®, ISI®'s weekly literature-alerting service, now has a new name: *Research Alert*™. Combining ASCA and ASCATOPICS®, *Research Alert* lets individual or group users select from an extensive list of topics or develop their own list of topics or names. Weekly reports then provide a concise listing of all newly published articles in our extensive database. This essay discusses various capabilities and applications of this service. Readers are then invited to try *Research Alert* free for a four-week trial, without obligation.

Librarians, scientists, and scholars prefer various methods for searching and staying on top of the literature. As the saying goes, "It takes all kinds to make a world." Recently, I've been touting the virtues of electronic searching. You've read me rhapsodizing about *Current Contents on Diskette*® (*CC-on-Diskette*™)^{1,2} and the *Science Citation Index*® (*SCI*®) *Compact Disc Edition* (along with its social-sciences counterpart, the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® [*SSCI*®] *Compact Disc Edition*).^{3,4} All of these have proven to be quite successful—even beyond our best expectations. The *SCI* and *SSCI* on CD-ROM, besides winning an award for unique software, have found their way into the many smaller libraries that could not afford the space required to store the 20 annual print volumes. And editors and other individual users can obtain these databases at affordable personal-use rates.

The print version of *Current Contents*® (*CC*®) continues to have a core of loyal readers—including the majority of *CC-on-Diskette* users, who still appreciate having an easily portable, print copy of *CC* for browsing on the way to work or wherever. And while the *SCI* on CD-ROM gains converts in industry and elsewhere, online searching continues unabated, primarily in industrial settings.

Much of this online searching, however, is done on a regular basis in order to stay

current, rather than for extensive, retrospective searches of the literature. However, our *SCISEARCH*® online database, a combination of the *SCI* and *CC*, is searchable for an 18-year period. And, most important, it is also used in an SDI (selective dissemination of information) mode—that is, on a frequent, regular basis to gather specified information from the most recently published journals and books.

Actually, you might say that ISI® was the inventor of the commercial SDI service, with a product we introduced some 25 years ago that is still going strong today: the *Automatic Subject Citation Alert*, better known (until recently, as I'll discuss) as ASCA®. I have come to think of this product as our "best-kept secret." A few years ago, in fact, I speculated about the mystery of why many more people hadn't taken advantage of this exceptional service.⁵ About a year ago, our new chief operating officer, William Schlegel, decided it was time to do something about that "secret." For starters, he observed that the phrase *Automatic Subject Citation Alert* was itself quite a mouthful. A name change was definitely in order.

ASCA Becomes *Research Alert*

We've now cut the name down to size. ASCA and ASCATOPICS have been com-

bined under the name *Research Alert*[™]. This essay serves as a suggestion that you might actually try out the advantages of this hybrid of CC, the *SCI*, the *SSCI*, as well as the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*[®] without any charge or commitment.

In brief, *Research Alert* puts our multidisciplinary database of approximately 7,000 journals at your disposal. Depending on your specific research interests, you can select one or more topics from ISI's established list of over 250 subject fields in the sciences and social sciences. Or, if you choose, you can work with the *Research Alert* staff to develop your own *personal subject profile*, a confidential, customized list of your special information needs. You simply list the names of topics, individual authors, or organizations that pertain to your interests. You then receive a weekly printed report listing all newly published articles on the topic or topics you selected (see the sample item in Figure 1). To obtain the full text of any article in a given report, you need only use ISI's *The Genuine Article*[®] document-delivery service. We can send those articles on their way to you, in a variety of electronic formats, within 48 hours of receiving your order.

It is, obviously, a matter of taste, style, or habit to prefer receiving a list of references rather than sitting at a personal computer to review anything from a few dozen to a few hundred hits per week. We find that thousands of individuals and institutions receive these weekly *Research Alert* bulletins and—despite the temptations of competing products, online and otherwise, from ISI itself—continue to use the service. I receive a half-dozen separate weekly reports, which, together with access to ISI's library, provide me with what I believe is the "ultimate clipping service," or, as I once expressed it, a personalized journal.⁵

Central to my personal *Research Alert* profile is the ability to monitor citations to my own work. I suppose if I were Linus Pauling, Oliver Lowry, or one of the other "citation superstars," finding and sifting through papers that cite my work might be an insupportable burden. However, as is the case with most scientists and scholars, my

publications are cited at a rate considerably below that of the superstars named above. Nevertheless, it is important in my work to know about the impact and applications of what I write. Of course, following citations to my own work is itself fun and I sometimes think a bit vainglorious, but, beyond that, I find it is essential to keeping in touch with others who, for whatever reason, cite my essays and other papers. More than half of these citations to my work are in journals that I normally never read.

In the same way, I am interested in references to the work of ISI colleagues such as Henry Small, director, corporate research, and Irv Sher, director, development and quality control. Several dozen of my colleagues and acquaintances, in fact, are listed in my profile so that I can follow not only their most recent publications, but also who is citing their work. *Research Alert* also allows me to track citations to *The Scientist*[®], the biweekly science newspaper that I publish.

By extending this basic need, I follow any articles that cite several key journals I'm interested in, such as *Scientometrics* and *Science Studies*.

My *Research Alert* profile also includes a list of keywords and key papers that I've developed over the years to catch articles on a variety of subjects, such as science journalism, peer review, research policy, etc. All together, my profile provides me with a manageable list of papers each week that I can scan in a few minutes at my leisure. Finding the time to read the items I've located is another matter. Many of them are short editorials, while others are lengthy reviews that require "quiet time" on a plane.

Research Alert also permits the tracking of papers from any institution, corporation, or city. For example, I have used this method for tracking the output of various colleges or universities, both in this country and abroad. Similarly, Joshua Lederberg, who is undergoing mandatory retirement this summer from his post as president, The Rockefeller University, New York, has used *Research Alert* to track every article published from that institution. Although he

Figure 1: Sample item, with annotations, from a *Research Alert*™ report.

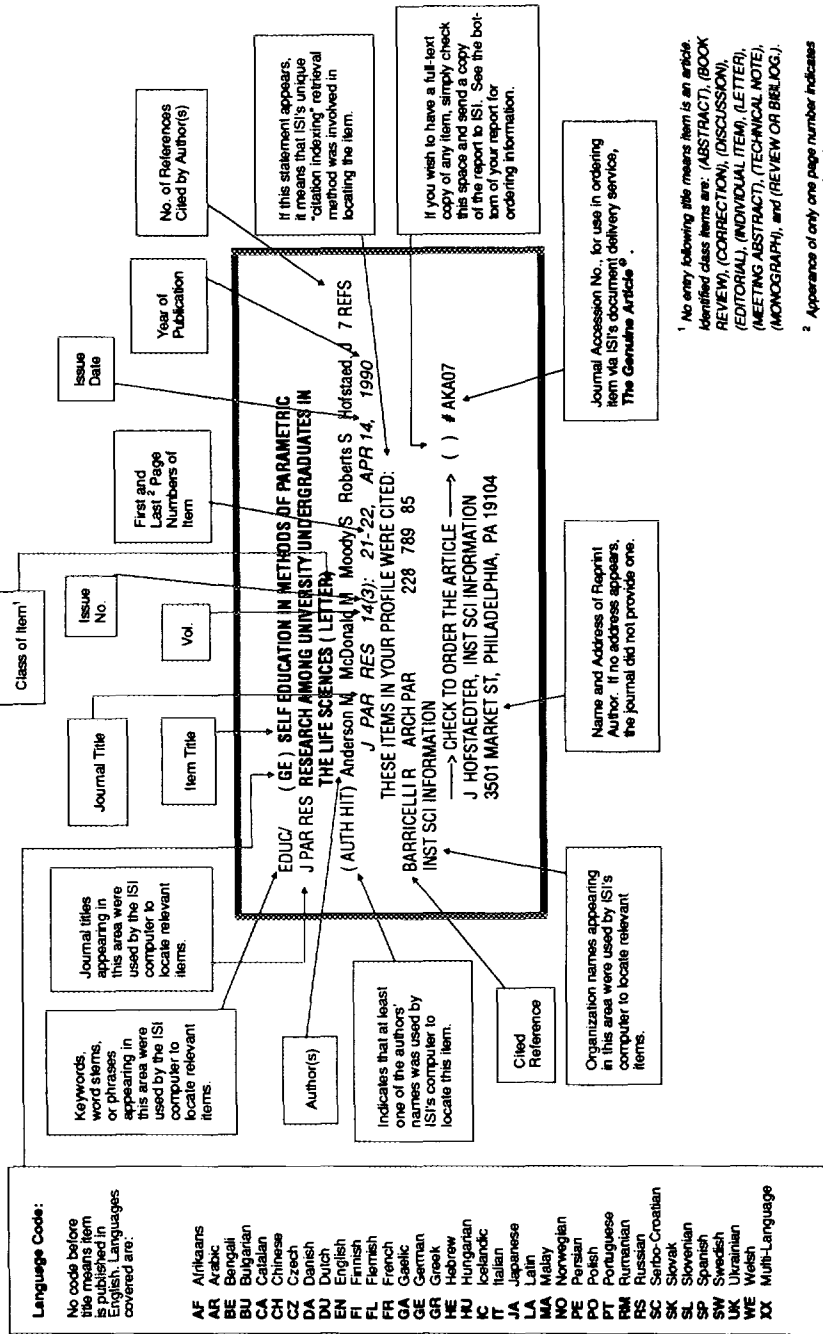


Figure 2. Sample page from a *Research Alert*™ report.

<p>Retrieved by Word (s) in Title</p>	<p>NEUROTOXI DOMOIC A</p>	<p>NEUROPATHOLOGY OF EXCITATORY NEUROTOXINS - THE DOMOIC ACID MODEL TRYPHONA L IVERSON F * REFS TOX PATHOL 18(1): 165-169, 1990 -----> CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----> () #DD118 L TRYPHONAS, HLTH & WELF CANADA, HLTH PROTECT BRANCH, SIR FREDERICK G BANTING RES CTR, PATHOL SECT, OTTAWA K1A 0L2, ONTARIO, CANADA</p>	<p>Retrieved by Cited Author</p>	<p>FIELDS M</p>	<p>COPPER DEFICIENCY IN PREGNANCY - EFFECT ON MATERNAL AND FETAL POLYOL METABOLITES FIELDS M LEHIS CG BEAL T SCHOLFIE D 64 REFS METABOLISM 39(5): 531-537, MAY 1990 THESE ITEMS IN THIS PROFILE WERE CITED: NEUROTOXICOL TERATOL 10 555 88 -----> CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----> () #DC467 M FIELDS, USDA ARS, BELTSVILLE AGR RES CTR, BELTSVILLE HUMAN NUTR RES CTR, BELTSVILLE, MD 20705</p>	<p>Retrieved by Cited Reference</p>	<p>GLUTAMATE</p>	<p>SMELLING-INDUCED RELEASE OF GLUTAMATE, ASPARTATE, AND TAURINE FROM ASTROCYTE CULTURES KIMELBER HK GODERIE SK HIGMAN S PANG S 73 REFS J NEUROSC 10(5):1583-1591, MAY 1990 THESE ITEMS IN THIS PROFILE WERE CITED: NEURON 1 623 88 SCIENCE 164 719 69 -----> CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----> () #DD426 HK KIMELBERG, UNION UNIV, DIV NEUROSURG A-60, ALBANY, NY 12208</p>	<p>Retrieved by Cited Journal</p>	<p>GLUTAMATE</p>	<p>PROTECTIVE EFFECTS OF THE GLUTAMATE ANTAGONIST MK- 801 ON PYRITHIAMINE-INDUCED LESTONS AND AMINO-ACID CHANGES IN RAT-BRAIN LANGLAIS PJ MAIR RG 47 REFS J NEUROSC 10(5):1664-1674, MAY 1990 -----> CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----> () #DD426 PJ LANGLAIS, VET ADM MED CTR, PSYCHOL SERV 116B, 3350 LA JOLLA VILLAGE DR, SAN DIEGO, CA 92161</p>	<p>Retrieved by Cited Journal</p>	<p>INDIRECT MECHANISM OF LEAD-INDUCED GENOTOXICITY IN CULTURED-MAMMALIAN-CELLS HARTWIG A SCHLEPEG R BEYERSMA D 40 REFS MUTAT RES 241(1): 75-82, MAY 1990 THESE ITEMS IN THIS PROFILE WERE CITED: NEUROTOXICOLOGY 5 295 84 -----> CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----> () #DD442 A HARTWIG, UNIV BREMEN, DEPT BIOL & CHEM, BIOCHEM GRP, D-2800 BREMEN 33, FED REP GER</p>	<p>Retrieved by Cited Journal</p>	<p>MODULATION OF NEURONAL-ACTIVITY OF LOCUS COERULEUS IN RATS INDUCED BY EXCITATORY AMINO-ACIDS PING HX HU HO LIU GO 13 REFS ACT PHAR SJ 11(3): 193-195, MAY 1990 THESE ITEMS IN THIS PROFILE WERE CITED: NEUROTOXINS THEIR PH 19 87 -----> CHECK TO ORDER THE ARTICLE -----> () #DC727 HX PING, CHINA PHARMACEUT UNIV, SCH PHARM, DEPT PHARMACOL, NANJING 210009, PEOPLES R CHINA</p>	<p>Retrieved by Cited Journal</p>	<p>NEUROTOXI</p>	<p>NEUROTOXICITY AND PHARMACOKINETICS OF INTRATHECAL ADMINISTRATION OF ACNU IN DOGS M KIBATAH MIHARA Y TAKAKI S MIHARA S OFFS</p>
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is an avid user of CD-ROM and diskette products, Lederberg notes that the printed format of *Research Alert* is ideal for copy and distribution to the library and to several university officers and faculty. Particularly useful is the ability to obtain reports based on citations or on a cited journal. Lederberg, who has used the service since its inception a quarter-century ago, notes that it has been indispensable for administrative as well as scientific purposes.⁶ Figure 2 is a sample

page from a *Research Alert* report demonstrating how various items were retrieved.

Some journalists use *Research Alert* to follow papers published in their immediate geographical area. In that way, they have a lead on stories of local interest. Somehow these journalists have managed to conceal this trade secret from competitors. A significant group of *Research Alert* subscribers are marketing researchers. An instrument manufacturer, for example, may want to track

novel applications; clearly, this would also be true for drug firms trying to follow the clinical literature.

We Invite You to Try *Research Alert*

As I've noted above, all of us are faced with an abundance of products, formats, and choices in the information marketplace. *Research Alert* represents an ideal mix of convenience, simplicity, and coverage: a weekly report, delivered in an easily readable format and tied precisely to your own interests and requirements. It would require a number of research assistants to spot even a fraction of these weekly references of direct interest to you.

Obviously most readers recognize systems involving the use of keywords or title words. But I am amazed how often I have to tell journal editors that this service enables them to follow references to *any* of the articles published in their journals. Now, if you are the editor of the *Journal of the American Chemical Society*, the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, or the *New England Journal of Medicine*, this may seem absurd. After all, why would anyone want to scan the hundreds of articles that cite their journal each week? But consider the fact that 80 percent of the journals we cover are cited less than 2,000 times per year. That translates into less than 20 to 40 citations a week. This number is easily manageable and useful for both new journals and older medium- or small-sized journals. And if your specialty is closely identified with that journal, then you may find such information quite illuminating. Each listing in the report indicates the specific journal article that was cited.

Robert L. Brent, editor of the journal *Teratology*, notes that he uses *Research Alert* to monitor citations to the journal so that he can report on progress at editorial board meetings.⁷ In a 1982 piece in *Teratology*, Brent described his own involvement in refining and improving the *Research Alert* profile on teratology.⁸ Although simply a customer of the service at the outset, he became so committed and insistent about necessary changes that he wound up work-

Table 1: Selection of available *Research Alert*™ profiles. (The number following each item is the "S" code used in ordering.)

Neurotoxins (S0770)
Breast Cancer (S0777)
Prostate Cancer (S0778)
Chronobiology (S0780)
Reverse Genetics Methods (S0779)
Lyme Disease (S0775)
Pheromones (S0082)
Plant Molecular Biology (S0749)
Ruminant Nutrition (S0205)
Enzyme Isolation & Immobilization (S0397)
Monoclonal Antibodies, Hybridomas (S0709)
Chemical Hazards—Health and Safety (S0676)
Polymers—Preparation of New Monomers & Polymers (S0046)
Aging/Geriatrics (S0639)
Alcoholism (S0003)
Drug Addiction & Abuse (S0020)
Electron Microscopy (S0166)
Thin Film Research & Technology (S0149)
Air Pollution—Effects, Source & Control (S0001)
Contaminants, Pesticides & Toxins in the Environment (S0254)
Soil Science & Ecology (S0129)
Water Pollution—Effects, Source & Control (S0006)
Cell Motility (S0074)
Genetic Engineering (S0442)
Immunoassay & Immunoserological Testing (S0246)
Interferon & Interferon Inducers (S0049)
Prostaglandins (S0008)
Visual Science (S0746)
AIDS (S0713)
Alzheimer's Disease (S0723)
Cystic Fibrosis/Exocrine Disorders (S0037)
Hypertension (S0325)
Sleep Disorders (S0742)
Smoking—Pathology & Addiction (S0669)
Voice Care (S0756)
Antibiotics (β -Lactams—Cephalosporins, Penicillin) (S0133)
Drug Delivery Systems (S0748)
Structure/Activity Relationships (S0052)
Superconductors (S0743)

ing with manager James Hofstaedter on modifying the profile. The teratology profile, thanks to these efforts, has become one of the service's most successful. Brent, who is chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Jefferson Medical College, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, and is also affiliated with the Alfred I. duPont Institute, Wilmington, Delaware, was the subject of an essay earlier this year. We reprinted a paper in which he and his wife, Lillian H. Brent, discussed the importance of balancing the needs of family and friends with the demands of a medical career.⁹

It seems to me that book as well as journal publishers would also find the *Research Alert* service useful for following references to books of all kinds, including cross-disciplinary citations, not to mention book reviews.

I could repeat here the details I've previously reported on this service, but perhaps the best way for you to learn what *Research Alert* can do for you is to try it out for a month. Given my long-standing belief in this service and its indispensable role in my own monitoring of the literature, I feel compelled to offer what might be called the "*Research Alert Challenge*": try it free for four weeks.

In Table 1, I've listed a very brief selection of the topics that are already available. If this excites your curiosity but does not happen to cover your particular interests, find out how we can put together a trial for

your own list of topics and authors. A number of small societies have used this service to provide their members coverage of topics as wide as science and religion, art and medicine, numerical taxonomy and classification, etc.

After selecting an existing profile or consulting with our staff to create a new one, you will receive the first of four complimentary weekly reports within a few days. Although you have the option to cancel without obligation, I believe you will find yourself wondering how you ever did without *Research Alert*.

* * * * *

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