



Basic Search Frequently Asked Questions

Updated February 1, 2008

Q. *Why do I usually get different result counts when I perform the same search in Basic Search and "Advanced Ovid Search" / "SilverPlatter Search"?*

A. Basic Search was designed to find the *best* results, not *all* results. Results with the best score are shown, then results with the next best score, then results with the third-best score and so on. We stop after the first group that brings the total result count past 500. If that group is large, the ending count may be a lot higher than 500.

In other words, the count for Basic Search results has a different meaning than the count for "Advanced Ovid Search" / "SilverPlatter Search" results.

Q. *Why was 500 chosen as the cutoff point for Basic Search results?*

A. Based on our extensive end-user research, we found that users who are looking for the most relevant articles to their query— rather than doing an exhaustive literature search— rarely look at more than 100 results before accepting what they have, refining their search, or trying a new search. On the other hand, we want to have a sufficient amount of results. Based on this research, it was determined that five hundred is an appropriate set of results for Basic Search.

Q. *Why do I sometimes get fewer results when I include related terms in a Basic Search than when I leave them out? Shouldn't a broader search find more results?*

A. One consequence of stopping results after the first group that brings the total count past 500 is that the size of the final group determines the size of the total. When related terms are included in a search, sometimes the final group is smaller than when related terms are left out. In such a case, the broader search gives fewer results.

Q. *Why does the spell checker sometimes think perfectly good words may be misspelled?*

A. Basic Search relies on two authorities for spelling questions, the database being searched and a lexicon. Search terms found in the lexicon are assumed to be spelled correctly. When a term does not appear in the lexicon, the database is our guide. If the word is also absent from the database, there's a good chance that it's misspelled. If it occurs often, it's probably fine. But what if it's in the database just a few times? Is it a data entry error (they happen) or a new term, say a recently developed drug or procedure? We can't be sure, so we alert the user that something may be wrong.

Q. *How does Basic Search handle "and" and "or"?*

A. Most of the time, "and" and "or" have no special meaning in Basic Search. They are just plain English words that separate other, more important words. But queries that look like result set combinations in Advanced Ovid Search" / "SilverPlatter Search", such as:

1 and 3

4 or 5

2 and 3 and 6

are interpreted that way as a convenience for experienced searchers. We think this is safe because queries like these don't make much sense as ordinary searches.