3-2020

Hosting Inspec on Engineering Village or Web Science: A case study in comparing database platforms

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Citation

McAllister, J., & Diaz, N. (2020). Hosting Inspec on Engineering Village or Web Science: A case study in comparing database platforms. *Reference Services Review* https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-08-2019-0050

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Journal:	*Reference Services Review*
Manuscript ID	RSR-08-2019-0050.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Institution of Engineering and Technology, Inspec, Web of Science, Engineering Village, Database comparison, Librarianship

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Abstract

Purpose – As library budgets continue to constrict, librarians will need to become more familiar with comparing database host platforms. This paper aims to compare Inspec on Elsevier's Engineering Village (EV) and Clarivate's Web of Science (WOS) from a novice user experience. The main objectives are to identify some R1 institutions that subscribe to Inspec and highlight some of the key differences between the two platforms.

Design/methodology/approach – Information on Inspec was gathered from various sources as well as the home website, IET, and the host platform websites of Elsevier and Clarivate Analytics. Data was also collected from brochures and guides to help illustrate some of the main features and differences that novice users would be familiar with.

Findings – Most institutions subscribe to Inspec via the Engineering Village platform. Results from the study conclude that Engineering Village was selected over Web of Science for hosting Inspec due to a more user-friendly interface, potential lower cost, and faster platform updates, in response to meeting user needs.

Originality/Value – Much of the literature focuses on the unfamiliar details and not so much on the novice user. This paper provides a unique perspective in how a novice user would prefer the attributes of one host platform from the other. Additionally, the same review criteria can be applied in other subjects and disciplines.

Keywords: Institution of Engineering and Technology; Inspec; Web of Science; Engineering Village; Database comparison.

Introduction

The increase in the availability of electronic resources has created competition amongst vendors leading to a race for improved products and options for librarians and users. One concern is the rising cost of database subscriptions, as the price has increased at a rate between 5-10% (Bosch *et al*., 2019). In turn, libraries must continuously evaluate their database collections in order to align with strategic goals, stay relevant, and reduce costs. Those evaluations can be complicated due to vendor competition on creating the best database platforms, and as a result, provide users with different experiences. This article reflects a case study at the University of Arkansas that compared a novice user experience of Inspec between Elsevier's Engineering Village and Clarivate's Web of Science. The study expands on existing literature related to database platform comparisons by focusing on novice users. Findings from the study may help librarians who are undertaking similar platform reviews.

In 2018, the University of Arkansas Libraries began a systematic review of serials and database subscriptions. Of interest during this review was the database Inspec, a high cost engineering database which was being provided by Clarivate on their Web of Science platform. As part of the review of the Inspec database, the Libraries secured a trial subscription to Inspec on Elsevier's Engineering Village platform. This case study describes the criteria used and data collected during a review of those two platforms.

The authors had two objectives during review of the platforms. The first objective was to determine which platform was used by peer institutions who subscribe to Inspec. The second objective was to identify unique platform features of Engineering Village and Web of Science

and evaluate those features with a novice user in mind. While there is not an official process to review and compare database collections on different platforms, the criteria presented in this case can be adopted for reviews of databases and platforms in other disciplines.

The University of Arkansas Libraries has had some form of Inspec since the early 1990s when it was available via CD-ROM. Years later, Inspec moved to a network platform in the late 90s and in 2005 was added to the electronic catalog system known as Sierra. In 2018, the engineering librarian and library graduate assistant supported the College of Engineering which had enrollment of about 3,500 undergraduate students, 943 graduate students, 119 faculty, and 180 staff members.

Inspec Database

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) maintains the database known as Inspec. Created in 1967, Inspec contains over 18 million records with over 12 million journal articles, 5.97 million conference papers, 14 thousand book titles, and 545 open access journals. Of the 18 million records, 80% are full text linked via digital object identifiers (DOIs) and some contain International Patent Classification Codes. According to the IET's experts, between 750,000 to 850,000 records are added each year (Hancox, 2019). The subject breakdown of the 17 million records comprises about 60% physics, 40% electrical engineering, 30% computer science, 10% mechanical engineering, and 2% information technology for business. Inspec covers five main subject areas: Physics, Electrical Engineering & Electronics, Computers & Control, Information Technology for Business, and Mechanical & Production Engineering (IET, 2019a). Although, there are more than nine vendors that host Inspec, this study will only focus on Elsevier's

Engineering Village (EV), introduced in 2009, and Clarivate's Web of Science (WOS), introduced in 2001.

Literature Review

Evaluating Database Platforms

The comparison of databases across different platforms is not new in library literature and has begun to take more importance due to the annual rise in subscription costs. Librarians continue to evaluate databases and database platforms, seeking tools that will best fit the needs of their users. LaGuardia (2005) notes that databases should have "understandable search capabilities, powerful behind-the-scenes technology, and metadata that brings better and more relevant results."

Review of specific databases sometimes leads to an evaluation of platform that database is hosted on. The library literature has several examples of articles detailing this type of project. Beck (2010) notes several major areas to be considered in the evaluation process such as the search interface, content coverage, test search examples, and price. Beck also mentions the date range, the detailed searchability of controlled vocabulary, and the conversation in the amount of scope of coverage of the subject areas can be additional aspects to consider. Bethel & Rogers (2014) suggest producing a checklist for database host platforms in order to demonstrate their ability to conduct complex searches for systematic review. Although their results showed that the database platforms did not perform well, support for a checklist could assist in the purchasing and decision-making steps at research institutions which heavily rely on conducting complex searches. They concluded that complex searching for systematic reviews should not be

considered when choosing hosts or purchasing database packages but should focus more on the ease of use and cost (Bethel & Rogers 2014).

Platform Comparisons

Bandyopadhyay (2010) examined Biological Abstracts on the platforms SilverPlatter and EBSCOhost. The study revealed that the information sought by the user, whether it be a novice or expert, depends on their expertise and knowledge about the search interfaces, Boolean operators, and understanding the overall design of the database in use. Brown (2003) compared the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database on four different platforms. The background of her study originated for assisting in the library's decision in determining which platform is the best fit based on important features and comparisons. Kimball (2010) looked at the GeoRef database on Ovid SP, EBSCO, and Engineering Village. His concentrations for comparison focused on general features, search record fields, display options, retrieval options, and comparing the search results. Soules, Golomb, Kelly and Chen (2014) focused on the comparing the search results on the MLA International Bibliography in order to understand why the same searches had different results on the platforms EBSCOhost, Gale/Cengage, and ProQuest. They discovered that similar terminology and field codes across multiple platforms don't always align and can be quite a challenge. They also found it difficult for users to understand what the field codes and other database terminology meant. Overall, such issues have led to a larger conversation about how librarians need to make a choice on database platforms and if that is based mainly on cost and what users are most familiar with (Soules et al., 2014). While there is published material regarding the comparison of hosting a database collection on two or more platforms, much of the published work aims at the features and functionality. Due

to the high number of published articles and relevance of the subject, this work only focuses on featured articles that contribute to the overall comparison of Inspec on different host platforms.

Comparing Inspec Host Platforms

Articles about Inspec platform comparisons are hardly new. Wilde (2000) wrote about Inspec on the Axiom, New First Search, Ovid, ProQuest, and SilverPlatter platforms. She featured a table that compared controlled indexing, uncontrolled indexing, treatment codes, numerical data indexing, classification codes, chemical substance-controlled indexing, astronomical object indexing, thesaurus, SDI option, and per-search pricing. Her study focused on areas as searchability of the interface, search options, and added features. It was also noted by Wilde that Inspec's interface on different platforms had a huge effect on the retrievability of information on whichever platform Inspec was hosted on.

Salisbury and Gupta (2004) compared Inspec on EbscoHost, EV, and the Institute of Information Science. Ratings were given based on pricing, interface, searchability, and enrichment. EV came out with the highest rated score and excelled in the areas of the interface and searchability. Salisbury also noted that the default search fields provide good descriptions and that the searches can be adjusted to last four weeks of records added. Salisbury followed up with another sound comparison between the platforms InspecDirect and EV (Salisbury, 2008). She highlighted pricing, database interfaces, search modes, and noted the scores in distinct categories on making the determination that EV again came out with the highest marks between the two (Salisbury, 2008). Recently, Salisbury (2019) focused on comparing Inspec on EV and WOS. She describes in detail about each platform's unique features, search and detailed record descriptions, and

general interface options. Salisbury highlights a few similarities that will be mentioned below, however, she covers in more depth the features of online assistance and describing the where to access the help options on EV and WOS (Salisbury, 2019).

Methods

This case study presents a comparison of Inspec on the Engineering Village and Web of Science platforms. Prompted by a library wide review of recurring annual subscriptions, the authors set out to determine which platform was used by peer institutions and evaluate both host platforms with novice users in mind.

One goal was to identify peer institutions and determine whether they currently subscribe to Inspec, and, if so, on what platform it is hosted. Peer institutions were defined as R1 schools with a comparable enrollment of undergraduate engineering students at the University of Arkansas. This was done in order to establish a correlation undergraduate engineering enrollment numbers with other universities as well as reflect the similarities of those institution's library budgets and viable database subscriptions. The list of selected R1 institutions classified as "high research activity" was collected from the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education website (Indiana University, 2017). Undergraduate engineering enrollment numbers came from data published on the American Society for Engineering Education website, official academic institution websites, and through contacting select academic institutions directly (American Society for Engineering Education, 2019). Institutions with an undergraduate engineering enrollment between 1,596 and 4,787 in the 2018 school year were included in the study. Several reasons fuel the decision to select R1 institutions as the sample for this study.

Since the University of Arkansas is an R1 institution it made sense to look at comparable institutions where similar research standards and guidelines are authorized. Observations indicate that research universities must state some form of research objective in their list of strategies, goals, priorities, etc.

The second part of the study was to systematically review and evaluate the unique attributes of the Inspec database on two platforms. Identifying the key differences or enhancements was conducted via a desktop computer with dual monitors. This provided an ideal setting for viewing and comparing the platforms side by side such as looking at the default search interfaces as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Screenshots were taken by the screen casting software program JING.

[Insert Figure 1]

[Insert Figure 2]

Research Findings

Inspec Institutions

As of 2018, 69 institutions fell within the 1,596 to 4,787 enrollment number, 55 of which currently subscribe to Inspec. Table 1 reveals 46 institutions that subscribe to Inspec on the EV platform while only 4 institutions host Inspec on WOS and 5 on Ebsco. Only one institution carried Inspec on both EV and WOS, however, this institution was in transition in switching over to the EV platform.

[Insert Table 1]

Comparing Interface User Features

It is worth mentioning that both database platforms are very similar, but there are some noticeable host platform differences such as the Engineering School Profile for EV and the tab and link to the add-on Kopernio for WOS. The Engineering School Profile tab is located under the main heading in EV and is primarily for academics in administration that are wanting to look at the scope of their program and its research output. Kopernio operates on actively searching to find the full text of the article, thus reducing the time to find it. It is beneficial for novice users to create a personalized profile on both EV or WOS, because having a personal profile grants the ability to create a results list, generate search & citation alerts, and saving records for citation use. In deciding which profile is better for the novice user, the both platforms offer much of same options with regards to saving, emailing, and printing records. The EV user profile does provide the option to make preferences such as the controlling the number of results per page, highlighting search terms, and determining the download location like a desktop and in which format such as PDF. It is worth noting that the WOS platform offers the choice to display its content in another language with at least 7 to choose from whereas EV does not have any option to switch to another language format. Since trends in analytics and bibliometrics are on the rise, WOS can display the author's ResearcherID and ORCID number in the detailed record, but only with author approval and a verified account with those entities.

Comparing Search Options

As one of the most important parts of a database, the search box provides a place for inputting the search operators and keywords which in turn will retrieve the related information (Techopedia, 2019). For novice users, a greyed-out example in the search box comes as a default, which is beneficial in showing how a possible search statement may look with operators,

codes, and tags. The EV and WOS platforms provide two main search modes: quick/basic and expert/advanced. The expert and advanced search options allow the use of search codes with EV having 31 to WOS's field tags numbered at 18. EV's search codes are conveniently nestled under the drop-down tab on the landing page which makes it easy for the novice user to follow a path from top to bottom. The WOS advanced search tab takes the user to a new page that contains no organization as it looks like different pieces of information contained in the tables, boxes, and headings are sewn together on the page without any common theme or heading. The field tags with brackets next to the terms are links to the help page for that term or it opens a search box for that specific term. One minor setback is that both platforms present their search codes and field tags in a small font, but the problem can be alleviated by increasing the zoom on the web browser of choice. Also, applying search codes and field tags in a search would not be popular for a novice user, however, it is important to know they can be found and used in later searches.

Both EV and WOS offer controlled vocabulary options through the Inspec thesaurus. The EV platform provides a thesaurus tab under the dropdown Search tab at the top. The WOS thesaurus link is more difficult to find as it is next to the Uncontrolled Index field tag. EV, also provides a better display when term is to be selected, it is then placed in the search box going from a left to right action. Users also have the choice to perform a vocabulary search, exact term, or browse search. The thesaurus feature in WOS is displayed from top to bottom, which is more difficult to read, and it gives too many terms and options. The published yearly coverage of Inspec begins with EV starting on 1896 followed by WOS in 1898. The timespan for WOS is better for novice

users since it can be adjusted to the current week, last 2 or 4 weeks, year to date, or all the way back to the last 5 years.

Search Results Display

The search results display page allows the user to narrow the search results by using filters, sort results by different fields, and how to display those results. This kind of flexibility is needed for current novice users, because not all will adopt the same search strategy. On EV's results page, the search box and limiters can still be modified without going back to the default search homepage. This ability is missing on the WOS platform, thus can hinder the search flexibility sought after by novice users. Additionally, EV also has added another location for suggestive terms underneath the search box, see Figure 3. Those suggested terms are the Inspec controlled vocabulary terms that are located under the refinement section on the left.

[Insert Figure 3]

Beneath the EV number of results are buttons, which allow the user to create alerts, save the search, or generate an RSS Feed of the search. Those buttons are of a different color and are squared so that they stand out close without being a distraction to the eye. WOS has a bell icon which grants the ability to "Create Alert" for those with a WOS profile which can be seen in Figure 4.

[Insert Figure 4]

Both platforms have unique filters with EV having a Numeric Filter and Author Affiliation. The Numeric Filter is useful to the novice user as it can filter to a specific value or range with the options to select by data type, unit, and operator (Dressel, 2017). WOS features the Highly Cited

in Field, Hot Papers in Field, Open Access, and Research Areas. The Highly Cited in Field are represented by an orange trophy icon and it represents those journal articles in the top 1% of their academic fields in that area and publication year. Hot Papers feature a red flame icon and it constitutes journal articles published in the past 2 years and have received enough citations to be in the top 0.1% in its academic field. Open Access articles are accessible via the publisher or institutional repository. Both Highly Cited in Field and Hot Papers in Field can be quite useful for novice users as it's a quick way to identify those papers that are making an impact in their respective research areas.

WOS also has is the Analyze Results, which will take the search record number of results and display them in a more visualized setting with the option to choose between a bar graph or tree map. The filters can still be applied, thus changing the form and shape of the visual along with the option to download the map for later purposes. The wide array of options could be overwhelming for novice users as options include the visualization type, number of results, sort by, show, download, hide, and the minimum record count.

Unique sorting options for WOS records include the Times Cited and Usage Count. The ability to sort by Times Cited or Usage Count helps users narrow what journal articles are important. This may also assist in better navigation of the search results without having to rely solely on keywords and controlled vocabulary terms.

Detailed Record Display

In the detailed Inspec record, EV allows the option of simple or detailed abstract viewing. The detailed abstract view helps novice users identify parts of a citation such as volume and issue

number. Both platforms have adopted the ability to highlight the search terms from the search box in the title, abstract, and vocabulary term sections. The right side of the Inspec detailed record on EV contains additional features such as Related Documents, Tools in Scopus, and Add a Tag features. The Related Documents tab lists journals, conferences, articles in press, book chapters, and standards, which can make searching for specific types of content with similar information easier for the novice user to understand. The Tools in Scopus and Add a Tag don't seem relevant enough for a novice user to explore further.

For additional author information, WOS offers the ResearcherID and ORCID Number only if the author has registered and volunteered to provide that information with Clarivate. EV does not provide a ResearcherID or ORCID number for their detailed record, however, has added PlumX Metrics, which tracks numbered count details like citation indexes, citation captures, usage, social media, and mention. Elsevier believes that PlumX Metrics will help users understand how research is being used, communicated, and the impact within the research community (Tucker, 2017).

The Inspec detailed record on WOS has two boxes labeled Citation Network and Use in Web of Science. A novice user would most likely not pay much attention to those numbers but concentrate more on the publications that have most recently been cited by or the usage count.

Discussion

Inspec Survey Institutions

Since libraries must continue to evaluate their database collections for lowering costs, staying current, and align with strategic goals, this study compared a novice user experience of Inspec on

EV and Web of Science. The results of the survey indicate that a high number of R1 institutions that subscribe to Inspec do so on the EV platform. It is unclear what has driven this clear preference for the EV platform. The choice of platform may be related to platform quality or may have come down to what platform had been introduced first along or bundled as part of a subscription package or membership into a consortium (Soules et al., 2014).

The review of Inspec holdings by peer institutions occasionally required contacting the institutions directly. This in turn led to interesting discoveries. A librarian at one institution noted that Inspec on EV is what was always the standard, and the thought never occurred to consider other platform options.

The cost of Inspec on a specific host platform must be another factor in making a choice. Competitive price agreements and subscription to other platforms owned by the same vendor could mean a more lucrative subscription package bundled with other subject disciplines, and special add-ons may gain support from other subject librarians. EV contains the engineering focused collection, Compendex, and the ability to bundle Inspec with Compendex for those with an engineering concentration expands the search for content. EV is owned by Elsevier, which does have a powerful voice in the world of database vendor subscriptions. Their control can have a large impact on user feedback, interface design, and when academic libraries talk about budgets, future subscriptions and renewals.

Choosing Engineering Village

This study found that the EV platform has a more user-friendly experience than WOS. It was easy to navigate the platform, conduct searches and interpret results. The simplicity of selecting the drop-down tabs and finding specific search tabs, limiters, and headings grants even the

novice user the ability to search and find information. It was also convenient to modify the search from the search results page instead of having to start from the beginning as one would have to in WOS.

The thesaurus tab in EV allows the novice user to selectively search for controlled terms without all the clutter and content that is displayed on the equivalent WOS page. Also, the location of the controlled vocabulary terms under the search box in EV will gain more use and popularity by novice users. The numeric filter on EV is usefully located at the top of the filter list and is easy to use. The PlumX metrics feature on EV is a great metric tool for users to track and measure published work. EV's option to not prefer citation management software presents the novice user with the flexibility of selecting one.

The WOS platform does have some features worth noting even though it is not the preferred choice. WOS users would find the Highly Cited and Hot Papers filters convenient in narrowing search results. The ResearcherID and ORCID numbers for authors are a great addition, as this demonstrates a cross collaboration of platforms in publishing data and research. WOS grants users the ability to change the language platform, although the actual records themselves would still be in the language of the journal it was published in.

Conclusion

The review and evaluation of database platforms needs to be an ongoing process in order to better understand current information retrieval methods and to stay up to date in meeting user needs. Additionally, database platforms should be reviewed with novice users in mind since most are considered as much at academic institutions. It is critical to continually compare not just the price and use, but also the unique features that the current or new database platform provides.

This study provides a framework for one method of comparing database platforms which can be adopted in other disciplines. It identified R1 Carnegie institutions that subscribe to Inspec and compared it two host platforms. Also, this study highlighted why the EV platform provides a superior user experience over WOS. Ideally, the authors of this study would want both platforms to adopt many of the same features that the other is missing.

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Table I. List of R1 Carnegie classification institutions with access to Inspec.

Platform	University	
Engineering Village (46)	Binghamton University	University of California - Irvine
	Boston University	University of California - Los Angeles
	Carnegie Mellon University	University of California - Riverside
	Columbia University – New York City	University of California - Santa Cruz
	Cornell University	University of Cincinnati - Main Campus
	Drexel University	University of Connecticut
	Florida International University	University of Houston
	Florida State University	University of Illinois at Chicago
	Johns Hopkins University	University of Iowa
	Kansas State University	University of Louisville
	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	University of Minnesota - Twin Cities
	Montana State University	University of Nevada - Las Vegas
	New York University	University of Nevada – Reno
	Northeastern University	University of New Hampshire - Main Campus
	Northwestern University	University of Pennsylvania
	Oklahoma State University – Stillwater	University of South Carolina - Columbia,
	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	University of South Florida - Main Campus
	Temple University	University of Southern California
	The University of Tennessee – Knoxville	University of Utah
	The University of Texas at Arlington	University of Virginia - Main Campus
	University of Buffalo	Virginia Commonwealth University
	University of Arkansas	Wayne State University
	University of California - Davis	University of West Virginia.
Web of Science (4)	Boston College	Stanford University
	New York University	University of Wisconsin - Madison
Ebsco (5)	Texas Tech University	University of Pittsburgh – Pittsburgh
	The University of Texas at El-Paso	Washington State University.
	University of Maryland - College Park	

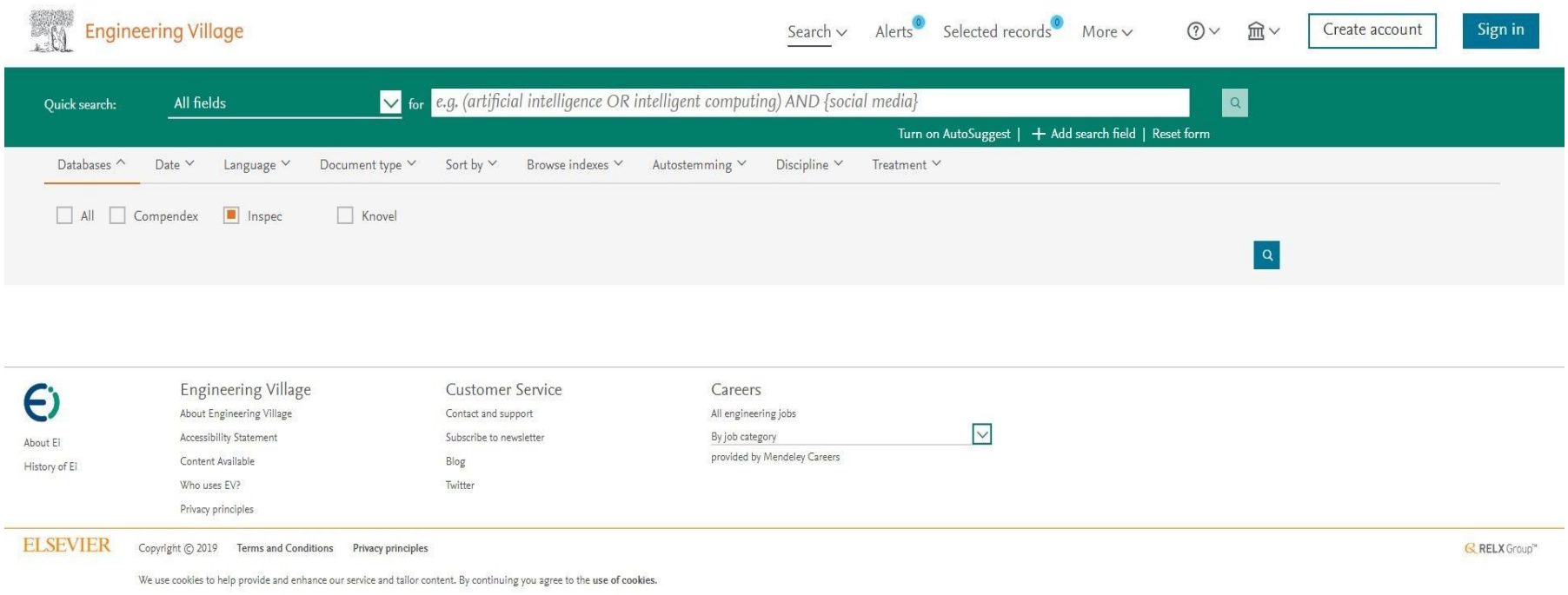

Figure 1. Inspec default search page on Engineering Village.

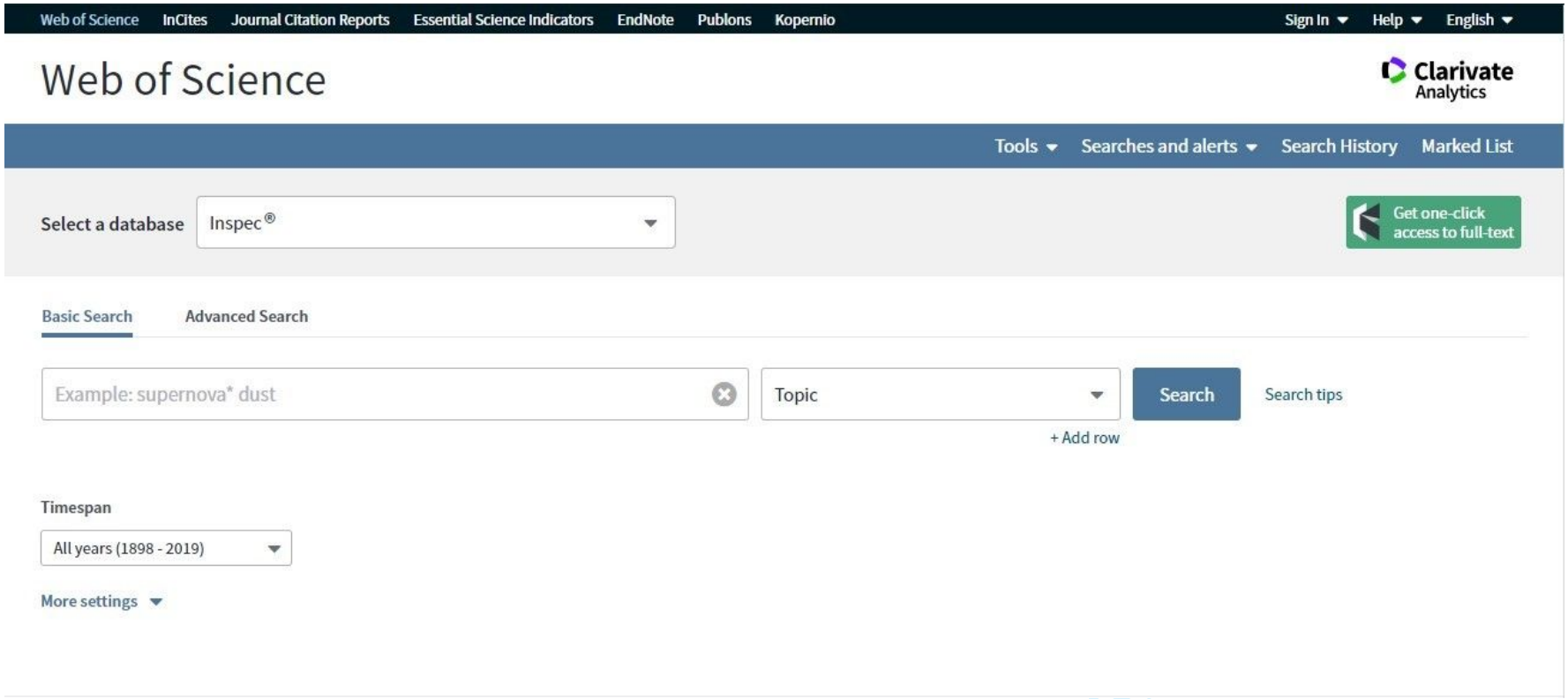

Figure 2. Inspec default search page on Web of Science.

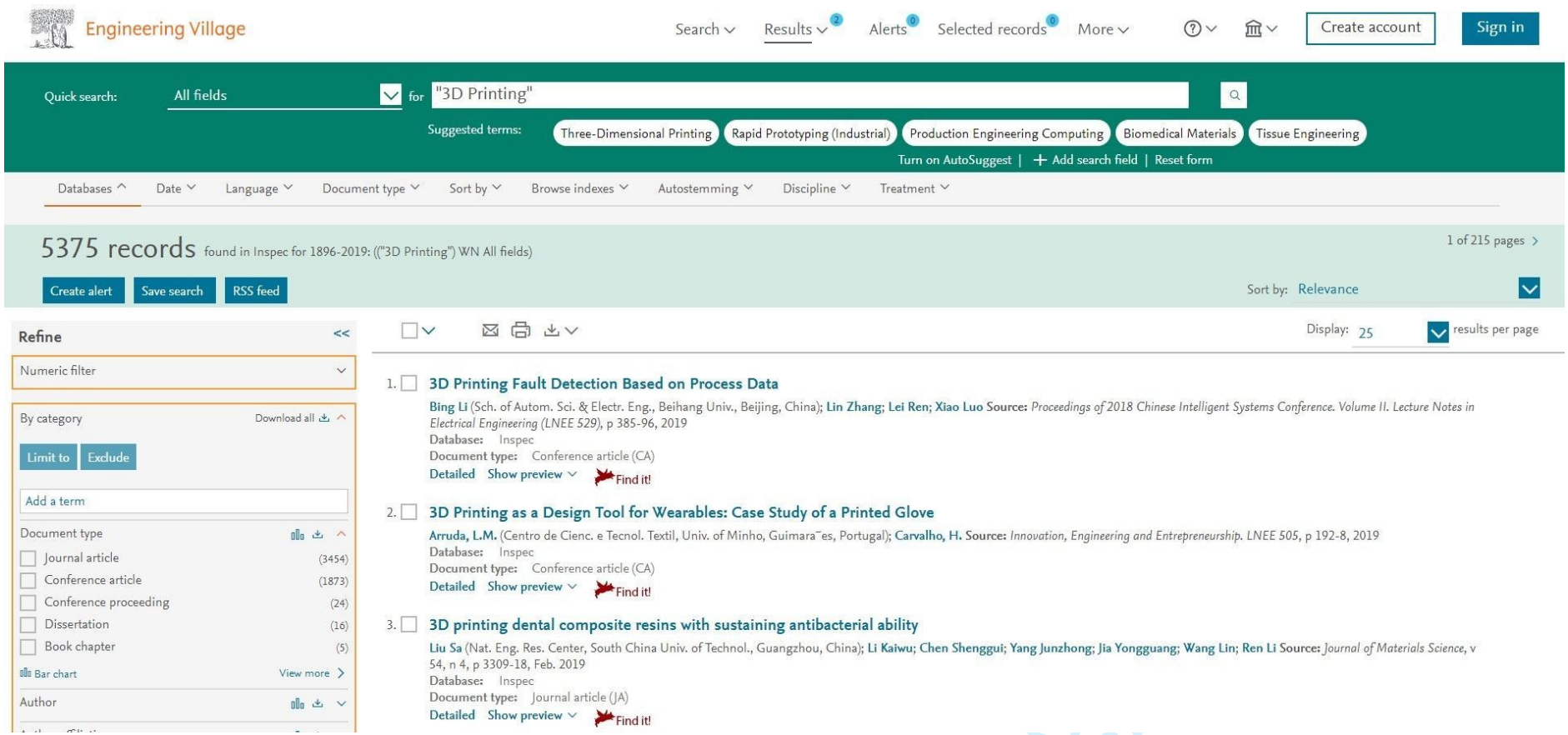

Figure 3. Search results display on Engineering Village.

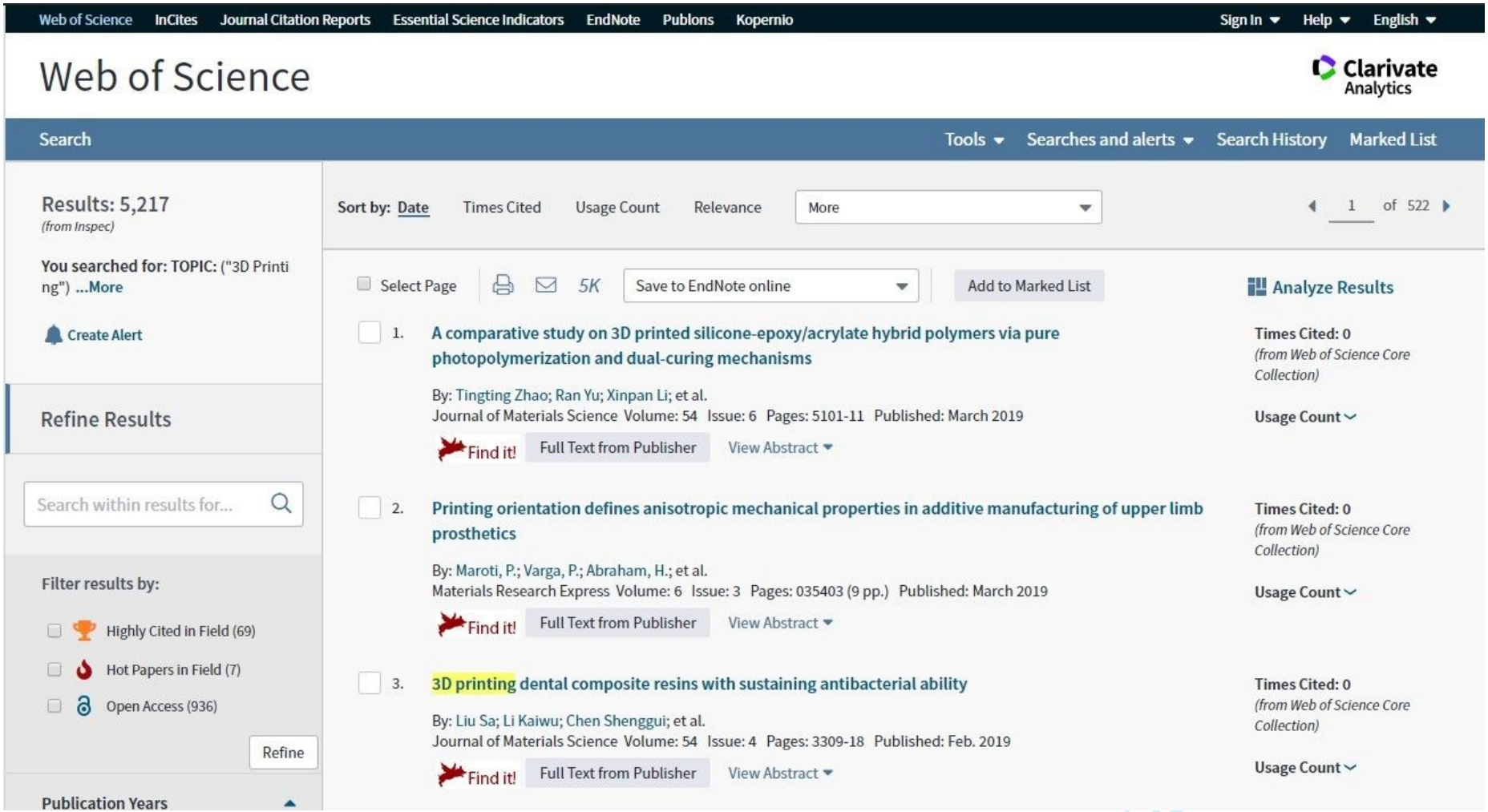

Figure 4. Search results display on Web of Science.