CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW

ACCESS SCIENCE, TODAY'S SCIENCE, AND SCIENCE IN CONTEXT

DATABASE COMPARISON

Fall 2014

In Fall 2014, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access and Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a comparative study of three science databases:

- AccessScience (McGraw-Hill)
- Today's Science (Infobase Learning)
- Science in Context (Gale)

The review focused on the subject coverage, search interface, cost, availability/accessibility of service, and customer service as well as customization, and mobile options.

The chart below summarizes our findings on our major review criteria. The following criteria were examined and rated on a four-point scale (1=Poor; 2=Fair; 3=Good; 4=Excellent). A short summary and analysis of each database will follow.

CRITERIA 1= Poor; 2= Fair; 3= Good; 4=Excellent	**Access Science (McGraw-Hill)**	**Today's Science (InfoBase Publishing)**	**Science in Context (Gale)**
Content/ Subject Coverage	**3** The AccessScience database contains more than 8,000 articles, research reviews, and topical overviews- with regular updates of new and revised material- covering all major scientific disciplines and including the *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology* and the *McGraw-Hill Education Yearbook of Science and Technology*. Also included are 115,000 plus definitions from the *McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms.* The strength of this collection is in its video/multimedia content. There are over 16,000 downloadable images and embeddable animations illustrating key topics as well as videos highlighting the life and work of award-winning scientists. Curriculum maps are provided to tie standards to core content saving instructors time in course preparation. These maps have been designed by leading science	**2** Today's Science is a database containing articles, video news briefs, encyclopedia entries, interviews with scientists, crossword puzzles, and editorial cartoons. This is a science-based product covering a wide range of science topics. The content is suitable for high schools, community colleges, and colleges and universities. Articles in *Today's Science* are original and new articles are added weekly. Editors and writers of *Today's Science* use dozens of sources to create their articles. The major sources include *Science*, *Nature*, *PNAS* (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences), *JAMA* (Journal of the American Medical Association), *PLoS* (Public Library of Science), *New England Journal of Medicine*, and numerous other scientific journals as well as a broad array of both focused and general journalistic sources, including *Scientific American*, *Science News*, *New Scientist*, *Discover*, *National Geographic*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*.	**3** Science in Context (SIC) provides a selection of reference titles, including *Encyclopedia of Science*, *Chemical Elements*, *Encyclopedia of Endangered Species*, *Genetics*, *Space Sciences*, *When Technology Fails*, *World of Biology*, *and World of Forensic Science*. It bears noting that almost 1/3 of the total number of reference titles in the collection are from Gale's UXL's imprint, a collection of titles that is geared towards middle school and high school students. See full list of reference titles at http://solutions.cengage.com/Gale/Database-Title-Lists/gscic_rt.xls. Multimedia is also a key component of SIC, and video, audio, and images are featured prominently on the topic pages and in search results. SIC also includes more than 450 periodicals - including journals - and newspapers of which 47 are embargoed and 81 (or around 13%) are considered open access content from sources such as Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). A full list of titles is available here:

	and engineering faculty, who have selected useful content, such as tables, graphs, diagrams, photos, animations, and videos, and then mapped that content to the standard topics taught within each course. The quality of the information and writing found in this database is high. Articles are written by award winning scientists, including contributions from 28 Nobel Prize winners. Articles have authorial attribution and often provide bibliographic citations and suggestions for further reading to citable articles from both books and Science journals. The AccessScience database itself contains no journal content. Where links to outside resources are provided, they are in the form of stable links. Although the content, quality and scope of information make AS suitable for community college users, an institution that wishes to support students pursuing upper-division coursework may need to look at another database provider for full-text scholarly journal content.	Because all of the articles are proprietary to Infobase Learning, content is not embargoed or discontinued. *Today's Science* provides access to an extensive backfile dating back to 1992 with new articles added weekly. All cumulative content is available at all times. *Science Online* database features a small selection of handpicked articles each month from *Today's Science*. All articles are full-text and included in the product. No additional purchases are required. If existing articles are updated, the newer version is automatically available within the product. No additional purchase is required. Some *Today's Science* articles will contain links to external open source content for additional supplemental information.	http://titlelist.galegroup.com/titlelist/SCIC/xls In terms of subject coverage, content in SIC is suitable for subjects taught at community colleges - including Earth Sciences and Physics, Mathematics, Computer Sciences, and Anatomy, but it should be noted that content appears to be aligned to standards of middle-to-high school science curricula rather than to upper division college standards. Some articles lack the depth of treatment that would be expected for upper division coursework and overall, the database falls short of delivering the full-text, scholarly article content to support in-depth research.

Search Interface (Consider functionality and ease of use)	**3** **Search Options** • Basic • Advanced • Browse Articles by Title or Topic • Browse Biographies by Name or Topic The *Basic search* is straightforward with the typical one box search. From the first search screen, users also have the option of browsing articles by broad subject categories, which may be helpful for students unsure of a topic. The user can refine their search results using facets on the left-hand side of the *results screen.* The facets are Content Type and Topic. It is unfortunate that there is no facet for date. The first listing on the results page is typically a definition, followed by articles, research reviews, videos, and/or images. The *Advanced search* option allows the user to combine search terms with an author name and/or an exclude box. Users can also limit results by entering a topic and/or selecting from Content	**3** **Search Options** • Basic • Advanced • Topic Index The *Basic search* interface is simple and easy to use. The user can easily limit their search results using the facets on the left-hand side of the results screen. Facets include: Subject, Article Type, & Date. The default display for search results is to sort by relevance; the user may change the results to display in by date ("newest to oldest" or "oldest to newest") or by title. The *Advanced search* option allows the user to limit results upfront by selecting from Subject, Article Type, & Date Range. The advanced search option would be improved if there were multiple search boxes available. This would allow users to more easily construct Boolean searches. Finally, there is a *Topic Index* available. This may be useful for students who are looking for help in selecting a subject to research.	**4** **Search Options** • Basic • Advanced • Browse Topics The *Basic search* is a single search box. As a user types in a search term, a list of suggested searches will display. This could be very helpful for students. The default is set to search "all" article types; users may also click on a tab just above the search box to limit their search to specific article types such as Reference, Images, Academic Journals, etc. Once the user executes their search, they will see one of two results screens. The first type of results screen occurs when the user's search term matches one of SIC's pre-defined categories. The first article at the top is a basic overview of the topic. This is followed by boxes which separate the various article types (e.g., Reference, Academic Journals, Audio). Once a user selects a specific article type box, they can rearrange the articles from the default Relevance list to sort by Date, Title, or Content Level.

	Types. The Advanced search could be improved in several ways: 1) do not limit the author/exclude boxes to specific fields or actions; rather have drop down menus which allow for options; 2) rather than have the Topic limiter be a free text box, have drop down menu with the same topics that are listed in the Articles by Topic area; 3) add a facet for limiting by date. In addition to the *Articles by Topic* option, there is a *Biographies by Topic* option.		If the user's search term(s) don't match a pre-defined topic, they will see a second type of results screen. This one does not provide the topic overview article or the article type boxes. It does, however, still present the results in one list broken out by article type. This version of the results screen also allows the user to re-sort their results after they have selected one article type. The *Advanced search* option provides the user with many ways to limit their searches. These include: limit to Full Text and/or Peer Reviewed Journals; limit by Publication Date, Document Type (e.g., Advertisement, Cartoon, Graph), Content Type (i.e., article type), Content Level, and Lexile Range. Finally, there is a *Browse Topics* option. Users may browse a complete A to Z list of topics, or may select a sub-category. This may be helpful for students who need assistance with selecting a specific subject.
Customization (Is it possible to customize the search interface/search results?)	**3** An Administrator Resource Center is available via "For Admins" tab that provides access to usage statistics as well as branding customization.	**1** Offers no customization to search interface and branding. Librarians cannot change search, defaults, limiters and expanders. Branding customization is not available at present. The Administrator's portal provides access to statistical usage reports.	**3** Gale Admin module provides flexible access to database statistical usage reports, including configurable delivery dates for scheduled reports. It provides branding customization.

Mobile or Multimedia Options	YES. AccessScience is mobile compatible. No app is required to access Science in Context via a mobile device. A separate tab "Media" on the search page allows one to search the collection of videos/ animations of this database. Animations are clear and explanations are easy to understand. Video sound is clear. These videos may also be downloaded.	YES. Today's Science is mobile compatible. No app is required to access Today's Science via a mobile device. Video news briefs which are close to 2 minutes long may be played on full screen except on iPad. The "Read Aloud" icon, to listen to the audio version of the page, is missing when using the iPad. Also videos are not closed captioned in iPad.	YES. Science in Context is mobile compatible. No app is required to access Science in Context via a mobile device. Videos are taken from third party sources. Audio files taken from NPR are also available.
Citation Options	YES. MLA, APA or Chicago Only export format provided is RIS (standardized tag format that can be read by Easybib, RefWorks, Endnote, and other citation management tools).	YES. Citations are available in MLA, APA, and Chicago formats. Currently export to third-party citation managers is not supported.	YES. Citation formats include MLA and APA. Third party citation programs - EasyBib, EndNote, ProCite, Reference Manager, and RefWorks are supported.
Availability/ Accessibility of Service (Closed-captioned videos, WAVE, Alt tags, etc.)	NO. McGraw Hill explains that while AccessScience is not strictly compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act nor Section 108, it does comply with the spirit of those pieces of legislation. On the positive side, they state that 100% of videos are closed-captioned; a spot-check confirmed that captioning is	PARTIAL. Video clips within Today's Science all appear to have closed-captioning that can be toggled on and off. At the same time, while the database provides alt tags for images, their usefulness is inconsistent. For example, images on a results list appear to all have the identical alt tag "popular article," whereas	NO. Gale states that some videos in Science in Context are closed-captioned, yet a random check of more than a dozen clips by this reviewer found only one that was closed –captioned. At the same time, a majority of the videos appears to be hosted on third-party websites (e.g. PBS), but even those videos lacked captioning when accessed from within SIC. The only captioned videos

	indeed present. In contrast, alt tags are used inconsistently and were not present for any of the images the reviewers looked at in either the image gallery or within articles. AccessScience does not seem to include audio files.	images within articles themselves have individual, descriptive alt tags. Article text within the database can be read aloud using built-in text reader technology, although a third party plug-in may be required. Today's Science does not seem to include audio files.	appeared to be from Kahn Academy. In contrast, audio clips, many from public radio outlets such as National Public Radio, consistently include transcripts. Like Today's Science, SIC uses alt tags throughout the database, but their usefulness varies depending on where the image is located. Images within results lists, including the image gallery, only include a generic "thumbnail" alt tag. Meanwhile, images within articles or detailed records include descriptive alt tags. Finally, text within the database's records can be read aloud using built-in text reader technology.
Customer Service and Technical Support (What types of customer and technical support are available for end user and administrator?)	**2** Email support is the predominate mode of support. The system administrator can email support directly or any user can find the "contact us" link at the bottom of the website. There is no indication of telephone support (as was stated in the 2011 review). There is a link to their "Help/FAQ page" that is provided on the "contact us" page. The "Help/FAQ" page also includes links to webinars and a note that custom training can be arranged.	**3** End user and administrative support starts with a "help" option located on the bottom of all pages within Today's Science (user must scroll down to find it). That leads to a page where any user (end user, librarian, etc.) could perform a search typing in keywords or see a listing of the most popular and newest help articles. There is also a link to "contact us" that provides the option of emailing or calling support. Support is available Monday - Friday from 9:00AM -5:00PM EST (6:00AM-2:00PM). There is text stating that there is a 24 hour wait for a response submitted outside of	**2** End user support is available, but it takes two clicks to find it (if you know where to look) and you have to log in to access the email, phone, and chat support as a student, instructor, or librarian (or find it on the consortium's website). Gale's website shows that phone support is available 8:30AM-9:00PM Mondays-Thursdays and 8:30AM-6:00PM Fridays and doesn't specify which time zone. Student chat is available 24/7 via cengagebrain.com (Cengage Learning) and is not specific to only this resource. A third click can get a librarian to the Library Technical Support page with

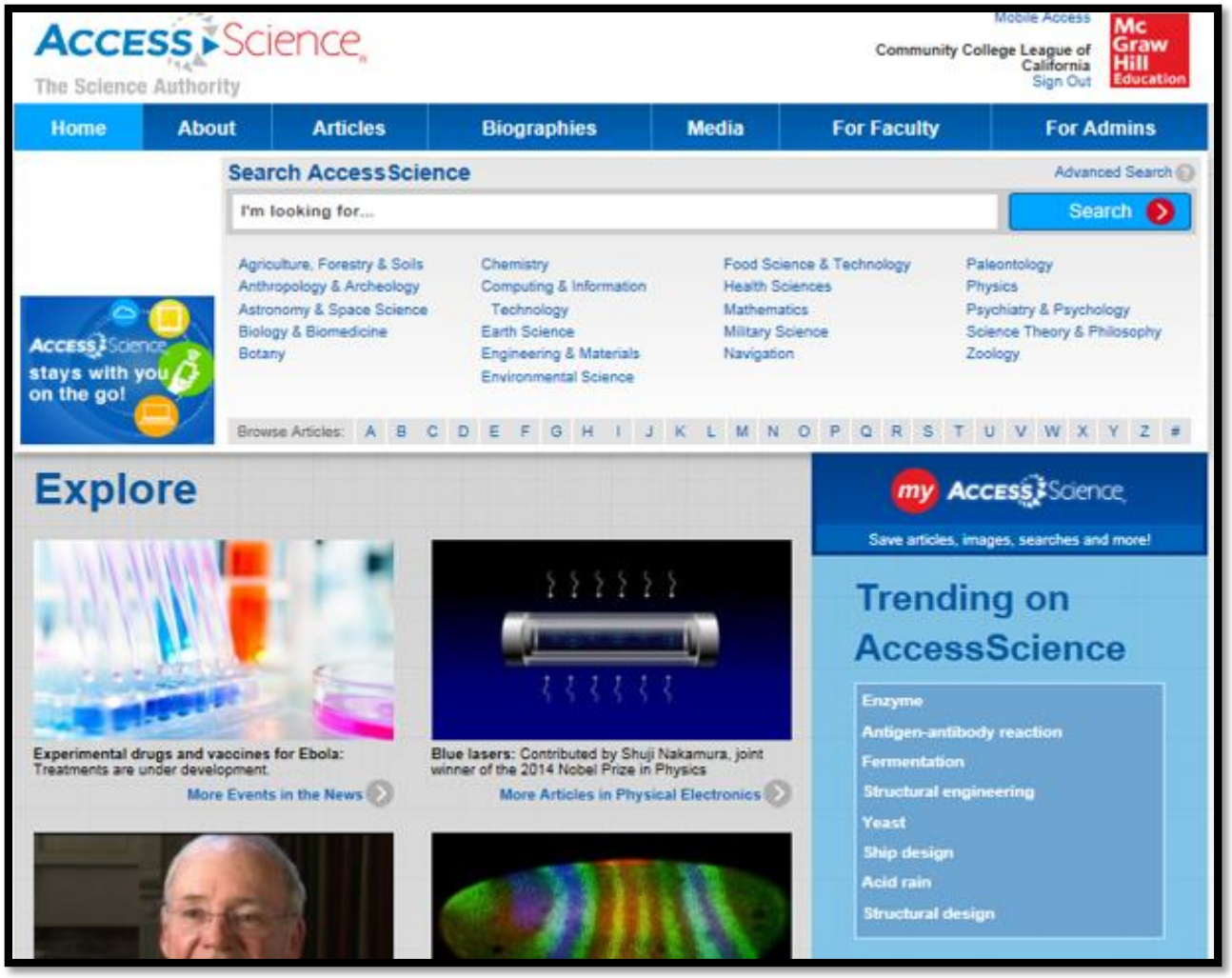
	An Administrative Resource Center is available through the "For Admin" link available on the website. This leads to information and links to statistics, promoting use of Access Science, and a user guide that "will soon be available". With only email as the primary means of support and lack of tutorials, a fair score is being given.	business hours. There is also a "live help" option available from the help page. It is grayed-out during non-business hours. There are links to "trainings and tutorials" and "tips" on the help pages. The administrative site also has help (with no search feature), and includes information on several items of interest to administrators. Located on the bottom of the page is a link to "contact us" which provides administrators an email or telephone number to call. Overall, Today's Science has the strongest support options of the three compared here.	additional information on statistics, training, and promotion. Training includes live and recorded webinars, on-demand tutorials, and additional materials librarians can use for promotion and teaching (lesson plans, tips sheets, and presentations). Overall, Science In Context support is not easy to find/access. Assistance is not specifically highlighted as being for Science In Context, but for all Cengage Learning resources, which many users may find confusing.
Cost If Cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?)	**2** Custom pricing (based on FTES).	**3** Custom pricing (based on FTES).	**2** Based on FTES.
OVERALL RATING (Consider functionality and value to the CA Community colleges as a whole)	**3 (Good)**	**2 (Fair)**	**3 (Good)**

SUMMARY REVIEWS:

AccessScience

AccessScience's search interface presents a simple and intuitive layout making it easy for novice searchers to navigate. The clarity of the visuals in the images and videos/ multimedia collections are engaging and promote an understanding of basic concepts. The reviewers highly recommend that a facet be added so users can limit the result by date, as this is a critical aspect when searching scientific materials. In addition, the reviewers would like to suggest adding ways to contact AccessScience for customer service/technical support, considering the unavailability of a user guide. Presently, there is just an email contact. This resource fits any community college library looking for a science database with content that ranges from high school to community college level.

Image of AccessScience homepage



Link to CCL-EAR AccessScience Complete review (2011):
http://www.cclibraries.org/reviews/Documents/AccessSCIrevFINAL.pdf

Today's Science

Today's Science is a well-regarded resource geared toward high school students and lower-division undergraduates. The database is primarily a collection of secondary source materials within the various science disciplines. Most prominent are original articles written by Infobase staff who draw from substantive and scholarly sources to create content. The resulting articles provide a thorough introduction to a given topic along with links to further reading and related content. Many articles include discussion questions that encourage further inquiry. New articles are added regularly and all are full-text. In addition to articles, *Today's Science* includes interviews with leading scientists, encyclopedia entries, editorial cartoons and video news clips.

The search interface for *Today's Science* is clean and easy to use. Advanced search functionality and readily accessible facets enable users to refine searches and filter results. Alternatively, the Topic Index feature provides an opportunity to browse topics and assists students in selecting a subject for their assignment.

Today's Science could benefit from the ability to customize the search interface and branding. In addition, video incompatibility with iPads is a significant drawback given the prevalence of Apple's tablet.

Image of Today's Science homepage

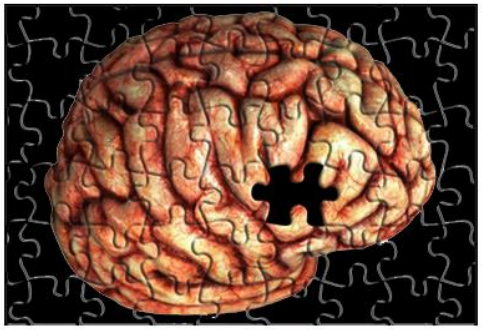
Facts On File

Today's Science

Science News Written Especially for Students

Topic Index | Resources ▾ | Search

Advanced Search



FEATURED ARTICLE

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by Leila Rieder
October 2014

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by Catherine Nisbett Becker | October 2014

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by Raymond P. Hill | October 2014

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Emily M. Standen
Asking Questions About Evolutionary Processes

Michael L. Larsen
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Thomas Higham
Dating Human History

Andrea Cavagna
Studying the Laws of Collective Behavior

View All Conversations with Scientists

Science in Context

The Gale *Science in Context (SIC)* database provides convenient access to multiple formats of science-related resources including:

- reference articles
- newspaper, magazine, and scholarly journal articles
- audio content from National Public Radio
- videos (mainly produced by A&E and PBS)
- recommended websites

The strength of this database is that it provides students with an attractive and user-friendly interface with which to begin their research. Students who need help with topic selection can make use of the *Browse Topics* option.

However, the journal article content in this database may not be robust enough for higher level research assignments. In this case, students may need to search *SIC* in concert with a full-text scholarly journal database.

Other issues of concern include the lack of closed-captioning for some videos, as well as the difficulty for users in accessing online assistance.

Image of Science in Context homepage

GALE SCIENCE IN CONTEXT

All | Reference | Images | Academic Journals | More

Search

Advanced Search

Home | Browse Topics | Maps | Curriculum Standards | Resources

Marie Curie, along with her husband, Pierre, discovered radioactivity and isolated two new radioactive elements. She was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize. View More

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Science News

- Another pyramid solution proposed: stones could have been...

Other Reviews:

AccessScience

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Peterson, K. (2006, Winter). AccessScience. *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*. Retrieved from: http://www.istl.org/

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McBroom, K. (2013). Today's Science. *Booklist*, *110* (7), 43. Retrieved from: http://www.booklistonline.com/

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