

Step A: Defining a loose query for “grade inflation”

The patron’s request has several “noise words” and fillers, which distract from the core information need: documents on “grade inflation.” An initial keyword search for <("grade inflation")> retrieves 291 results. While this is a substantial result set, it is also limiting since it only retrieves this exact phrase, in this word order. A search for <(grade AND inflation)> which unlocks the word order and does not search for exact phrase, retrieves 325 results. Yet without truncation this query does not find variants of the search terms. The search <(grade* AND inflat*)> generates 386 results. <(inflat*)> returns variants of the root word “inflate,” like inflating, inflated, inflates, and inflation. <(grade*)> finds variants of the root word “grade,” like grades, graded, and grader. One article retrieved by this search that would not have been found if truncation were not used is *“Use of Part-Time Faculty in Higher Education”* whose abstract states, “They may **inflate** student **grades** or pander to students in an effort to assure a continuing contract.” The truncation of <(grade*)> however, does not retrieve the variant “grading.” The most inclusive search for the core concept of “grade inflation” is <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*)> which returns 388 results.

Search #11

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat*

388 results found in ERIC

22 results found in Community of Scholars™: Social Science

Date Range: Earliest to 2006

Step B: Narrowing the initial query by adding “higher education” concept

The patron’s statement that he was a professor and is now a college administration consultant implies that he is interested in grade inflation in colleges and universities. To make the search more relevant to his interests, the search query must be narrowed to include information about this additional

concept. The most obvious two-word compound term that describes college and university level education is “higher education.” Instead of using a NOT Boolean operator to exclude items about elementary and secondary school, a positive AND operator can be used to add the “higher education” concept. The search query <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND (“higher education”)> narrows the initial result set by about 40% to retrieve 234 results.

Search History

Search #2 [Edit](#)

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and KW=(higher education)

234 results found in ERIC
7 results found in Community of Scholars™: Social Science

Date Range: Earliest to 2006

A quick scan of the results shows that several of the articles are highly relevant, and have the phrases “Grade Inflation” and “Higher Education” as descriptors.

[Inflation Compensates for Grade](#)

Database: ERIC
Descriptors: [Academic Standards](#) | [Grade Inflation](#) | [Grade Point Average](#) | [Academic Achievement](#) | [Grading](#) | [Higher Education](#)

Inflation p561-569 Dec 2005
The relationship between grade inflation and higher education is demonstrated by a wide range of studies that have changed the information

However, 234 hits is an unwieldy and overwhelming number of results to give to a patron, so an even narrower query is appropriate.

Step C: Further narrowing the query by adding “faculty evaluation” concept

After further questioning, the patron reveals that he is interested in a specific aspect of higher education grade inflation—the relationship between grade

inflation and students' evaluation of faculty. The patron's statement, again, contains several unnecessary filler words that distract from the important additional concept of "faculty evaluation." The query <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") AND ("faculty evaluation")> narrows the result set considerably, but is too restrictive returning only 6 results. It is necessary to use truncation to find variants of the search terms "faculty" and "evaluate" and to use the Boolean AND to allow for any word order of the terms. The query <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") AND (facult* AND evaluat*)> retrieves 43 results. Several of these are highly relevant and include descriptors related to the patron's query: "Grade Inflation," "Higher Education," "College Faculty," and "Evaluation Criteria."

[**Note:** After submitting this paper I realized that I should not have used truncation for faculty. Although truncation may retrieve "faculties" and "facultative" neither is needed.]

[tions of Teachers.](#)

[er, William](#)

view; v18 n1 p59-63 Feb 1999

ge student **evaluations** in a model allowing for the **ides** are simultaneously determined. Estimates **evaluations** res and two-stage ...

Database:

ERIC

Descriptors:

[*College Faculty](#) | [*College Students](#) | [*Evaluation Criteria](#) | [*Grade Inflation](#) | [*Grading](#) | [Higher Education](#) | [More...](#)

However, to narrow the search even further to generate about 20 articles, proximity operators are used. The NEAR operator, when used between the truncated terms "facult*" and "evaluat*," finds articles where these terms appear within 10 words of each other and in any order. The query <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") AND (facult* NEAR (evaluat*))> retrieves 24 results.

Search #6

[Edit](#) | [Save](#) | [Delete](#) | [Return to Search](#)

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and KW=(higher education) and KW=(facult* NEAR evaluat*)

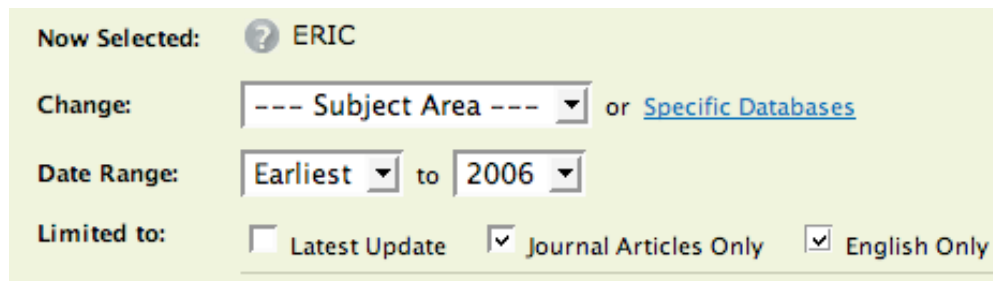
24 results found in ERIC

1 result found in Community of Scholars™: Social Science

Date Range: Earliest to 2006

Step D: Modifying the query to the patron's preference for English-language journal articles

The patron indicates that he is interested in English-language journal articles. In the CSA version of ERIC, simply checking the appropriate boxes allows modification of a search by limiting by language and document type.



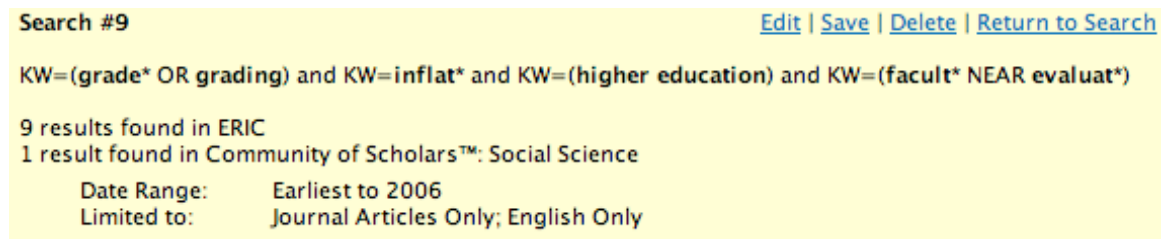
Now Selected: ? ERIC

Change: --- Subject Area --- or [Specific Databases](#)

Date Range: Earliest to 2006

Limited to: Latest Update Journal Articles Only English Only

The query <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND (“higher education”) AND (facult* NEAR (evaluat*))> limited to English-language journal articles retrieves 9 results.



Search #9 [Edit](#) | [Save](#) | [Delete](#) | [Return to Search](#)

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and KW=(higher education) and KW=(facult* NEAR evaluat*)

9 results found in ERIC
1 result found in Community of Scholars™: Social Science

Date Range: Earliest to 2006
Limited to: Journal Articles Only; English Only

Step E: Broadening the “faculty” concept by including synonyms

To broaden the result set, synonyms and quasi-synonyms are added to the search query. Terms that are related in meaning to “faculty” are: teacher, professor, researcher and instructor. Truncating these synonyms to find their singular and plural forms helps to broaden the result set. The new query, <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND (“higher education”) AND (facult* OR teacher* OR professor* OR researcher* OR instructor*) NEAR (evaluat*))> still limited to English-language journal articles retrieves 19 results—a good, manageable number of items for the patron's request.

Search #3 [Edit](#) | [Save](#) | [Delete](#) | [Return to Search](#) | [Run Search](#) | [Save as Alert](#)

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and KW=(higher education) and KW=((faculty* OR teacher* OR professor* OR researcher* OR instructor*) NEAR evaluat*)

19 results found in ERIC
3 results found in Community of Scholars™: Social Science

Date Range: Earliest to 2006
Limited to: Journal Articles Only; English Only

Scanning the result list confirms that the items found by this query are both relevant and pertinent to the patron’s information need. Several records are included which have the highly relevant descriptors of “Grade Inflation,” “Higher Education,” and “Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance.”

[and Grade Inflation.](#)

501 Aug 2002

ons of teaching effectiveness has been a
i in a mid-sized, public university in the
en ...

Database:
ERIC
Descriptors:
[*Grade Inflation](#) | [Grades \(Scholastic\)](#) | [Grading](#) | [Higher Education](#) | [*Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance](#) | [Trend Analysis](#)

Step F: Running the query in Sociological Abstracts

The patron’s additional request for articles with sociological and psychological emphasis of the issue is easily handled by running the same query in other, more appropriate databases. In CSA, switching between databases is achieved by selecting the “Change Specific Databases” link that appears at the bottom of the result screen. The link leads to a list of databases within CSA that are available for searching. As the screenshot below illustrates, Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES are all available in CSA.

- [?](#) PsycARTICLES
Applied psychology, developmental psychology, personality
- [?](#) PsycINFO
Applied psychology, developmental psychology, personality
- [?](#) Social Services Abstracts
Social work, human services, social welfare, social policy
- [?](#) Sociological Abstracts

The query from Step B, <(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND (“higher education”)> limited to English-language journal articles retrieves 8 results in Sociological Abstracts.

Search #4 [Edit |](#)

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and KW=(higher education)

8 results found in Sociological Abstracts
7 results found in Community of Scholars™: Social Science

Date Range: Earliest to 2006
Limited to: Journal Articles Only; English Only

Only 1 of these items is relevant, “*Grade Inflation in Higher Education: Its Causes and Consequences.*”

Step G: Running the query in PsycINFO

Following the method mentioned above, switching to PsycINFO from Sociological Abstracts is a simple matter of clicking the link to “Change Specific Databases.” It is not necessary to log in again to CSA, and the previous search history remains intact. The same query from Step F retrieves 5 results in PsycINFO, including 2 highly relevant results: “*Grade Inflation and Student Individual Differences as Systematic Bias in Faculty Evaluations,*” and “*Does Grade Inflation Affect the Reliability of Grades?*”

Search #5 [Edit |](#)

KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and KW=(higher education)

5 results found in PsycINFO

Date Range: Earliest to 2006
Limited to: Journal Articles Only; English Only

Step H: Running the query in PsycARTICLES

Again, switching to PsycARTICLES without having to log in again is an easy process because this database is also available through CSA. The query from

Step F produces zero results in PsycARTICLES. A simple change in the pull-down menu modifies the search so that the concept of “higher education” is searched in the Anywhere Index rather than in the Keyword Index.

The screenshot shows a search interface with a query: `(grade* OR grad or) and (inflat* or) and (higher educatic or)`. A dropdown menu is open, showing options: Journal Name, JN=; Journal Pages, JP=; Journal Supplement, JS=; Journal Volume, JV=; Keywords, KW=; and Anywhere. Below the query is a "Search Tips" link and "Search" and "Clear" buttons.

The query `<(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND (Anywhere = “higher education”)>` limited to English-language journal articles retrieves 1 relevant result.

The screenshot shows the search results page. At the top, it says "1 result found for: KW=(grade* OR grading) and KW=inflat* and (higher education) in PsycARTICLES". Below this, there are tabs for "Published Works 1", "All Publication Types 1", "Journals 1", and "Peer-Reviewed Journals 1". There are also links for "Mark or Clear all on page", "Update Marked List", "Save, Print, Email", and "Sort by: Most Recent Fi". The first result is: "1. [Grading Leniency Is a Removable Contaminant of Student Ratings](#). Greenwald, Anthony G.¹; Gillmore, Gerald M.¹ *American Psychologist*. Vol 52 (11), November 1997, pp. 1209-1217 ... instruction correlate positively with expected course *grades*. The authors identify 4 additional data patterns that, collectively, discriminate among 5 theories of the *grades*-ratings correlation. The presence of all 4 of these ... [View Record](#) | [References](#) | [Cited by 56](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Full-Text HTML](#) | [Full-Text PDF \(913 Kb\)](#)

Step I: Running the query in Web of Science

Web of Science is the only database searched for this term paper that is not included in CSA. Because of the different interface, it is necessary to modify the search query in order for it to work correctly with the Web of Science search syntax. In CSA, the Keyword Index was searched. In Web of Science, the Topic Index is the analogous field as indicated by the help file, which states that a query in the Topic Index “searches within article titles, keywords, or abstracts.”

The help file also confirms that Web of Science treats the truncation symbol * in the same way as CSA, allowing that part of the search query to remain the same. In order to limit the results by language and document type, a selection must be made at the bottom of the search screen.

Restrict search by languages and document types:

All languages	All document types
English	Article
Afrikaans	Art Exhibit Review

SEARCH CLEAR

The adapted query from Step B <Topic= (grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") restricted to English-language journal articles retrieves 11 results, 5 of which are highly relevant.

Search Results -- Summary

TS=((grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education"))
DocType=Article; Language=English; Databases=SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI

CrossSearch: [View additional results in other databases](#) **NEW!**

11 results found (Set #1)

Evaluation of Cited and Citing References

Each of the CSA databases—Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES—display in their results lists whether cited or citing references are available for the records. The display also indicates the number of citing articles. This saves the searcher the additional step of having to link to the full record to discover this information. However, not all records in the results list are enhanced by direct links to cited or citing references. In these instances the user does not know whether an article has been cited or how many times, and must link to the full text of the article to find the cited references. For example, it was necessary for me to follow the link to the full text of the relevant article in Sociological Abstracts in order to find the list of that article's cited references. Web of Science's result list shows the number of times each record is cited, with a direct link to a list of the citing articles. This is more informative than the CSA databases because even if an article has been cited zero times, that information is included in Web of Science, whereas uncertainty about times cited remains in CSA. Unlike the CSA databases, Web of Science does not include direct links to cited references in its result list. The user must open the full record to access that information.

The cited reference lists in PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES and Web of Science all display the basic bibliographic information of the cited works. In addition to this basic information, Web of Science provides direct links to the full records of some of the cited items. The reference lists in PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES are enhanced by several powerful direct links. The user can access the full text of the cited articles (either as HTML or PDF) as well as their abstracts and citing references. The display also indicates at a glance, each reference's number of citing articles.


7. Gigliotti, R. J. & Buchtel, F. S. (1990). Attributional bias and course evaluation. *Psychology*, 82, 341-351.
[Abstract](#) | [Cited by 4](#) | [Full-Text PDF \(895 Kb\)](#) | [Full-Text HTML](#)

The basic bibliographic information in the citing reference lists in Web of Science is enhanced by direct links to the citing reference's full record, full text, and its own citing references. Again, the number of citing references is prominently displayed.

Breen R, Jonsson JO
[Analyzing educational careers: A multinomial logit model](#)
AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW 65 (1998)
Times Cited: [12](#)
[find it](#) [VIEW FULL TEXT](#)

Arum R
[Schools and communities: Ecological and evolutionary perspectives](#)
ANNUAL REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY 26: 39-62 (2000)
Times Cited: [10](#)
[find it](#) [VIEW FULL TEXT](#)

The citing reference lists in the CSA databases include the same enhancements as their cited reference lists—there are direct links to full text, abstracts, citing and cited references. In addition, the user can link to the Table of Contents of the source journal as well as the reference's descriptors, both of which can lead to other possibly relevant articles.

Journal of Educational Psychology 1997, pp. 1218-1225
Variables such as *grading* leniency can affect students' perceptions about the wisdom of applying statistical inferences. This article argues that the problem ...
[Table of Contents](#) | [Full-Text HTML](#) | 

Database:
PsycINFO
Descriptors:
[*Educational Programs](#)
[*Grading \(Educational\)](#)
[*Teacher Effectiveness](#)
[*Test Validity](#) | [Rating](#)

Summary of Final Queries

Step	Database	Search Query	# Results
A	ERIC	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*)	388
B	ERIC	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education")	234
C	ERIC	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") AND (facult* NEAR evaluat*)	24
D	ERIC	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") AND (facult* NEAR evaluat*) limited to English-only Journal Articles	9
E	ERIC	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") AND (facult* OR teacher* OR professor* OR researcher* OR instructor) NEAR (evaluat*) limited to English-only Journal Articles	19
F	Sociological Abstracts	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") limited to English-language Journal Articles	8
G	PsycINFO	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") limited to English-language Journal Articles	5
H	PsycARTICLES	(grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND (Anywhere= "higher education") limited to English-language Journal Articles	1
I	Web of Science	Topic= (grade* OR grading) AND (inflat*) AND ("higher education") restricted to English-language Journal Articles	11