Advanced Searching II: Citation Searching

What is citation searching, and why is it useful?
The reference list of a journal article is a quick and useful way to expand on what you have read: it lets you see what influenced or inspired the author’s work, and tap into their knowledge about prior research.

However, the reference list only lets you see the research that came before your article. What about the research that came afterwards, which that journal article inspired?

Citation searching allows you to examine the links between articles – who has referenced what – to help understand how research has influenced, and been influenced by, other work.

Do all databases support citation searching?
Creating an extensive network of linked articles at a large enough scale to be useful is a big job. This means there are a limited number of databases which support citation searching. The best known of these are Web of Science, Scopus and PubMed. The search engine Google Scholar also supports citation searching.

How can I use citation searching to find better articles?
There are a number of ways you can improve your search using citations:

- Start with an older article on your topic and find up-to-date information on the same topic by viewing its citations.
- Start with an article on a key theory and see how the theory has been applied in later work by viewing work which has cited it.
- Identify well-respected articles by sorting results from your keyword search by number of citations in order to find those which are frequently referenced.
To perform a basic citation search, use a keyword search to locate an article of interest. No citation database covers all the literature, so you are not guaranteed to find citation information on a specific article you want, although it is worth checking multiple databases.

Pictured below is the full record for an article on Scopus, accessed by clicking on the title of the article.

In Scopus, the right-hand side of the article page has the two most recent citations that the article has received. Note that you can also view details of all the citations the article has received in Scopus, which indicates how popular it has been.

**What are the limitations of citation searching?**
Bear in mind that occasionally articles receive a high number of citations because so many authors have disagreed with what the article said! It is worth checking the context in which an article has been cited.

**Images**

*De Montfort University Library and Learning Services Helpsheet updated August 2013.*
*For quick help during staffed opening hours contact [justask@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:justask@dmu.ac.uk).*