Where to Look for Database Scope Statements

In chapter one we recommended four strategies for locating database scope. Let’s look at these in close detail with some relevant examples.

**Database main page or help page**

The initial database page is a given, but sometimes finding a “help” or an “about” link can be a challenge.

*C19: The Nineteenth Century Index*. This Chadwyck-Healey (ProQuest) database clearly states it scope right on the initial page. Notice the complexity of this scope note:

*C19 Index* draws on the strength of established indexes such as the *Nineteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* (NSTC), *The Wellesley Index, Poole’s Index, Periodicals Index Online* and the *Cumulative Index to Niles’ Register 1811–1849* to create integrated bibliographic coverage of over 1.7 million books and official publications, 70,000 archival collections and 22.7 million articles published in over 2,500 journals, magazines and newspapers. *C19 Index* now provides integrated access to 13 bibliographic indexes, including more than three million records from *British Periodicals Collections I and II*, together with the expanded online edition of the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (DNCJ).

Readex’s *AccessUN* database does not give scope information on the initial screen, but if you click the help button, scope is clearly stated:

Full text of selected UN documents lets the researcher review retrieved documents immediately. These documents include resolutions from the General Assembly (1981–onward), the Security Council (1974–onward), and the Economic and Social Council (1982–onward). Also, selected Provisional Verbatim documents, which contain voting records of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, are added to the database in reverse chronological order (1990–onward); some full text documents dealing with important topical issues are also included.

Retrospective indexing of United Nations documents and publications to 1948 enables researchers to gain valuable historical perspectives on a multitude of topics addressed by the UN.

**Vendor sales information**

Not every database explains its scope from the main database page. For this reason it may be more informative to look for background information on the vendor’s Web site. Use a search engine, such as Google, to find this information.

ProQuest’s *Agricultural & Environmental Science Database* is not so forthcoming with its scope. This is actually an amazing database that combines many databases previously featured separately. But the new name is too modest to tout all of the important content hidden within.
Using our Google search skills we can discover a brochure that tells about the content: https://media2.proquest.com/documents/agricultural-environsci-database.pdf. But even this is not adequate. Sometimes I think aggregators of content do not fully appreciate the value of the content they are offering. The ProQuest Libguide doesn’t even say what databases have been combined (http://proquest.libguides.com/aesd). To get the complete answer on the ProQuest database we will need to employ the third strategy mentioned below.

**Library guides**

Librarians are very helpful people. Thus, it should come as no surprise that there are many helpful guides freely available with database scope information. You can use power Google search techniques to track these down.

In the case of ProQuest’s *Agricultural & Environmental Science Database*, a library guide provided by the University of Wisconsin tells us exactly what databases have been merged together into this database: https://search.library.wisc.edu/database/UWI60061. We learn from this guide that the database includes *Aquatic Science & Fisheries Abstracts* (ASFA) 3: *Aquatic Pollution & Environmental Quality*, *Bacteriology Abstracts* (Microbiology B), *Ecology Abstracts*, *Environment Abstracts*, *Environmental Engineering Abstracts*, *Environmental Impact Statements: Digests*, *Health & Safety Science Abstracts*, *Industrial and Applied Microbiology Abstracts* (Microbiology A), *Pollution Abstracts*, *Risk Abstracts*, *Sustainability Science Abstracts*, *TOXLINE*, *Toxicology Abstracts*, *Water Resources Abstracts*, and *Agricola*—something that the vendor should have clearly stated within the database itself.

For another example, *Hoover’s Online* database (Dunn & Bradstreet) is so well-known that they assume we know what the database covers. Their Web site has online videos, but scope information is not easily discernable. To see what other librarians have written about the scope of Hoover’s, you can search Google like this: site:edu hoovers online, or like this: site:edu D&B hoovers.

**Correspondence with the vendor**

This point isn’t so easy to illustrate with an example. But you can use this strategy as a last resort when the first three strategies get you nowhere. Just go to the vendor sales information pages and look for some kind of contact information. Generally a sales representative will reply to you very quickly with the information you need.