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RESEARCH FRONT METHODOLOGY

Research areas in Science, particularly those at the cutting edge of their fields, are characterized by patterns of intense communication between scientists. This communication manifests itself in various ways, both formally and informally, but prominent among these are citations from one scientist's work to another. Patterns of citation reflect a fine-grained selection process of how scientists build on each others' work, and the relationship of these works to one another. Such patterns can be used to create a picture of the state of a specific research area in terms of the papers that constitute its core of seminal work. The first step in identifying research fronts is thus the selection of these seminal works by making a comprehensive inventory of highly cited papers across the disciplines of science.

STEP 1: HIGHLY CITED PAPERS

Highly Cited Papers are the building blocks of Research Fronts, and are defined as the top 1% of papers in each different discipline. The selection is based on the cumulative citation counts received by papers. To pick the top percentile of papers, citation thresholds are set separately for each year and discipline (see <http://sciencewatch.com/about/met/thres-highlyctd>) for a typical set of thresholds for the current bi-monthly update.

STEP 2: FORMATION OF RESEARCH FRONTS USING CO-CITATION PATTERN

The next step is to discover how these highly cited works are related to each other by drawing on the scientists' won perceptions and usage patterns. The procedure to accomplish this in Essential Science indicators (ESI) by Thomson Reuters is called Research Front analysis. It is based on grouping Highly Cited Papers that have been co-cited – that is, how often they co-occur in the reference lists papers that cite them. Co-citation mirrors the concept associations of authors, and it has been found that

papers cited together frequently have significant conceptual or methodological relationships. The formation of these pair-wise relationships is followed by a clustering process that groups together papers linked at a pre-set threshold. Each Research Front grouping thus consists of a set of Highly Cited Papers bound together by strong co-citations. A name is applied to the front by a linguistic analysis of the titles of the papers.

Research Front analysis will not identify all research areas or all the papers in an area. However, it can assist in identifying areas where important work is being done and where the scientific community is focusing its attention. The methodology for creating research topics is described in [details](#) on ScienceWatch.

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