PRODUCT REVIEW / ÉVALUATION DE PRODUIT

Yale MeSH Analyzer: A Personal Reflection

I am a creature of habit. There is no other explanation as to why I have not tried the Yale MeSH Analyzer sooner. At the MLA and CHLA joint conference in May 2016 I attended a session about the analyzer. While I was intrigued, when I went back to my library I didn't use it, and instead continued to operate as I always had. When the opportunity to review the analyzer presented itself I felt like I had been given a second chance. I knew that writing this review would finally give me the motivation to try the analyzer. And I am glad I did, because I am impressed with it.

The analyzer was created by two Yale University librarians, Lei Wang and Holly Grossetta Nardini. It automates a time consuming manual process of creating grids of medical subject headings (MeSH) from articles relevant to a search.

I decided to try the Analyzer on a search I was struggling with. The topic, how hospitals can protect healthcare workers from the psychological stresses of their job, was very broad and I was trying to determine the appropriate search concepts. Specifically, I wondered if the MeSH term "job satisfaction" was too general to include. I took the PubMed Identifiers (PMIDs) from three relevant articles, and inputted them into the text box of the analyzer. Instantly a chart with all of their MeSH terms appeared. The terms were listed alphabetically, with each letter in a new row. This configuration allowed me to quickly determine that each of the articles was indexed with job satisfaction, and indeed it was the only common MeSH term they shared. It was settled; "job satisfaction" should be included in the search.

Over the course of the next few weeks I continued to experiment with the MeSH Analyzer. Even though it is extremely intuitive and easy to use I explored the Help section, which has both video and text support. I found the text provided me with everything I needed; however, the video might be useful if you are completely new to the analyzer and want more extensive information on how it can be used. It was in the help section that I discovered how to drag the "Analyze MeSH" button to my browser's favourites' toolbar. Now when I am in the PubMed results page I can check the articles I want, click on the "Analyze MeSH" button, and the selected articles are transported into the Analyzers MeSH grid. It is amazing that such effortless action can produce something so useful.

For me the strength of the analyzer is having the visual comparison of MeSH terms on one page. This ability to quickly scan and compare terms disappears if you try to add too many articles, extending the page past the normal screen view and necessitating scrolling. Some people may be comfortable scrolling several pages, however personally I found that I did not want to compare more than 8 articles, and enjoyed using the Analyzer most when there were no more than 4 articles.

Since writing this review I have incorporated the MeSH Analyzer into my daily work. Sometimes I use it at the beginning of a search to assist in initially identifying search terms, and sometimes I use it near the end to confirm that I have exhausted all possible MeSH terms. Occasionally I have also used the Analyzer for training purposes, showing patrons how a term they did not think should be in their strategy is used to index several of their relevant articles. Thank you Yale University, and Lei and Holly, for producing such a useful, and free, tool.

Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

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