What are stop words and how does EBSCO's search engine handle them?

Stop words are commonly used words such as articles, pronouns and prepositions. Stop words are not added to the search dictionary, but they are counted as words for proximity (a distance between words) searching purposes. The primary reason for not indexing stop words is to allow for the most precise Result List.

In Boolean/Phrase searching, the search engine will substitute a stop word with any other stop word from the list, retaining word proximity. The search engine will ignore stop words (such as the, for, of and after), and instead find a result with any single stop word in its place. For example, if you entered company of America, the search engine will return company of America, company in America, or company for America. It will not return company of the America, because the search engine retains a word distance.

Additionally, if you enter two stop words, the search engine will find any two stop words in their place. For example, if you searched for company of the America, EBSCOhost would return any two words in the place of the stop words.

Notes on searching with stop words:

- When a phrase is enclosed by double quotations marks, the exact phrase is searched. If a phrase contains stop words, the stop words will not be searched, but the searchable words will be searched in the order as entered.
- A stop word will not be searched for in an EBSCOhost database, even if enclosed in double quotation marks.
- A search query with stop words only (i.e. no other terms) yields no results.

EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) has some additional parameters regarding the handling of stop words. Please refer to the following FAQ for more information:

Searching with stop words in EBSCO Discovery Service

Stop words vary by database. A sample list of common stop words appears below.

a
also
an
and
are
as
at
be
because
been
but
For a list of stop words used in EBSCOhost medical databases click here.