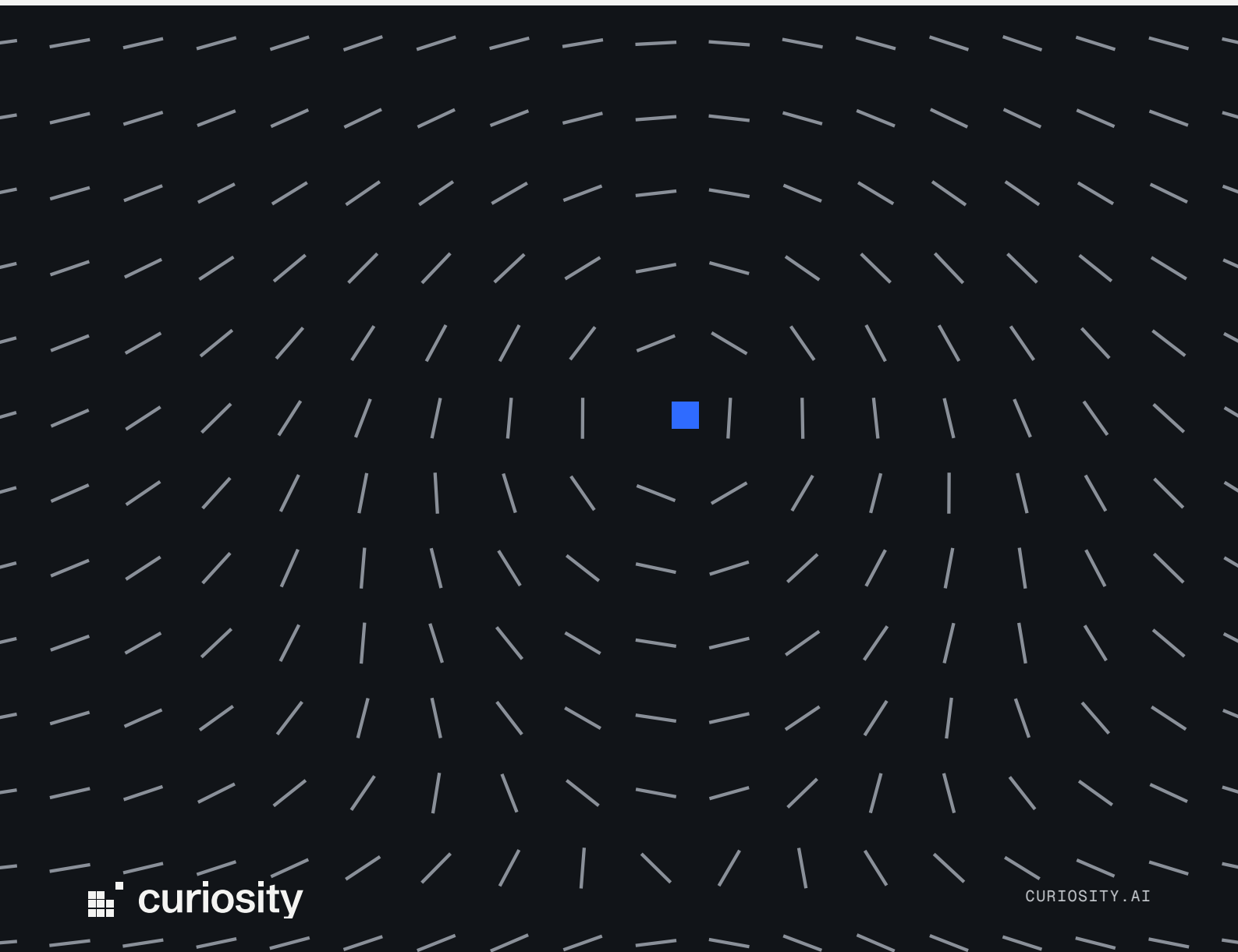


What a score means and what it does not.

A plain-language guide to the number next to each search result in Curiosity Studio: what it is, why it is not a percentage, and how to use it.

TOPIC	FOR	DATE
Search and similarity scores	Anyone who reads ranked results	October 2026



1.1

Think of a soup contest

Five cooks each make a soup. A judge tastes them and puts them in order. The judge gives each soup a number. That number is the score.



THE ORDER IS KNOWN



HOW TASTY EACH SOUP IS: NOT KNOWN

FIG. 1.1 · THE JUDGE GIVES AN ORDER. THE JUDGE DOES NOT SAY HOW TASTY EACH SOUP IS.

YOU CAN ANSWER

- ☒ Which soup came first?
- ☒ Is soup B ranked above soup C?
- ☒ Where does the list drop off?

YOU CANNOT ANSWER

- ☐ Is soup A tasty?
- ☐ Is soup A twice as good as soup B?
- ☐ Is soup A "90% good"?
- ☐ Is soup A good enough to serve?

All five soups can be bad. Then the winner is only the least bad one. A search score works in the same way. It puts results in order. It does not say if the best result is good.

IN THIS PICTURE

The judge's number for each soup is the score. The list from first to fifth is your result list.

KEY POINT

**You know the order.
You do not know how
good each result is.**

2.1

A score is a sorting tool

A score puts results in order. It does not say how good any one result is.

Every search compares your question with many items. Each item gets one number. The item with the highest number goes first. That is the job of a score: to decide the order.

The number comes from a formula. It may count matching words, measure how close two meanings are, or follow links in your data. Each formula has its own scale. The scale is not out of 100.

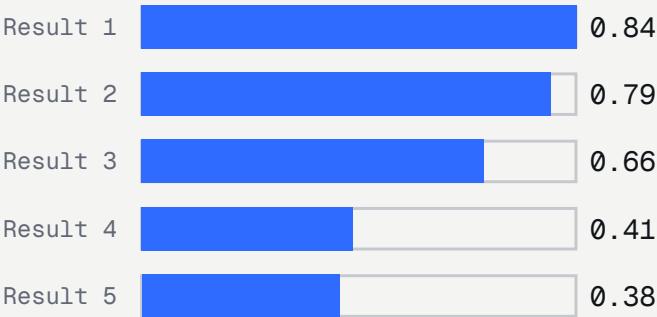
Result lists often draw a bar for each score. The bar is as long as the score is, compared with the best score in the list. So the top result always has a full bar.

If a bar has colored parts, each color is one signal, such as meaning or shared links. The parts add up to the score.

SCORE
A number used to put results in order.

SEARCH A · STRONG MATCHES

Best score 0.84



SEARCH B · WEAK MATCHES

Best score 0.29

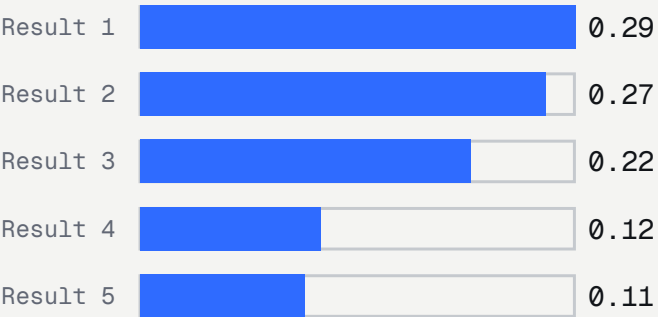


FIG. 2.1 · TWO SEARCHES, AND THE SAME FULL BAR AT THE TOP. SEARCH A FOUND STRONG MATCHES. SEARCH B DID NOT. ILLUSTRATION, NOT A SCREENSHOT. THE SCORES ARE EXAMPLES.

TABLE 3.1

A score is built from several parts

PART	WHAT IT LOOKS AT	HOW IT CHANGES THE SCORE
Search terms	Your words, and near matches	Rare words count more
Text similarity	The meaning of the text	Closer meaning scores higher
Graph links	Connections shared by two items	Adds a signal you can weight
Recency	The age of the item	Last 14 days keep full score
Boosts	Weights an admin sets	Chosen words or sources count more

HOW THE PARTS COME TOGETHER

Each part has its own scale. Search adds them up, with weights, into one number. That number has no fixed top, so it cannot be a percentage.

NOT EVERY PART, EVERY TIME

Which parts count depends on the search. A plain keyword search mainly uses search terms and recency. A similarity view can add meaning and links.

OTHER WAYS TO SORT

You can also sort by newest, by meaning or by number of links. Each way uses its own number.

4.1

Four reasons a score cannot be a percentage

1 · THE SCALE

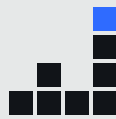


The scale is not fixed.

The same number can mean different things in different searches.

For example, in German schools, 1 is the best mark. In some other countries, 1 is the worst.

2 · THE LIST



A score has meaning only inside its list.

Compare it with the scores next to it.

For example, the tallest child in a class is not always a tall person.

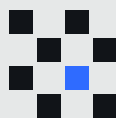
3 · THE WHOLE



There is no whole to take a share of. A percentage is a part of a whole, like 50% of a pizza.

A score has no pizza. No number means "perfect".

4 · THE PRECISION



A percentage looks more exact than it is.

"87%" sounds like "87% sure". It is not.

For example, an app says "Your day: 87% nice". Nobody knows what that measures.

KEY POINT

A percentage shows how much of a whole. A score shows what comes first.

TABLE 5.1

Questions a score can and cannot answer

YOUR QUESTION	CAN A SCORE ANSWER IT?	USE INSTEAD
Which result should I read first?	☒	The order
Is result A ranked above B?	☒	The order
How far apart are A and B?	☐	The gap, not a ratio
Is this result relevant to me?	☐	Open it and read
Is 0.8 a good score?	☐	Nothing: there is no such value
Which of two searches did better?	☐	Read both top results

☒ YES ☐ IN PART ☐ NO

READ IT THIS WAY

A score is reliable for ranking and for seeing where a list drops off. Whether a result is right for you depends on what is in it. So the answer is always in the result itself.

6.1

Use these each time you look at a result list. They take a few seconds.

Three habits for reading a list

READ FROM THE TOP



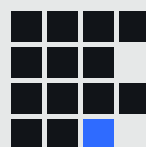
The order is the signal.
Start at result 1 and go down.

LOOK FOR A DROP



A big gap between two
results often means a
change in kind.

JUDGE BY CONTENT



Open the result and read
it. Only the content
shows if it fits.

BEFORE YOU ACT ON A SCORE

Am I comparing results from one search only? Am I using the gap between results, not the size of the number? Have I read the top results, not only looked at the bars?

Terms in this paper

SCORE

A number used to order results. Its scale depends on the search.

RELEVANCE

How well a result fits what you need. Only you can judge it.

SIGNAL

One source of evidence in a score, such as meaning or shared links.

SCALE

The range a number lives in. Each search type has its own.

RANK

A result's place in the list: first, second, third.

SIMILARITY

How alike two items are, by words, meaning or connections.

PERCENTAGE

A share of a known whole. Scores have no such whole.

GAP

The distance between two neighboring scores in a list.

What to take from this paper

01

A score decides the order.

It does not grade any single result.

02

It is not a percentage.

There is no fixed scale and no whole to take a share of.

03

Read the list, then the result.

Use the order and the gaps. Judge fit by opening the result.

Describe it Monday. Ship it this week.

Not sure how to read your own results? Send us a search and we will walk through it with you.

curiosity.ai/request-demo

DATA RESIDENCY

EU, on premises or private cloud

COMPLIANCE

GDPR

MEMBER

KI Bundesverband