Here is a simplified example of the vector space retrieval model. Consider a very small collection C that consists in the following three documents:

d1: “new york times”
d2: “new york post”
d3: “los angeles times”

Some terms appear in two documents, some appear only in one document. The total number of documents is *N*=3. Therefore, the *idf* values for the terms are:

angeles	$log_2(3/1)=1.584$
los	$log_2(3/1)=1.584$
new	$log_2(3/2)=0.584$
post	$log_2(3/1)=1.584$
times	$log_2(3/2)=0.584$
york	$log_2(3/2)=0.584$

For all the documents, we calculate the *tf* scores for all the terms in C. We assume the words in the vectors are ordered alphabetically.

	angeles	los	new	post	times	york
d1	0	0	1	0	1	1
d2	0	0	1	1	0	1
d3	1	1	0	0	1	0

Now we multiply the *tf* scores by the *idf* values of each term, obtaining the following matrix of documents-by-terms: (All the terms appeared only once in each document in our small collection, so the maximum value for normalization is 1.)

	angeles	los	new	post	times	york
d1	0	0	0.584	0	0.584	0.584
d2	0	0	0.584	1.584	0	0.584
d3	1.584	1.584	0	0	0.584	0

Given the following query: “new new times”, we calculate the *tf-idf* vector for the query, and compute the score of each document in C relative to this query, using the cosine similarity measure. When computing the *tf-idf* values for the query terms we divide the frequency by the maximum frequency (2) and multiply with the *idf* values.

q	0	0	(2/2)*0.584=0.584	0	(1/2)*0.584=0.292	0

We calculate the length of each document and of the query:

Length of d1 = sqrt(0.584^2+0.584^2+0.584^2)=1.011
Length of d2 = sqrt(0.584^2+1.584^2+0.584^2)=1.786
Length of d3 = sqrt(1.584^2+1.584^2+0.584^2)=2.316
Length of q = sqrt(0.584^2+0.292^2)=0.652

Then the similarity values are:

cosSim(d1,q) = (0*0+0*0+0.584*0.584+0*0+0.584*0.292+0.584*0) / (1.011*0.652) = 0.776
cosSim(d2,q) = (0*0+0*0+0.584*0.584+1.584*0+0*0.292+0.584*0) / (1.786*0.652) = 0.292
cosSim(d3,q) = (1.584*0+1.584*0+0*0.584+0*0+0.584*0.292+0*0) / (2.316*0.652) = 0.112

According to the similarity values, the final order in which the documents are presented as result to the query will be: d1, d2, d3.