

Databases vs. Search Engines: What's the Difference?

Databases

(Library databases are available 24/7 from the CSN Library web page:
[CSN Library Databases](#))

What: A database is an organized collection of electronic, digitized information that can be searched in a variety of ways. Databases typically include information from magazines, journals, newspapers, and electronic books. Since most of the information found in a database has previously appeared in print form, it has gone through the editorial process. As a result, there is the expectation that the information included in a database is credible and reliable.

How: Databases are provided to the library by vendors as part of a subscription service - no different than the library subscribing to an individual magazine, journal or newspaper. These are not free services available to anyone on the web. However, they are available for free to registered CSN students (your tuition dollars pay for access). Databases are selected by the library to support courses and programs offered at CSN.

Why Use a Database:

- Information is organized: Articles and other types of information are collected, organized and made available by the database provider. You may search for information by keyword, subject heading, author, title, and more. Results can be very relevant.
- Reliability: Most of the information included in a database has gone through the editorial process - it has been checked for accuracy and reliability.
- Ease of access: Databases provided by the library are available 24/7. You have access to thousands of high quality, full text magazines, journals, newspapers, and more.
- **Bottom line:** If you are looking for credible, scholarly information that is carefully organized and easily accessible, use an appropriate database.

Types of Databases: Essentially, there are two basic types of databases made available by the library:

- **General Databases:** These are large databases that provide full text access to thousands of magazine, journal, and newspaper articles on virtually all subjects.
- Examples of General Databases
 - Academic Search Premier
 - Academic OneFile
 - Proquest
- **Specialized Databases:** Specialized databases typically collect and organize information based on specific subjects or disciplines such as business, health, art, history, literature, etc.
- Examples of Specialized Databases
 - Business Source Premier
 - Health Source: Nursing
 - Grove Music Online
 - Literature Resource Center
 - Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection

Search Engines

What: Information on the web is not collected and organized in any meaningful way - it is a vast reservoir of articles, ads, propaganda, opinions of every variety, full text books, government documents, and so much more. A search engine will allow you to search for information found on the web using simple keywords, but they lack the advanced search capabilities provide by most databases. Also, most information found on the web has not gone through the editorial process - anyone can "publish" whatever they like on the web. Consequently, there is no guarantee that information found on the web is credible or reliable.

How: Search engines use software called "spiders" and "crawlers" to routinely scour the web to identify and index web pages. The software used by each search engine works a bit differently. The same search conducted with different search engines will yield different results. You may want to try your search in more than one search engine and compare results. Also keep in mind that information on the web is very dynamic - information is constantly added, deleted, moved, and changed. There is no guarantee that what you find today will be there tomorrow.

Why Use a Search Engine:

- You are looking for information about an organization (American Medical Association), a city/county/state/ agency (Clark County Assessor's Office), or other specialized information.
- You are looking for very specific or obscure information (dates, statistics, etc.).
- You are seeking information for personal uses: how much is my 1995 Honda Accord worth?
- **Caution:** Critically evaluate any information you use for academic assignments - especially information found on the web.

Examples of Search Engines:

- [Google](#)
- [Yahoo Search](#)
- [Live Search \(MSN\)](#)
- [Ask](#)