Locating Information: Search Engines vs. Electronic Databases

# Web Searching

By now, you've certainly used a search engine to find something that you were looking for. Unfortunately, it's likely that you are probably not using your searches to their full potential. It also may be likely that you are unaware of the many **Electronic Databases** you have access to and why you should know and care.

# Overview

First, we'll take a look at search engines.

Second, a crash course in Electronic Databases

Third, determining the reliability of your resources? [*Purdue's Online Writing Lab*](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/02/) will let you know how to check for credibility. There are also terms like [**Validity**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Validity) and [**Logic**](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/659/01/) when dealing with arguments that you'll want to understand before moving on to your assignment.

Regardless of which source you choose, you'll want to look for some of the following:

* Is it recent?
* Does the author identify him/herself? Provide contact info?
* Provide a source for the information?
* Is it free of spelling & grammatical errors?
* Does it match with what you currently know and what other sources say?

# Electronic Databases

Not as clumsy and random as the pages you may find on the World Wide Web, Electronic Databases provide excellent credible resources on all kinds of subjects.

There are significant differences between Search Engines and Electronic Databases though many of the search strategies are the same. [Video Lesson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oa9Plg_7gdg).

# Search Engines vs. Databases[[1]](#footnote-1)

What is a library database?

**Library databases contain information from published works.**

* Examples: Magazine and newspaper articles,encyclopedias and other reference books.

**Library databases are searchable.**

* By Keywords, Subject, Author, Magazine Title, Date, etc.

**Library databases provide citation information.**.

* Author, if available
* Title of Article
* Publication (Title of Magazine, Newspaper, or Reference Book)
* Publisher
* Date of Publication

**Databases often contain full-text articles**

* You can print or email an entire article.

**There are different kinds of databases**

* For specific topics. Examples: Biography Resource Center, New Book of Popular Science
* For general topics. Examples: ProQuest, World Book Online

**Library databases are paid for by taxpayer dollars**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Library Databases | Websites |
| Library databases get their information from professionals or experts in the field. | Websites can be written by anyone regardless of expertise. |
| Library databases contain published works where facts are checked. | Website content is not necessarily checked by an expert. |
| Library databases are easy to cite in a bibliography and may create the citation for you. | Websites often don’t provide the information necessary to create a complete citation. |
| Library databases can help you narrow your topic or suggest related subjects. | Websites often aren’t organized to support student research needs. |
| Library databases are updated frequently and include the date of publication. | Websites may not indicate when a page is updated. |

# Questions to ask about ANY information:

**Currency:** How recent is the information, and when was it last updated?

**Organization:** Is it easy to find the information you need?

**Accuracy:** How reliable is the information, and are the facts accurate?

**Bibliography:** How easy is the work to cite in a bibliography? Does it give you the author, title, publisher, and date?

**Unfamiliar Topics:** How useful is it when you don’t know where to start?

**Languages:** How easily can the work provide languages other than English? Any source, whether a library database or website, can have good information. It is necessary to think critically about all information that you read or view.

You can find databases at the [Electronic Library of MN](http://www.elm4you.org) (ELM).

# Search Engines

[Advanced Searcing Intro Video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReHsbqVc0Ak)

In the video, you have just watched someone narrow a Google Search to make it more effective. Check out this example:

| Search Term | # of hits |
| --- | --- |
| Super Mario | 16,700,000 |
| “Super Mario” | 14,400,000 |
| “Super Mario” – movie, film | 11,300,000 |
| Stereotype “Super Mario” –movie, film | 31,000 |
| Italian Stereotype “Super Mario” –movie, film | 1,620 |

Of these 1,620 results you can weed out the ones that are not reliable using the techniques discussed in class.

Try it yourself: Enter a search term and record the results, specify your terms more and more until you achieve a more reasonable list.

If you need some more ideas for searching there are [even more suggestions here](http://www.powersearchingwithgoogle.com/course/ps/lesson31.html).

Advanced Google searching helps you find more relevant sites. You can subtract words you don't want; group terms together; search in specified time or by copyright.

When you have access to the internet that makes you as smart as anyone in the world, all you have to do is access, evaluate and interpret information. It is time for you to begin relying upon yourselves, and your skills and not look to others to provide that information for you. To paraphrase Obi-Wan "Ben" Kenobi, “*You're about to take your first steps into a larger world*.” Well, a more accurate/scientific world at least.

Chances are, one of the first sites you'll see after performing a search will lead you to the much maligned *Wikipedia*.

# Wikipedia

[Video Intro](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFBDn5PiL00). While it's true that anyone can create an account and add/edit information, it's really not quite as easy to post false information as it sounds (this is called Vandalism). There are thousands of volunteers who monitor pages in which they have an interest and can revert changes, lock pages, request documentation, etc. Most Wikipedia pages have discussion going on in the background where people argue about the validity of the information posted. It's a more rigorous process to get new information included.

You've probably had teachers that told you not to use Wikipedia because it can't be trusted. You may have had teachers tell you that it's no big deal. Here are the facts regarding Wikipedia:

1. Information found on Wikipedia is just as (if not more) reliable than other Encyclopedias (Encarta, Britannica). In the past, Encyclopedias were the only way to find documented and relevant information on all kinds of general knowledge topics. They have an interest in keeping the myth of their superiority alive.

2. Experts in the field actually think quite highly of the information there.

3. While you may have teachers that won't let you use it, and you may not want to use it as a source yourself, you can certainly look at the references on the bottom of the page. Those are most likely primary source documents that you'll want to check out when doing internet research.

[*See more about the value of having an encyclopedia that the world can access and edit*](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQR0gx0QBZ4) *from the man who started it.*

# Your Turn

*Please answer all questions thoroughly (i.e. more than a couple sentences). It's important to back up your opinions by using facts and reasons, even other sources if necessary.*

1. How can you test a website for credibility?

2. How do you (should you) determine if something is logical? (Do not write that it just makes sense)

3. Why would someone use a Database over a Website?

4. Why would someone use a Website over a Database?

5. What are the positives and negatives of using Wikipedia? When would it be appropriate to use that site? When would it be inappropriate?

6. Access the ProQuest Database. Go to: <http://elm4you.org/databases/> and click on *ProQuest Complete Newsstand.* Search for your topic (not something like *Ants*. Choose one that is something that can be researched in terms of information you would find in a newspaper.)

7. Search for the same topic using Google. Describe your experience. What was your topic? Read a couple of the results for each. What were the differences in results?

1. From the Hennepin County Library. Used with permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)