What's the Difference between a Research Database and Google?
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As part of your research, your instructor may sometimes require you to use articles or other resources from the library's research databases. But what is a research database and why are they useful?

A research database is an organized, searchable collection of information that allows you to quickly search many resources simultaneously. Databases can be general, such as *Academic Search Complete* or *ProQuest*, or subject-specific, such as *PsycInfo*, which has resources related to psychology, or *America, History and Life*, which has resources related to history.

So what makes a research database different than other search engines, like Google? There are a few important distinctions to keep in mind when you're using a research database instead of Google. First, the types of information you're searching are usually different. Google searches for results across the internet, including websites, while research databases typically include scholarly journal articles, popular magazine articles and newspapers, books, and videos. The content of a research database is also reviewed and updated regularly.

Also, *how* you search is different. Google uses natural language searching, which allows you to search using complete sentences, such as "How many moons does Jupiter have?". Google also searches the full text of resources, which usually means you get many results, but not all of them are relevant to your search query. Research databases use more precise, keyword searching, and most don't automatically search the full text of a resource. Keywords are words or phrases that describe the topic you're researching, and you'll want to use them when searching databases to locate the most relevant resources on your topic.

Also, while Google offers some advanced searching options, most people don't need to use them to find what they're looking for. However, advanced search options in research databases, such as filtering by date, language, document format, and peer review status, can be effective in retrieving more relevant, precise results. Google also uses ads and tracks its users based on what they're searching and clicking on, which the library doesn't.

Both Google and research databases can be useful depending on your information need, and results from both need to be evaluated for accuracy and credibility. If you're searching for scholarly research in mechanical engineering, a subject-specific engineering database would be a better place to search than Google. However, if you're looking for websites of professional engineering organizations, Google is the better search option.

If you still have questions about research databases and how to use them, contact UH Libraries for help.