

Module 3.1 Where do you find information?

This tutorial focuses on **finding** high-quality information. You will see and try a variety of tools for finding information.

A library database is a collection: an organized, searchable collection of information resources. You could think of each database as a very large, very well-organised warehouse. At the U of A we have more than a thousand of these databases.

You search a database to find information about articles, to discover that certain articles exist. Many databases also give you the full text of the articles you find.

Many databases also help you find book chapters, books, newspapers, conference proceedings, and more.

Databases are essential for academic research. At the U of A, we have more than one thousand of them.

Some databases are subject specific, for example, *PsycINFO* which primarily contains references to resources in psychology and psychiatry. Other databases, such as *Academic Search Complete* are general and contain references to resources across many subject areas from art history to zoology. The subject specific databases have the advantage of having a much more complete and in-depth coverage of the literature in a specific subject area but may not completely cover cross over areas to another discipline such as music therapy or psychohistory. The general databases have the advantage of covering a wide variety of subjects but do not cover any one subject in-depth to the degree and subject specific database does. In addition, while there may be significant overlap in coverage between the general and subject specific databases, there is no one database that will cover all subjects, therefore, it is important to never limit your search to only one database as you could be missing a very important resource for your research.

Database interfaces may look different, but the way to search them is similar in most cases. That is, once you know how to effectively search one database, the search skills you learn can be transferred to another database.

There are a wide variety of database interfaces you may encounter. The general principles of searching can be transferred across different interfaces, however, some database have rather unique search features. As well, some database interfaces that look the same may have distinct options for limiting your search such as by historical time period or publication language. It is always wise to consult library public services staff in person or via online chat to learn the specifics of searching databases. All databases also have a “help” option that can provide useful information.