Using a Library Database – English Transcript

Maybe your teacher has asked you to use a library database as part of an assignment. But what is a library database, and how can it help you with your research? This tutorial will cover what you can expect to find in library databases. It will go over some of the differences between what is available on the Internet and what is available through library databases. And, it will discuss how and when you should use databases.

Some library databases include content written for adults, and others focus on content for students. Some databases are general and cover just about every topic you can think of, and others focus on specific subjects like history or health.

So when you use a library database, what exactly are you searching? Most databases provide access to thousands of articles and images from magazines, newspapers, and reference books, plus some audio and video content, too.

When you find a magazine article in a library database, it is exactly the same article and you would have found in the magazine itself. This article about penguins is from National Geographic Kids magazine, but we found it in a library database. As you can see, the article in the database is the same as the article in the print magazine.

This is also true for a newspaper articles. It's as if someone cut out all of the articles from hundreds of books, magazines, and newspapers; gathered audio and video clips; and put everything in digital folders by subject so you can access information about almost any topic. Bees, baseball, Brazil, bananas, bongo drums. You get the idea.

For many people, searching the Internet is the first stop for beginning any sort of research. You can definitely find a lot of useful information by searching Google, but not everything is available on the Internet. Let's take a look at the difference between information you find on the Internet and information you find in a library database.

Sources in library databases have either been reviewed by professional editors or experts. This adds credibility to the information you find. On the other hand, anyone can post whatever they want on the Internet. While some web sites -- like those from zoos, museums, national parks, and magazines and newspapers -- may have been reviewed by editors or experts, many have not.

Editing, fact-checking, and uploading articles to databases all take time, anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. On the other hand, without going through a detailed editorial process, Internet information can be added as it happens. That is why you can often find up-to-the-minute information on the Internet about certain events like sports, weather, and breaking news.

The Internet contains a lot of information on almost any topic in the whole world, so sometimes it can be difficult to find exactly what you're looking for. However, some library databases are made just for students like you. Database editors continually sort through piles of new information selecting and adding articles that match the audience and purpose of a database. This makes it easier to find information that is just right.

Finally, while much of the information on the Internet is free for anyone to access, databases cost money. One reason is because professionals have collected and reviewed the information. Another reason is because database companies have to pay the original publishers for the right to use their articles and images, most of which are not available on the free Internet.

School and public libraries pay for these databases and allow you to use them for free. You access them through your library's web site, and this means that you do not always have to be in the library to do research. If you access databases when you're away from the library, you will usually need to log in with your school's username and password or your library card number.

Let's take a look at a database that is designed for students.

There are often three options to find information in the database -- Browse, Search, and Advanced Search. Let's begin with the Browse option. Notice the categories on the main page, and choose the ones that you are interested in exploring or that seem to fit your topic. When you browse, you start with a broad subject and click through to narrow down your search to something more specific.

Let's choose animals. Now you have several subtopics to choose from. Let's look at bugs and worms. Now there are many specific topics to choose from. Bees, butterflies, ladybugs, and wasps, to name a few.

Let's look at bees. When you scroll down, you see there are lots of books, pictures magazines, and newspaper articles about bees. Click on any content type to see all of the results in that category. Browsing is especially helpful when you have not decided on a topic yet. It helps you get ideas.

But what if you already know your topic? In that case, use the Search option. Click on the database logo to go back to the homepage and locate the search box at the top. Enter your topic or keyword into the search box. Let's use bees again.

As you can see, the search results are the same as when you used the Browse option. Notice that you can get to the search box from any screen. You can also get to the Advanced Search option. Let's check it out.

Advanced Search allows you to narrow or limit your search results in a very specific way. For example, you can limit your search to certain keywords, to a specific publication title, like the name of a magazine or a newspaper, and more. You can also limit your search to results that have pictures, or limit by a certain date, document type, or reading level. They call it advanced searching for a reason. It takes more know-how than regular searching.

For some tips, check out the two OSLIS videos about searching effectively. Now that you understand what a library database is, be sure to use one to find quality information when you're doing research, either for an assignment or for your own interests.

For specific examples and for more information about this topic and the entire research process, explore OSLIS. Thank you to the Oregon CLIP Project for allowing the OSLIS Committee to adapt their tutorials. OSLIS -- Learn to Research. Research to Learn.