# **Search Interfaces**

## What is a Database?

*Databases* are searchable collections of resources on a variety of subjects. Databases are subscription-based; college libraries pay the subscription fees so that you, as a student, can access the information. [Watch this video](https://youtu.be/G8Md9NxkO98) and read the information below to find out more about library databases.

Libraries buy database subscriptions from vendors, like EBSCO, ProQuest, Gale, and Ovid, to name a few. You can think of vendors like cable company providers: Bells, Rogers, Shaw - and their content packages. We sometimes use the term *platform* when referring to a vendor’s search interface.

You can find the following types of material in a database:

* newspaper articles
* journal articles
* encyclopedia articles
* streaming media
* scholarly, or peer-reviewed academic articles

## What is a Discovery Layer?

A *discovery layer* is a multidisciplinary search tool. Discovery layers are like search engines (think: Google) for library content. [Watch this video](https://youtu.be/laQQYm4PM6c) and read the information below to find out more about discovery layers.

Using your library’s discovery layer, you will be able to find the following types of material:

* articles in databases
* e-content (ebooks, audiobooks, streaming media)
* physical library resources (e.g. books, DVDs, magazines)

*Note on magazine articles*: a discovery layer is usually the best place to search for articles from trade magazines and popular magazines. Although these may also be available in specific databases, some databases are limited to scholarly journal articles.

### Differences Between Discovery Layers and Databases

There are some differences to searching with a discovery layer instead of in a database:

* Discovery layers cover a broad range of subjects, so your search results will likely include materials not related to the health sciences, as opposed to health science databases, which will have only health sciences results.
* Discovery layers have a lot of search tools and filters, but not as many health sciences-specific advanced search options as databases like PubMed, CINAHL, Cochrane, and other health sciences databases that may be available through your library.

If you are looking for physical library resources such as books, or e-content such as ebooks and streaming videos, the discovery layer is an excellent tool. If you are looking for journal articles, you can always start with the discovery layer, but you will likely need to move to a database to use the more powerful search interface.

## What is a search engine?

A search engine, such as Google (or Google Scholar), is an interface for searching the web. You probably use search engines in your everyday life. Although Google should not be your only tool for finding information for your course assignments, it is a good choice for some types of materials.

Search engines are a good place to search for the following types of information:

* Grey literature, including standards and guidelines from the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) and Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario (RNAO)
* Scholarly articles (Google Scholar)