Types of Sources

Reviewing this tutorial on source types first may help for what comes next.

In this learning unit I'm going to give you a whirlwind tour of some databases. Knowing what databases are, what kind of stuff is in them, when it is appropriate to use them, and how to best search them are all very important components of the searching step of the research process (that's step 3 if you're keeping track). Generally when searching for information we go to three different types of resources: books, periodicals (articles in newspapers, magazines, and journals), and websites. And generally we use a different database for each.

Books: Catalogs (such as Piper and Worldcat)
Periodicals: Databases (such as JSTOR and Literature Resource Center)
Websites: Search Engines (such as Google and Yahoo)

The language is not always consistent here. For instance, the word "database" in its broader sense can mean any collection of information, but we also use it more narrowly here to mean "where you look for articles"; this is what you get on the library's website under the "databases" section. Also, there can be a lot of overlap. For instance, you can sometimes find entire books and scholarly articles on websites. And of course you get to all of these on a computer, via the internet and they all use search boxes, so they're all "search engines" in a sense. But try to keep in mind that what you get out of each can differ greatly, and there are times when it is more appropriate to use one rather than another.

I apologize upfront if this seems confusing. I'll try to keep it simple but I don't want to give you the impression things are more black and white than they really are. Different people use different terms for the same thing. Just hang in there, I think it will start to make more sense once you get your hands wet with it!

Over the next few slides, I'll introduce you to a number of catalogs and databases through some video tutorials and then have you do a few searching worksheets for which you'll have to get into said catalogs and databases and do some exploring.

The first thing you should do though is open up and go through these powerpoint slides. This is just to introduce you to some basic vocabulary and give you an overview of some important catalogs and databases.

You may not need to use all of the resources I'll show you for this class this semester but many of them may come in handy for other research projects you may have in the future.