What is COMPASS?

COMPASS is an information retrieval service that can give you a list of resources, such as journal articles, research reports, and dissertations, on a topic of your choice. Legal citations and some forms of numeric data, such as census figures, are also available.

Where do the references come from?

References come from computerized lists, or databases, compiled by both commercial and public organizations. Some databases correspond to printed indexes such as Psychological Abstracts or Index Medicus. We access these databases through service companies like BRS and DIALOG, which are located outside of Cornell.

Are all the articles identified in a computer search available at Cornell?

Not necessarily. Since the producers of most databases have no connection with Cornell, articles may be listed that are not in our collections.

What are the advantages of a computer search?

**Speed.** In most cases, several years of an index can be searched in a few minutes.

**Currency.** Computerized indexes are usually updated more frequently than the printed version.

**Access points.** The computer can scan words in the title or abstract as well as subject headings.

**Downloading.** In some libraries, the results of a search can be read onto a disk for storage and later use.

**Complexity.** A computer can combine several concepts, providing, for example, a list of articles in *English* on the effects of *acid rain on wildlife* in the *Adirondacks.*
What are the disadvantages?

Cost. Most computer searches cost money, even if you do not find anything useful.

Convenience. In some libraries, you must make an appointment for a search.

False drops. The computer cannot distinguish between two meanings of the same word; for example, depression will be interpreted as both psychological and economic depression. Some irrelevant references may be retrieved. It may be expensive to browse through references to check for usefulness.

How much does a computer search cost?

Databases vary widely in basic charges. Factors that determine the cost are:
- number of databases searched
- amount of time required to type in the search terms
- number of references you want printed
- whether or not you want a summary of each article
- whether or not you can wait a week for results or need the results immediately

Reference librarians can often supply a rough estimate of costs.

How do you pay for a search?

Searches can be paid for with cash, or a personal check made out to Cornell University, or in some cases may be charged to a departmental account.

Who performs the search?

The search is usually performed by a librarian, but you are encouraged to observe the search, explain your information needs, and suggest changes in the search if necessary. In some libraries, you may be able to arrange to perform your own search.
How can you arrange for a search?

Telephone or visit the reference desk of one of the libraries listed below. It is helpful to prepare for the search in advance by clarifying your search topic in your own mind and noting synonyms and alternate terminology to describe what you need.

Engineering Library .................................. 255-5935
Geneva Experiment Station .......................... 122-214
or (315) 787-2214
Johnson Graduate School of Management Library .......................... 255-3389
Hotel Administration Library .......................... 255-9992
Industrial and Labor Relations Library ...................... 255-2184
Law Library ........................................... 255-7236
Mann Library .......................................... 255-5406
Olin Library ........................................... 255-4009
Physical Sciences Library ............................ 255-4016
Uris Undergraduate Library .......................... 255-2339
Veterinary Library ................................... 253-3510

For further information, contact the reference desk in any Cornell University library.

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