Limitations of Search Databases

No electronic database contains all the information that you need for your research. Considerations such as subject coverage, publication coverage, date coverage, updates and timeliness, must be considered.

Subject Coverage
Some databases cover specific subjects, such as the Canadian Research Index which includes only Canadian government documents. Other databases are more general and cover a wide range of subjects, such as Carl UnCover which includes 17,000 journals from almost every possible discipline. PsycINFO covers the psychological and psychiatric aspects of subjects.

In order to choose the most appropriate database for your research, you need to review what subjects are covered in a particular database.

Publication Coverage
Electronic databases do not necessarily index (i.e. cover) every type of publication available. Some only index journal articles, whereas others might also index government documents, dissertations, conference proceedings, book chapters, etc. In order to ensure that you will be retrieving the type of information you require, you need to know the publication coverage. Usually by clicking on the Help Button on the main search screen of a database, such information will be provided.

Date Coverage
You need to review the date coverage of the database to ensure that you are searching within the time range that you require for your paper. Many electronic databases are fairly recent and do not index published information from years ago. Most databases will indicate date coverage on the first screen. If the database date coverage is too recent, you will probably have to use the print index equivalent (if there is one).

Updates and Timeliness
A database may be updated daily, monthly, quarterly or yearly. Updates can affect the retrieval of results. Usually the more updates, the more recent the information. Note, however, that recency of information is also affected by timeliness. For example, if you require an article that has been published in the last two months, a database such as PsycINFO, although updated monthly, will not be useful as records indexed in PsycINFO usually have a four month to a year time lag from the time that they are published in the journal to the time that they are indexed in the database. When you require very recent information, search a current awareness database like Carl UnCover which indexes tables of contents of journals recently published.

Reference
http://www.ucalgary.ca/library/subjects/SOWK/PsychInfo/limits.htm

Medline indexes and abstracts the ~4000 journals which constitute the core clinical literature of biomedicine. The problem is that thousands of biology, chemistry, engineering, mathematics and other journals publishing results of possible relevance to molecular biology and genetics are not covered. General science journals like Nature and Science are covered selectively, i.e. only the papers that the National Library of Medicine considers relevant to biomedicine are included in the database. Book chapters are not even considered.

Another problem is that it takes 2 or 3 months for the National Library of Medicine to compile the database. Thus papers that have appeared in the literature in the last few months are not in the database. PubMed, the web version of Medline, is now overcoming this problem by updating Medline almost daily. Also the web version of Knowledge Finder, another popular version of Medline, is updated weekly.

Fortunately there are several ways around these problems. Biological Abstracts, PubMed, and Science Citation Index has services that complement Medline in some way. Biological Abstracts covers the complete biological literature, not just biomedicine. It is thus strong in such fields as botany, agriculture, and entomology. PubMed is the
Medline database, but it has the virtue of being updated almost daily, and thus contains very recent papers (on the other hand it is not nearly as easy to use as KnowledgeFinder). Its “See Related Articles” feature easily amplifies your general search results. Science Citation Index also covers all science and technology disciplines, not just biomedicine. In addition, it allows one to find papers that have cited an older paper. This is an easy and terminology-neutral way to find relevant literature. Records from PubMed, Biological Abstracts, and Science Citation Index can be imported into EndNote, just as KnowledgeFinder records can be (see the Guides section of the Whitehead Library Home Page for cookbook-like instructions).

Reference

CINAHL (Cumulative Index of Nursing & Allied Health Literature) is a database of citations from 1982 to the present to articles published in nursing and allied health journals. Some nursing dissertations, health care books, conference proceedings, and audio-visual materials are indexed, too. While this database provides the full-text for selected journals (approximately 7000 records have links to the full-text articles), most of the records are citations only. Some records include an author-provided abstract of the article.

Reference
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/nuffield/infoservices/UKCH/cinahl.html

Ovid and PubMed

Ovid and PubMed are systems that search the MEDLINE database; each has advantages and disadvantages. PubMed is a government-sponsored system and is freely accessible by anyone who can access the Internet; they have limited free access to full-text journals. Ovid is a privately owned system developed by Ovid Technologies. Ovid's primary advantage is that the user can search different databases in several disciplines using the same interface. Ovid also provides access to a number of full-text journals and textbooks. PubMed is generally easier to search than Ovid, but it can return large numbers of irrelevant journals and textbooks. PubMed is generally easier to search than Ovid, but it can return large numbers of irrelevant journals and textbooks. Ovid can be more difficult to learn, but complex and precise searching is easier to do on Ovid than on PubMed. It allows a greater level of control over a search which can result in retrieval of fewer irrelevant articles.

Reference
http://library.mcphu.edu/guides/Medlinecompare.htm