Author's Note: Below is an excerpt of a 3,000 word article on Blockchain for the average person. This was a long-form piece of content created expressly for a person coming blindly into the subject matter.

What is a database?

Let's start by understanding what a database is. In the traditional sense of the word, a database is a repository of information. From records scratched on bones to modern cloud-based systems, every database stores and organizes information that can be accessed by different people.

Throughout history, databases have been in only one location, that is, centralized. One of the most important things to understand about a centralized database is that by its nature, it can be controlled by outside forces. For example, think of a Google document. No matter how many people can edit or how many people it is shared with, someone is still the owner of the document. They can easily lock people out or change things permanently.

A blockchain database is a decentralized database, with multiple points of connection. Once information is entered into the blockchain as part of a new block, it cannot be changed by any user. (In theory, this could happen, but the sheer amount of work that it would take is staggering and impractical in the extreme.)

Common characteristics of databases

In order to understand why a decentralized database is such a revolutionary idea, here are a few characteristics of common databases.

They are controlled by a group or an individual
Not every user has equal rights
The information is a 'snapshot' in time
Previous information generally needs to be backed up in order to be kept.