DATA OR STATISTICS?
What’s the assignment?

Understanding the requirements of your assignment or research project is always the first step in the process.
Data or statistics?

Have you been asked to answer a specific question or provide numbers to support an argument?
For example, what percentage of violent crimes committed in Boston were homicides or assaults? In Quincy, are more building permits issued for apartment houses or single-family homes?
"How many" questions are often answered by statistics.

How many Asian and Hispanic immigrants live in Boston? How many children in Boston have asthma? Is this number increasing or decreasing?
Data or statistics?

How? Why?

Data may help you answer "how" and "why" questions, and those answers may help you understand relationships among events or people.

For example, are there datasets to help us understand why the childhood asthma rate is increasing or decreasing? Are there data about air pollution, numbers of days with air quality alerts, better diagnostic tools for childhood illnesses, etc.? 
Statistics are often presented in ready-made tables, charts, graphs, and infographics with references to the underlying datasets.
Work with datasets is likelier to require some knowledge of specialized tools for manipulating and visualizing the data. Also, most datasets are supplemented by codebooks and metadata which explain data collection techniques, limitations of the data, etc.

If you’ve been asked to look at codebooks or use data analysis programs, chances are you’ll need data for your project.