Definition: reference book from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1. a publication consulted to identify certain facts or for background information, as an encyclopedia, dictionary, atlas, etc.

**Plural:** reference books

Summary Article: Reference Works (Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, etc.)
From *Encyclopedia of International Media and Communications*

I. History of Reference Books
II. Types of Reference Resources
III. References to Aid in Communication
IV. The Future

**GLOSSARY**

**bibliographic tools**
Comprehensive lists of materials that have been published and are available for purchase or are owned and available by other libraries and information centers that house the materials within their collections.

**dictionaries**
Access to word lists of spoken and written languages helping users to find pronunciations, division into syllables, definitions, and usage.

**encyclopedias**
Collections of short articles on general rather than specialized subject topics, biographies, and geographic locations, among others, that introduce researchers to the subject and help them with basic information before they begin to research in other resources.

**online reference tools**
May include databases that are available only as databases or on the Internet; may offer access to information also available in print formats.

**ready reference books**
Entities such as general dictionaries, almanacs, and general encyclopedias that are found in libraries with specialized information about topics that provide brief answers to simple questions.

**reference books**
Resources containing information for users when specific questions arise that will help them to begin their search for more in-depth information.

Reference works may be described as those entities that contain information for users when a specific question arises. Few people, other than editors of references, read any reference book from beginning to end. Their primary use and their real importance come when the information within solves a problem.
such as learning the definition of a word, finding the capital or population of a country, locating a specific quotation or poem, finding a picture or biography of a particular person, or seeking any other short answer to a research query. It is logical that the first record of an event was made to provide later access to that information. The history of the development of reference materials is followed by a brief description of several different types of references available, including bibliographic resources. Because this encyclopedia has an international focus, references to help writers who wish to communicate are included. The article ends with a discussion of the future of reference books in an online environment.

I. HISTORY OF REFERENCE BOOKS

Estimates of human life on earth span millions of years, yet keeping records is much more recent. The ancient cave paintings recording events such as hunts were references, but they were probably used as religious icons rather than as a record of how many animals were killed. Incisions on bones or notched sticks have been found, but it is not certain what these recorded.

Until record keeping became more possible, history was the oral record passed down from generation to generation. As civilization moved into business transactions some 5000 years ago, records of these transactions were stored on available material, with the first being clay tablets—and reference work began.

It is thought that the ancient Sumerians, in what is now southern Iraq, had a clay-based civilization, while the Egyptians used reeds and stone. Inscribing with a stick onto a surface came to be called “cuneiform or wedge shaped.” Clay, as a reference commodity, had its own long-term storage problems. Usually housed in reed baskets that disintegrated over time, clay tablets were easily broken. Even if carefully housed, retrieval systems were immature at best.

Papyrus, the Egyptian device for record keeping, was more easily stored than clay but was certainly no more permanent and very susceptible to fire and water. The destruction of the library at Alexandria is an example of how a great library can be leveled and its references lost. Stone was extremely durable, and pictorial records, hieroglyphs, were cruelly cut into stone. Whether clay, papyrus, or stone, the first reference books were “readable” by only a few and were housed in official libraries or archives used only by privileged users: scribes, priests, or government officials. About 500 BC, the Greeks turned their governance structure into a democracy; and the concept of education for free men (no slaves or women) made access to references important for at least the higher levels of civilization. Recognizing the need for a classification system, they first created taxonomies to arrange things into some order. Alphabetical arrangement moved into wider use when defining difficult words in the margins of their papyrus, “glossa,” and the term glossary was born. This led to the later development of dictionaries.

The domination of religion in the lives people during the Middle Ages began a higher production of books. Priests in monastic communities created manuscripts mostly by copying from existing Bibles or other religious works. Reading and ownership of books remained with the wealthy, and the common man was unaware of the existence of reference works.

For people to have reference books beyond the keeping of business records or religious and governmental laws, they needed a less labor-intensive way in which to reproduce records. With the building of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg during the mid-15th century, this changed. Producers of information now had the ability to provide more readily available information for the public
at large. It is thought that the term *information* came into general use around the time of the invention of the printing press. Also at this time, strict alphabetization became a necessity for retrieval rather than the hierarchical order that taxonomies would demand, even though the creation of new information grew slowly at first.

Information may be found in many locations, including books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, scholarly journals, periodicals, governmental and commercial reports, newsletters, news services, film, audiotape, microforms, and online databases. While the ancient Egyptians had simple retrieval systems (if any), people looking for references today have access to indexes, thesauri, and other guides both in print and online. All users need to understand is what information is best found in which kinds of references.

II. TYPES OF REFERENCE RESOURCES

References discussed in this article include encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, and other ready reference handbooks and manuals; specialized references such as books of quotations, geographical information (e.g., maps, gazetteers), biographical references, bibliographic tools, and government documents; and specific reference resources to help people who wish to communicate.

A. Dictionaries

If someone is asked to identify a reference book, the immediate response would probably be the dictionary. Believed to be the first type of reference book for the general public, the dictionary today is available in many formats and even in paperback editions, making it affordable to all families. Dictionaries are found in many homes, in offices on desks of staff, and in libraries and classrooms. Dictionaries offer word lists of a spoken and written language, helping users to find pronunciations of words, divisions of words into syllables, and definitions of words. Dictionaries are arranged in alphabetical order, and the definitions are usually in order by the most recent usage first. Users need to understand the sequence of the definitions given for any word because if a definition is different from the one in most common usage, then the definition will not help users to make a choice. Grammatical information is usually given indicating the part of speech (e.g., noun, verb, adjective, adverb). Alternative spellings for past tenses of irregular verbs or plural nouns are often shown. Not all dictionaries include all words in common usage. Slang words are often not added to a dictionary until they reach consistent usage. The number of words found depends on the size of the dictionary.

Unabridged dictionaries are those heavy volumes that are placed strategically on a stand so they can be left open for easy viewing. They are too large to be found on the lap of a researcher. These volumes are recognized authorities in the pronunciations and definitions of words. They often have inset pages with color pictures of flags or coins of the nations, and they may have small drawings beside their definitions, but they are mostly text. The vocabulary chosen to explain is easy enough to be understood by most users.

Many unabridged dictionaries offer synonyms within the definitions. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* was very controversial when it was published, and many who owned copies held on to the earlier edition. Published by Merriam Webster, the modern successor to the company founded by Noah Webster, it is but one of many dictionaries using the name *Webster*, which is in the public domain. Their earliest unabridged dictionary was published in 1934, with the most recent being published in 1961.

Merriam Webster dropped the number of entries from some 600,000 in the second edition to 450,000, of which 100,000 were new words. This dictionary is revised every five years, and each new
printing has a section on new words. It is now available as a CD-ROM with 472,000 entries. Also available online for a monthly or yearly fee, it may be located on the Web (www.merriam-websterunabridged.com/mwol-1b.htm).

Users may find information about the history of a word, but for a detailed etymology of a word, they probably are better served by a dictionary specializing in etymology such as HarperCollins's The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology. Containing more than 30,000 entries, the date of the earliest recorded appearance for each word is given with the definition. Pronunciation and part of speech are also indicated for each entry.

The smaller desk dictionary is much less expensive than the larger unabridged version. An example of the former is Merriam Webster's Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. These dictionaries may have as many as 150,000 or even 200,000 definitions with illustrations, small line drawings, and/or pictures. They also serve as guides to pronunciation, and they easily fit on a bookshelf.

Even smaller dictionaries than the desk dictionary are available. They usually have between 30,000 and 60,000 words and may be purchased in paperback, making them affordable to all. The fourth edition of the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language has some 90,000 entries, with 70,000 audio word pronunciations and 900 full-page color illustrations. Some of these, such as the Merriam Webster Dictionary, are available in both hard copy and paperback.

The transfer of information to CD-ROM and online technologies have made it possible to locate words and their definitions even more quickly. The online dictionary has the additional advantage of locating alternative spellings when users misspell words during their searches.

A wide variety of dictionaries are available for students in elementary school, possibly because the difference in ability of students to read and understand is so great between early primary and upper elementary schools, providing a ready market. These dictionaries often have wide margins and colorful illustrations to attract students to them. Middle school and high school students should be able to use desk dictionaries as well as unabridged dictionaries.

Historical dictionaries often have many volumes, allowing for essay-length articles that trace the history of the English language and cover the etymology of words. One of the most popular ones is Oxford University Press's The Oxford English Dictionary, a multi-volume set that can be found in many high school libraries as well as public and academic libraries. The Oxford English Dictionary is currently available online at www.oed.com. Its definitions are extended with quotations to illustrate variations in the uses and meanings of the words. A more specialized reference in this category, the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang, uses the historical principles of The Oxford English Dictionary, giving evidence of usage and meanings. Its lengthy entries define the terms' meanings and show, through cited quotations, how the terms have been used.

Users will find many other specialized dictionaries available. Some of these are specific to a topic area such as The ALA Glossary of Library Terms published by the American Library Association. Others have a very specialized use such as the various crossword puzzle dictionaries. These help not only with the meanings of words but also with words of a certain length to fit into crossword puzzles. Dictionary-style reference books are available to explain abbreviations and acronyms for any reader who is having difficulty in understanding content when the text is filled with unfamiliar abbreviations and acronyms.

The thesaurus remains one of the more important tools for writers looking for synonyms and
antonyms. A thesaurus is useful to students who are writing papers, public relations personnel or real estate agents who are writing ads, potential and published authors who are writing stories and books—nearly any kind of writing. To locate a word that means the same as another word (synonym) or the opposite of another word (antonym), the format of the thesaurus provides some options. Some are arranged in alphabetical order so that users need only to look up the word where it would be in its alphabetical listing. Others are arranged so that users must use the index for the location of the word by its assigned number. Turning to that page, users will find related words by topic. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus is in dictionary form. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus is also available on CD-ROM. Scott Foresman offers Roget's Children's Thesaurus for the younger age group. Descriptionary, published by Facts on File, is similar to a thesaurus and useful when a user cannot think of exactly what word he or she needs because it also lists associated words together by topic.

Travelers to other countries often carry small dictionaries and phrase books to help them communicate in those countries rather than relying on the very brief lists of phrases found in travel guides. Cassells is a major name in foreign-language dictionaries. Cassells also publishes English idioms, slang, and usage, but it is most noted for its foreign-language dictionaries, with French, Dutch, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish as well as Latin in print at this time. As trade within the Pacific Rim opens even more, it will be of interest to see how many Chinese-English dictionaries are published.

B. Encyclopedias
The second most likely reference book to be named as such is the general encyclopedia. In the early existence of encyclopedias, it is possible that one person could have authored the entire volume, understanding all of the topics well. As the explosion of information has continued over time, encyclopedias are more likely to have single articles written by experts in the various fields. Encyclopedias are probably the most often used type of reference book in any library, and they are available for all ages and on many specialized subjects. The encyclopedia most often follows alphabetical order, from A to Z. They contain brief articles as well as many illustrations and pictures to accompany the text. An encyclopedia is probably the best place to start to research any topic.

Perhaps the best-known encyclopedia has been the Britannica. Originating in Great Britain (hence its name), it came to the United States early in the 20th century, and its latest print set has a copyright of 2002. In 1985, this publication was transformed into a 12-volume Micropaedia, with its alphabetical format, and a 17-volume Macropaedia, with much longer articles. A 2-volume index, the Propaedia, guided users to related items in both works. In an interesting approach, this reference was offered free of charge online. The major rival to the adult market encyclopedia Britannica is the Americana.

In addition to the many other competitors in the area of encyclopedias for adults currently on the market, there are numerous encyclopedias for children. The leader in this category is World Book Encyclopedia, a set found in elementary through high school classrooms, school and public libraries, and sometimes homes (it is also available on CD-ROM and online: www2.worldbook.com). World Book publishers suggest that this is suitable for young children as well as upper elementary school children, but in reality, it is for older elementary and middle school children. Recognizing this, the publishers have recently introduced a set for younger children.

Although the cost of purchasing a print encyclopedia is usually quite high and not necessarily affordable for most families, CD-ROM and DVD encyclopedias (e.g., Microsoft’s Encarta) and online access have made it possible to have this information available at home. This transfer to a more rapid and
economical approach to encyclopedia information has made it easier for people using the information to plagiarize, and so care must be taken to be certain that reports are written to give credit to the authors of the downloaded information.

It is possible to find one-volume works that are much less expensive than the multivolume sets. The *Columbia Encyclopedia*, in its sixth edition in 2000 with more than 3000 pages, could be considered a "desk encyclopedia, but the desktop needs to be fairly large to hold it. The short descriptions in entries provide a good start on any topics included and compare favorably with the coverage in the multivolume sets. The smaller *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia*, published by Merriam Webster in 2000, is physically manageable and fits easily on a bookshelf.

When the interest in multivolume all-purpose encyclopedias seemed to decline, many publishers saw a market for specialized subject encyclopedias that would appeal to specific audiences. Furthermore, this permitted closer, more detailed articles on subjects that would not be found in a general encyclopedia. Researchers should be able to find better information through searches in specialized sets when they are available. For adults, the subjects are as varied as science and technology, economics, business, history, literature, music, theater, and religion. For school libraries, there are sets in the areas of endangered animals and the environment, and science sets are being published as well, so users have many choices.

C. Ready References

Reference books that are used for very short answers are called ready references. Most of the references in what follows will have no more than a single line to answer a question.

1. Almanacs, Handbooks, Yearbooks, Directories, and Manuals

Ready reference resources, including almanacs, handbooks, yearbooks, directories, and manuals, are particularly useful when users request quick answers from a single reference source. One of the most popular of these, *The Guinness Book of World Records*, is on the list of the top 10 best-selling books of all time. Its reliability is unquestionable, and it features winners of the tallest, longest, fastest, highest, and the most in every category imaginable. A premier use of Guinness is to solve arguments. The sports statistics are of particular interest to sports buffs because they cover final scores and records set by runners and swimmers. Scholastic has published a book of world records for children, *Scholastic Book of World Records*, but most youth from middle school and up will want the adult version.

Almanacs offer a variety of statistics and useful data about people, countries, events, specific timely subjects, and other topics such as zip codes and maps. They are published annually so that this source of general information should be up-to-date. Each almanac will have something unique within its covers, but if users are looking for the most popular one, then *The New World Almanac and Book of Facts* would win. The general almanac has wide appeal because of its ease of reading. Most are available in paperback, making the cost of owning one minimal.

Another general reference tool, the yearbook, covers the happenings within a specified time period. Most are published on a regular basis. Purchasers may receive a yearbook to update the encyclopedia set purchased the previous year or years. Encyclopedia yearbooks are often helpful as a reminder of what events occurred in a given year as well as to update information that is out-of-date in the original set. Other yearbooks are published independently from any other publication. The Gale Group's

[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/general_reference](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/general_reference)
Worldmark Yearbook has information about every country in the world, including dependencies and protectorates. Its rival, Europa World Yearbook, also covers the world, with little overlap with the information in Worldmark.

Some yearbooks relate to specific subjects such as the political information found in Statesman's Yearbook. Arranged in alphabetical order, this reference provides current background information on nations around the world. Because it is up-to-date, users will find the current names of countries and accurate comparative data. Users will find the names of heads of government, populations, religions, education, government information, and weights and measures. Maps are available to show natural resources found in the countries and their time zones. This is also a source for information about international organizations, including the United Nations.

Handbooks and manuals are related to specific fields of knowledge and are very limited in scope. The emphasis is on knowledge rather than the most up-to-date advances in the field, and the value of handbooks and manuals is in the depth of information in those particular fields. If a handbook is specialized, then users should be experts in the field because the information given may be in a format that will be difficult to understand if users are not familiar with the tables, symbols, and/or formulas found in the field.

One very popular example of this type of reference is Famous First Facts, a reference explaining, for example, where the first ice cream cone was sold. Another, Anniversaries and Holidays, gives users a calendar with, as the title indicates, anniversaries and holidays along with their dates.

For someone who is trying to follow the American culture, a book of etiquette, such as Emily Post's Etiquette, will help to determine how to greet strangers or introduce colleagues, which fork to use at an important dinner, and how to send a thank you note to the host and hostess after a formal occasion.

Another popular type of reference in this category includes the Magill series of Masterplots. Loved by students and questioned by teachers, these provide the masterplots for great literature. Although some students might be able to parlay information provided here into critical analyses rather than reading the original, most good teachers would detect the culprits. Masterplots are certainly useful in refreshing the memories of books that have been read to see whether they are interesting enough to reread.

If a person is trying to find out the prospective chances for future employment in one of 700 jobs, then the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook may be helpful. This listing of occupations provides information about potential employment opportunities, potential for advancement, locations, earnings, and working conditions. Users should remember that this information and its predictions are just that—predictions—and cannot be relied on for certainty in making decisions about the future. The brief descriptions may be helpful as an outline for writing longer job descriptions for those occupations.

Popular ready reference tools in health care include Physicians' Desk Reference to Pharmaceutical Specialties and Biologicals and Random House's The American Medical Association Encyclopedia of Medicine. When using books that contain health information, users should verify any analysis of symptoms or conditions with someone in the medical profession before taking any action that could be detrimental to their health or anyone else's health. Although the information is accurate, it will not substitute for essential clinical interpretations given by health professionals.
Also to be used as possible starting points are law references such as the Gale Group's *The Encyclopedia of Legal Information Sources* and *The Reader's Digest Legal Question & Answer Book*. These references should help to phrase the questions to pose to lawyers rather than act as the basis for any independent legal actions. Laws vary from state to state, and what is under federal jurisdiction is an entirely different set of rules and regulations. Reference books on this subject offer an introduction that defines the legal ramifications. It takes a knowledgeable person to make any legal interpretations and explain other options.

### 2. Using Single Words to Find Longer References

Other specialized references include references that allow users to find full quotations on particular topics. Little, Brown's *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, Stevenson's *Home Book of Quotations*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* have been the classics in this category. They are most useful when preparing presentations or papers. To locate the author of a quotation, a user needs to have the approximate wording. However, if the goal is to find an appropriate quote, and it is not a search to find something remembered from the past, then the user might use Stevenson's reference, which arranges quotes by subject area. Users may also find a book of quotes on a particular subject. *Dictionary of Quotations about Communications*, published by McFarland, has 314 topics, with eight or more quotations for each topic. Specialized quotation books by diversity include *African American Quotations*, published by Checkmark Books. The 5000 quotations are mostly by 500 men and women of color in the United States from the 18th century to the present.

If a user is seeking a sentence or phrase from the Bible or a particular author, then a concordance—an alphabetical index to the important words found in any book—is the most useful reference. The original works were to the Bible, but during recent years, publishers have provided concordances to the total works of a single major writer such as Shakespeare. Computers make it much easier to store and analyze text than did the creation process of earlier times. With a concordance, a searcher may find an entire quote even if only one or two words are remembered.

Poetry indexes help users to find poems by the names of the poets or by the first lines of poems or even poetry on a specific subject. *The Columbia Grangers Index to Poetry* locates poems for adults, and *Index to Poetry for Children*, as its name indicates, locates children's poetry. John and Sara Brewton published this index for many years with the help of G. Meredith Blackburn, who now is responsible. These references list the poetry books that have been indexed, and if the library does not own a copy of a book, then users will need to borrow it from another location. Other types of literature indexes exist, including *Index to Plays* and *Index to Fairy Tales*. The secret to their usefulness as an instant reference is that the library or individual owns copies of all the works indexed.

### 3. Finding Organizations

A popular tool for people who wish to find organizations that give money for future projects is the Foundation Center's *The Foundation Directory*. Some academic and public libraries are repositories for information from the Foundation Center; others purchase copies. Arranged in order by states, this directory lists more than 5000 foundations whose annual giving is more than $1 million and who awarded at least $100,000 during the previous year. This is the place to research name, purpose (sometimes as specialized as newsboys or orphans of a disaster), any subject specialty (e.g., health-related issues), cities, donors, and names of the administrators and board members (very helpful if someone might be a member of the same club or attend the same church). This directory also states

[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/general_reference](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/general_reference)
the types and amounts of the grants they offer. The index is arranged in order by states.

For users who seek information about an association, *The Encyclopedia of Associations* lists information from some 25,000 organizations with the groups' names, addresses, executive officers, phone numbers, purposes, activities, and membership numbers. Another section arranges the organizations by geographical location. To locate international organizations, users must obtain the *International Organizations* volume.

Directories to higher education institutions are useful to high school and graduate students researching which U.S. colleges to attend after high school and to those students looking for advanced degrees. *American Colleges and Universities* is fairly recent with a 2001 copyright date, while the 15th edition of *The Comparative Guide to American Colleges* has a 1991 copyright date. *Lovejoy's College Guide*, published in 1997, is a third guide that offers detailed information about higher education. The first has the most detailed information—the number of faculty, the number of students, and the educational programs offered. *The Comparative Guide* is just that—comparisons among admission requirements, social life, the percentage of men and women attending, and how many students continue into graduate work. *Lovejoy's* offers requirements for admission, which programs are offered, and other basic information.

**E. Geography Reference Books**

Geographical information is found in atlases, maps, and gazetteers. These references seem more difficult to use because the study of geography during the late 20th century in the United States was given less attention in basic and higher education programs. With the rapid name changes for countries undergoing revolution and any subsequent border changes, keeping geographical information current becomes a constant challenge. The most familiar work in this category is the atlas, often an oversize book collecting maps into a single volume. The type of map depends on which boundaries are being shown. Political maps provide national boundaries and cities within those countries. Atlases with road maps help users to travel by automobile between cities and towns. If users wants to know about the physical characteristics of the land, then other atlases will show mountains, rivers, and plains.

Historical or thematic atlases will provide settings based on what was happening within a given time period. These record the changes in boundaries between countries because of the outcomes of wars among nations.

The Sanford maps, perhaps a less well-known resource, were produced in the United States for more than a century from 1867 to 1970. The more than 660,000 large-scale maps (a scale of 50 feet to 1 inch) trace the growth and development of more than 12,000 towns and cities within the United States, providing a historical view of plots of land with an outline of the buildings on these plots. Originally drawn for fire insurance companies to help them assess risks associated with insuring properties, these are wonderful records of what cities and towns looked like over time. Users can see where additions were made to homes and whether the drug store on a certain corner is still on that corner today. Many libraries have purchased these maps in microform for their areas. Digital access is available through subscription from ProQuest.

Atlases also provide maps of parts of the globe that most users would not expect to find such as Firefly Books' *World Atlas of the Oceans: With the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans*. Important discoveries of modern marine explorations and oceanography, with data on the topographic
features of the world's oceans, are illustrated in this book. The depths of ocean trenches and underwater mountain ranges are described along with ocean charts and the topography of the ocean bed.

Gazetteers, a form of geographical dictionary, help users to locate place names of cities and towns, mountains, lakes, and rivers as well as important physical features. Some gazetteers provide information about country populations.

One of the most popular resources in this category is the guidebook. These are available for most countries. If a country is very small and less likely to be a tourist attraction, then the country will be found with several others in a regional guidebook. Along with beautiful photographs of important sights within the country, users will find information about the exchange rate for currency, hotel rooms in a variety of price ranges, good restaurants, where to shop, and how to travel from place to place. To trust the information found, users must check to make sure that they have a very recent copyright date, with an indication in the preface of when the contents have been updated. Within the United States, the American Automobile Association provides its members with tour books of states and regions along with road maps. These are not so colorful as other guidebooks, but they are much less expensive. If users are members, then they are free.

City directories and telephone directories are included in this category because they are geographically specific. If a user wants to find out who lives in a particular house on a particular street, then the city directory will give their names unless it is a large apartment complex. Often, if a user knows the telephone number, then he or she can locate the street address using that information. City directories also provide listings of businesses and professionals in the area.

Telephone directories are useful when the subscribers allow their numbers to be published or, in the case of the business pages, the businesses pay for the advertisements. Many telephone directories are now available on CD-ROM, but the cost of the product is high enough that most users instead will want to go to their public libraries for access. An online telecommunication service will also provide much of this information.

F. Biographical Information

Researchers who wish to get biographical information about people who have no published individual biographies may need to refer to a biographical index. One of these, Biography and Genealogy Master Index, is a multivolume set that is updated through cumulative volumes and annual supplements. This reference is currently available for a fee online (www.library.dialog.com/bluesheets/html/bio287.html). Biography Index, an H. W. Wilson publication, helps to locate citations to biographies that are in the books and periodicals indexed. Included are people living and dead. Each person is listed with birth and death dates, nationality, profession, and a bibliographic citation leading users to the article. The index lists people by their occupations. Obituaries are also indexed.

Brief biographical references, once located, are useful as ready references to find out the correct spellings of names. They may also provide addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, birth and death dates, and pictures of the individuals. These are very helpful for parents when their children have been given an assignment to write about an individual. Often, little time remains to locate or read an entire book, or no article is available in an encyclopedia or current periodical. An overwhelming number
of new ready references in this area are published every year.

*Webster’s New Biographical Dictionary*, published by G & C Merriam, is an easy-to-handle book of some 40,000 names of people, their birth and death dates, and pronunciations of their names. Most of those included are dead. American and British citizens are given the most coverage, but major international and historical figures are also included. The brief statements about each entry are not enough to allow a student to write a paper, but they do give an excellent introduction. Another biographical dictionary, *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia* published by Cambridge University Press, includes the living as well as those who have recently died.

In the category of biographical dictionaries, one may use the *Who’s Who* publications found in many countries. The first *Who’s Who* was published in Great Britain in 1849, and this retains the two-word title, while others that followed must acknowledge the location of the names found within the volume. Most of the people listed in *Who’s Who* are prominent in Great Britain, but the book does contain listings of people from a few from other countries. The less than 30,000 entries make it a smaller volume that the Marquis series.

The Marquis *Who’s Who* series lists living persons for the year. In addition to birth dates, places, and current professional positions, these brief entries provide names of parents, spouses, and children; degrees; major accomplishments; major publications; and honors. *Who’s Who in America* lists more than 80,000 persons prominent mostly in the United States. Other volumes in this series divide entries by profession or by area of the country. Many other countries publish their own *Who’s Who* series that can be used if researchers are looking for information about important people in those countries.

Europa Publications has published *The International Who’s Who* in London since 1935. It lists the royal families as well as 15,000 persons who are very prominent in art, business, diplomacy, education, entertainment, government, international affairs, law, literature, medicine, music, and science. In 1970, Marquis began publishing a similar work biannually, *Who’s Who in the World*, with little overlap with the Europa volume.

A standing joke is that, while one seeks to be in *Who’s Who* or *Who’s Who in America*, one does not wish to be an entry in *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, the *Dictionary of American Biography (DAB)*, or *American National Biography (ANB)*. Persons in these volumes are deceased. The *DNB* includes British names as well as a few outside of Great Britain who had an influence in that country. The *DAB* and its predecessor, the *DNB*, cover people in the United States. The *DNB* is now available from Scribner on CD-ROM, while the *ANB*, published by Oxford University Press, includes not only Americans but also people “whose significant actions occurred during [their] residence within what is now the United States or whose [lives] or career[s] directly influenced the course of American history.” This reference also expands to include more women and people of color than did the *DAB*.

Longer biographies may be found in works such as *Current Biography*, another H. W. Wilson publication appearing monthly with a cumulative index to preceding issues in each issue. Individual issues are cumulated into an annual yearbook volume with a subject index by profession as well as the cumulative index. Entries provide much more information about better-known personalities. Most articles have photographs of the people, and source references are given for the information provided.

Specialized biographies are published to honor diversity, including race and gender as well as professions. *International Encyclopedia of Women Scientists*, published by Facts on File, brings
together information about women both deceased and currently living from many countries and many scientific disciplines. Each of the 500-word entries includes the background, education, and field of study as well as a discussion of the woman's contributions to science.

Contemporary Authors and Something about the Author both are Gale Group publications, while World Authors is from H. W. Wilson. Although the better known authors may be found in encyclopedias or Current Biography, these have many more authors included. World Authors also includes biographical information and has bibliographies of works by and about the authors; however, it is not as up-to-date as the other two. Contemporary Authors, with its many volumes, is a very comprehensive biographical source. Something about the Author includes children's book authors and is intended for the school market.

A very important use of biographical information is the tracing of a family's genealogy. The greatest resource in the world is located in the Mormon Church's archive in Salt Lake City, Utah. This resource has been available through online access (www.familysearch.org) for several years. Earlier, searching family lines had been relegated to experts. However, the use of online resources has made it practical for everyone to search for their ancestors. The previously mentioned Biography and Genealogy Master Index is a good beginning point.

G. Government Information

Government documents are of great value to a researcher if they can be found. Printed at government expense, they are the public record of a government's information policy, laws, edicts, rules, and regulations. They offer a record of the governing authority's meetings and votes by participants. They also may include "how to" books, national recipes, and tourist information. Because they are up-to-date, they are a valuable resource. However, government publications are difficult to locate, especially those from countries other than the United States.

In the United States, the Government Printing Office established depository libraries in academic and public libraries to house government documents and make them available to the citizens. The volume of documents published increases the difficulty. Furthermore, the movement to privatize government publications has increased the problems involved in maintaining access to this type of information. Adding to the problem of securing and maintaining the federal government's output is the need to preserve the records of state and even local governments.

For locating and purchasing government documents from another country, users almost need to be present when the publications come from the printers. To have access to some documents, the use of computers to store records is helpful. Once these resources are located and purchased, inadequate indexes make it difficult to have them readily available to users unless they create their own databases.

H. Bibliographical Information

Researchers often need to find specific books or articles by specific authors, titles, or subjects, and they are not certain where they may be found. Librarians may help them to use the array of bibliographic tools. For those more adventuresome researchers who wish to do the searching themselves, descriptions of some of the major locators follow.

In the past, books were the major resources, and bibliographies attempted to provide access to as many books as possible. An example of an attempt to provide all of the items published in one country is the National Union Catalog published by the Library of Congress in the United States. This resource
lists books, periodicals, films, recordings, and other items by author with an indication of where each item is located in 1500 other libraries so that it can be borrowed through interlibrary loan. Other countries also publish similar lists. Once the bibliographic information has been located, it is possible to search for the location of the item through the Internet.

Another source for locating an item is through the use of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) or another large information network. During recent years, many state agencies in the United States have developed their own union catalogs of materials. The Access Pennsylvania database provides locations of some 17 million items held in all types of libraries in the state.

When a researcher is visiting a U.S. bookstore and seeking to find a certain book, the sales clerk may look in R. R. Bowker's *Books in Print* or *Children's Books in Print* if the researcher knows the author or title of the book. If the researcher needs a book on a certain subject, then the clerk may go to *Subject Guide to Books in Print*. These resources are available online as well as in print, and they provide buying information (e.g., author, title, price, ISBN number) for the books listed. Their being listed here indicates that they are “in print” and should be available for purchase.

An excellent source for finding information about newspapers is *Ulrich's International Periodical Directory*, available both in print and online from R. R. Bowker, or *The Serials Directory*, published by EBSCO. *Ulrich's* is international, and in its three volumes, it has more than 120,000 titles arranged under 600 broad subject headings from 62,000 publishers in 197 countries. Information provided for each title includes the address of the publisher, editor, date when first published, frequency of publication, and price. For a few of the titles, an indication is given about the content of the periodicals. Similar to *Ulrich's*, *The Serials Directory* further lists 5000 newspapers.

Once a researcher has located a periodical or newspaper, finding the content requires the use of an index. In the past, tools such as *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* were taught in late elementary school. However, the capability of computers to index information and to keep those indexes up-to-date has made access to information available at great speed and, if databases are indexed well, readily and completely available. *Reader's Guide* and its companions are indeed available as electronic resources from H. W. Wilson. These databases and others become more important when they are maintained accurately and with care.

**III. REFERENCES TO AID IN COMMUNICATION**

Communication between individuals is difficult, whether written or oral. When information is to be published, editors responsible for the publications usually specify a manuscript style manual to follow. Those most often suggested in the United States are the University of Chicago's *Manual of Style* and the American Psychological Association's *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Following such a style manual ensures that the writer provides the necessary information for other researchers to find the resources used.

For readers to understand the text, writers also adhere to the rules and regulations for punctuation and grammar that are found in style manuals. Some suggestions include the *American Heritage Book of English Usage*, *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English*, Clarendon Press's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, and Strunk & White’s *Elements of Style*. If one is on the other side of the process, then Art Plotnik’s book, *The Elements of Editing: A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists* published by Macmillan, would be helpful.

[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/general_reference](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/general_reference)
IV. THE FUTURE

Books, once completed and published, become dated. Although this is not important for books of fiction or as important for some nonfiction books, reference information must be updated as often as new information is available. The ease of update of information through electronic storage is incomparable. It is also much faster to do searches using electronic means. The cost of printing and the environmental objection to the use of paper make electronic publication appealing.

The downside of electronic storage is the unknown length of time that information may be stored. The rapidly changing hardware, with its need for updated software, may make any storage device unreadable. Furthermore, many users wish to print the information they locate, adding the cost of paper and ink. The uncertainty of the Internet is also a concern. What if the free status of the Internet ends and charges accrue for the use? Even with these potential problems for electronic access to reference sources, it is likely that speed for keeping these up-to-date will prevail.

See Also the Following Articles BOOKS • BOOKS, FUTURE ROLE OF • INFORMATION SOCIETY • INTERNET • JOURNALS, SCHOLARLY • LIBRARIES, PUBLIC • LITERACY, CURRENT STATUS OF • LITERACY, HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF • POETRY, DRAMA, AND FICTION

Bibliography


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