Week Four

The Print Reference Collection

What will you find in the Reference Collection?

- Each library has a Reference Collection with specific types of resources for finding facts or basic information on a variety of topics. When you have a research assignment the library’s Reference Collection usually is the best place to start.

- Reference books and databases provide useful information and can lead you to additional sources of information for your research. Reference resources can provide:
  - A historical summary or an overview of a given topic
  - Facts and statistical data
  - Access to additional relevant resources on the selected topic

- Reference resources, both in print and online are generally an excellent starting point to conduct academic research because they are written by trusted authors and publishers.

Some General Characteristics of Reference Resources

Most Reference resources have distinctive characteristics that separate themselves from the books found in the circulating collection.

- Almanacs, encyclopedias, and dictionaries are well organized and indexed to help the reader easily access the information they are looking for.
- Bibliographies, indexes and abstracts, point you to the actual sources of information. (known as indirect sources)
- Reference books are designed to quickly look things up rather than to be read cover to cover. Usually there will be just a section written on each topic.
- Reference books cannot be checked out the library or circulated.

1) TWO CATEGORIES OF REFERENCE SOURCES

Reference materials fall into two broad categories:

- General reference sources provide information on all topics.

- Subject reference sources focus only a specialized subject. Each subject discipline has its own dictionaries and encyclopedias.
2) BASIC TYPES OF REFERENCE SOURCES

- **Encyclopedias**: If you need background information or an overview of your topic, an encyclopedia is a good place to start. Subject encyclopedia articles provide more detail and may be written by experts in the field.
  - Examples of general *encyclopedia* are:
    - *Encyclopedia Britannica*
    - *Encyclopedia Americana*
    - *World Book Encyclopedia*
  - Examples of subject *encyclopedia* are:
    - *Encyclopedia of Science & Technology*
    - *Encyclopedia of Archeology*
    - *Encyclopedia of Musicians*

- **Dictionaries**: Most language dictionaries are general dictionaries.

- **Subject Dictionaries**: Offer definitions of the terms and concepts used in a specific discipline.
  - If you are unfamiliar with the terminology associated with your research topic, find a subject specific dictionary on your topic. For example, consult a dictionary of sociology for finding meanings of sociology terms and then you will find specialized meaning(s) of the term used within the context of sociology.

3) WHERE TO BEGIN…

- Librarians evaluate items before they are added to the library’s collection.
- Each researcher must examine the available resources and evaluate the contents for their particular research needs.
- Your “information needs” must be identified and then matched with the appropriate information source as part of the search strategy.
- Ask for help from your instructor and a librarian!

Factors to consider in determining the type of resources to use:

- **Focus or Scope of Coverage**:
  - Do you need a broad overview, a brief summary, or a focused description of the desired information?
- **Determine the subject area or perspectives**:
  - Humanities, social science, science, technical, pictorial, statistical, etc.
- **Viewpoints**:
  - Do you need to write about the pros or cons of an issue, i.e., supporting or opposing point of view?
- **Time Factor:**
  - Do you need find out about a historical time period, the current situation or a combination for comparison?
    - **Timeline of publication:**
      - Daily - most current (newspapers, news websites).
      - Weekly - can add perspective (news magazines).
      - Monthly — more perspective (monthly magazines).
      - Quarterly — more time for analysis (scholarly journals).
      - Annually - only once per year.
- **Treatment:**
  - Do you need to find popular materials or scholarly research? Popular materials are written for general readership, often by journalists or staff writers. These publications contain illustrations, anecdotal accounts, news, current events and issues.
- **Scholarly publications:**
  - Are written for and by scholars and experts. These contain results of research Endings and studies and usually lengthy with cited sources. Many academic research assignments require scholarly sources.
- **Popular publications:**
  - Intended for widespread readership; often written by journalists or staff writers; (contains illustrations, advertisements, anecdotal accounts; deals with current events and issues.
- **Trade publications:**
  - Written for and by professionals in an industry (e.g. advertising, automotive, media).

**4) WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION DO YOU NEED?**

Determine the appropriate type of Reference Sources:
- Do you need entire books on your topic? Shorter summaries or overviews found in Encyclopedias?
- Do you need other types of reference materials such as statistics? Your assignment may specify you need to use sources other than encyclopedias, but beginning your research with a subject or general encyclopedia can help you get started.

- General or Background Information:
  - Encyclopedias, subject encyclopedias

- Specific Facts:
  - Encyclopedias, handbooks, statistical abstract

- Geographical Facts:
  - Atlas, gazetteers

- Biographical Facts:
  - Biographical dictionaries, biographical encyclopedias
• Statistical Charts/Information:
  o Statistical abstracts

• Primary Sources:
  o Original source of information such as eyewitness accounts (examples: diaries, interviews, experiments, raw statistics, etc.)

• Secondary Sources:
  o Secondhand—reports after the fact or removed from the event; a commentary based on first-hand accounts or/and encyclopedia article.

5) EVALUATING REFERENCE SOURCES

• Consider:
  o Accuracy of information
  o Authoritativeness
  o Completeness
  o Currency / Timeliness
  o Objectivity / Bias/ Balanced Opinion
  o Publisher
  o Documentation: bibliography or notes
  o Illustrations (pictures, maps, chairs, tables)
  o Ease of use

6) DIRECT VS. INDIRECT SOURCES

While some reference sources offer information or facts directly like a dictionary, others only include references to guide you to the information. (See the chart below)

• **Direct Sources** (contain the information)

• **Indirect Sources** (point to information sources)
## 7) The Reference Sources Within a Library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Direct or Indirect</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>A list or index of citations and summaries of other items. Abstracts can help you identify specific resources. May include statistics.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td><em>Statistical Abstract of the US</em></td>
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<td>Periodical databases include article abstracts.</td>
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<td>Almanac</td>
<td>A &quot;handy guide&quot; to facts. Usually in one volume. Includes statistics and compilation of facts. Almanacs can be <em>general</em> or <em>subject</em> specific.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td><em>General World Almanacs</em></td>
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<td><em>Specific Political Almanacs</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Atlas</td>
<td>Collection of maps and other geographical or demographic information. Includes countries, national borders, mountain ranges, etc.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td><em>Atlas of American History</em></td>
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<td><em>Atlas of the World</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>A list or collection of sources of information on a specific subject or author. Bibliographies have been mostly replaced by online databases that offer a list of resources along with the “full text”.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td><em>Galenet Discovering Collections</em></td>
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<td><em>A Bibliography of Jazz</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Biographical Recourses</td>
<td>Information about the lives of people. Biographical dictionaries have short entries with basic facts; Biographical encyclopedias are more detailed and lengthy; Biographies are full-length books.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td><em>Biographical Dictionary of Music</em></td>
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<td><em>Who’s Who is Business</em></td>
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<td><em>Charlie Chaplin</em></td>
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<td>Concordance</td>
<td>An alphabetical listing of keywords or phrases found in a major work or all works of a major author. Detailed interpretations of religious tracts.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td><em>Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible</em></td>
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<td><em>Shakespeare Concordance</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dictionary</td>
<td>Lists definitions of words and phrases, or online: spelling, usage, and pronunciation guide. Can be general or subject specific.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td><em>Webster’s Dictionary</em></td>
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<td><em>Dictionary of Poetry</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Directory</td>
<td>Lists names and contact information for individuals, companies, organizations or institutions.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td><em>Telephone Directories</em></td>
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<td><em>Directory of Community Colleges</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Encyclopedia</td>
<td>A comprehensive collection of information. Encyclopedias provide a broad overview of facts. They can be general subject specific. Encyclopedias generally give more detail than dictionaries.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td><em>General:</em></td>
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<td><em>Encyclopedia Britannica</em></td>
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<td><em>Subject:</em></td>
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<td><em>Encyclopedia of Gangs</em></td>
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<td>Type of Source</td>
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<td>Gazetteer</td>
<td>A dictionary of geographical places; provides information to locate a place or geographic feature; no maps.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Columbia Gazetteer of North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidebook</td>
<td>Intended for travelers; provides detailed descriptions of places with facts and maps. Major sites to visit and background of a culture</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Fodor's London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook</td>
<td>A brief survey or overview of a subject that may include formulas, charts, statistics, background information.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Occupational Outlook Handbook <a href="http://www.bls.gov/oco/">www.bls.gov/oco/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td>How-to-Do-It or How It Works guides. Usually with detailed instructions and diagrams on how to repair or create something. How-to guides on the workings of an organization or institution.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Chilton's Automotive Repair Manuals</td>
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<td>United States Government Manual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>An index points to information and tells where it can be found. The index in a book lists its contents alphabetically and gives page numbers. A reference index use citations to periodical articles, books or other information resources by subject.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Readers Guide to Periodical Literature</td>
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<td>Databases like ProQuest and SIRS</td>
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<td>LA Times Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yearbooks and Chronologies</td>
<td>Yearbooks summarize the year's events; they can be general or specific to a discipline. Chronologies list and summarize the main events for a specific time period.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Britannica Yearbook</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>American Decades (multi-volume set)</td>
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