

Research



Research



Types of Information Sources

Library 318 – Library Research and Information Literacy



Types of Information Sources

Information sources are all around us and can come in different formats.

The sources you choose for your research will depend on your information need.

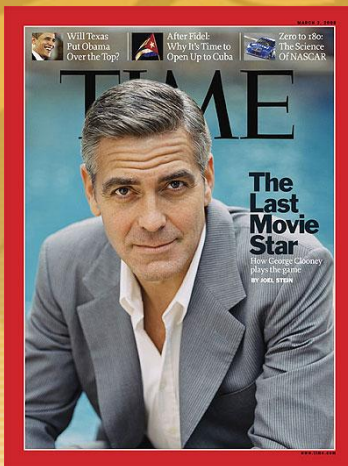
This presentation lists types of information sources and their purpose for research.

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Periodicals

Information sources include *Periodicals*, which are items published at regular intervals like weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Periodicals include magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, and newspapers.



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Magazines

Magazines:

- provide general information on topics of popular interest
- are written for the general public
- publish shorter articles
- are written by staff writers
- contain no references or bibliographies
- contain a lot of pictures and advertising



Periodicals include magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, and newspapers.



Scholarly Journals

Scholarly Journals:

- analyze and report on original research
- are written by experts/scholars in the field
- publish longer articles using scholarly language
- have articles reviewed by peers before they are published
- include references used to write articles
- often include charts, graphs, or tables



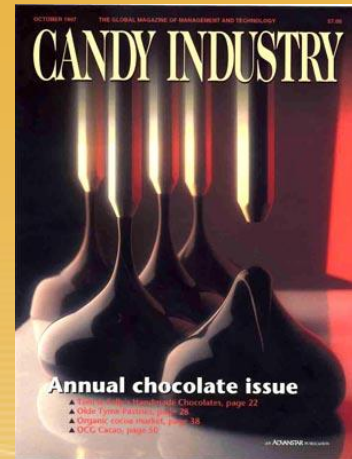
Periodicals include magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, and newspapers.



Trade Journals

Trade Journals:

- report on trends and issues in a given industry
- are written by experts in the industry
- publish articles that address standards from the field
- often include charts, graphs, tables, or illustrations
- contain advertising that relates to the given industry



Periodicals include magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, and newspapers.



Newspapers

Newspapers:

- provide current news/information about international, national, and local events
- are written by journalists and freelance writers
- are written for the general public
- publish short articles
- contain no references or bibliographies



Periodicals include magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, and newspapers.

Now let's move on to Books...



Books

Books are written on many different topics and can be considered fiction or non-fiction (aka Fact).

Libraries divide books into reference sources and those found in the general collection.

Books can come in print and electronic (called ebook) format.

In order to find information for your research, it is important to learn some common types of reference and general collection books.

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Reference Books

Reference books:

- are kept in a special area of a library and are not checked out (do not leave the library)
- are good starting points for any research project or problem
- contain facts, statistics, and/or biographical information
- are generally referred to -- not read beginning to end
- are used to locate brief bits of information

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

Now let's take a look at each type of reference source.

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Encyclopedias

Encyclopedias are great places to start when you are unfamiliar with a topic because reading an encyclopedia article is a good way to get a grasp of the range and depth of the topic you are investigating.

Use an encyclopedia when looking for background information on a topic and when trying to find key ideas, important dates, or concepts.

Articles are usually written by subject experts for beginners. Information is reliable, but you don't need to be an expert to understand it.

Articles often include a bibliography—a list of books and articles used to write the article. Bibliographies are useful for identifying additional sources of information on the topic.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Encyclopedias

Two types of encyclopedias (general and subject):

General Encyclopedias provide broad coverage of many topics, contain shorter articles, and can include definitions, descriptions, history, and statistics (ex. *World Book* or *Britannica*).

Reading an article in a general encyclopedia can be an excellent way to begin your research, but don't stop there. Articles in general encyclopedias lack the depth necessary to complete a college level research assignment. Consult other resources, including a subject encyclopedia, for specific and more in-depth information.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.



Encyclopedias

Subject Encyclopedias provide specific information on one subject or field and contain longer articles with references

Similar to general encyclopedias, subject encyclopedias are written by subject specialists for non-experts.

Examples: *Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health*
Violence of Interpersonal Violence
Social Issues in American: An Encyclopedia

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.



Encyclopedias

Not all encyclopedias will have the word “encyclopedia” in the title. Some books use the term “dictionary” in the title even though it is really an encyclopedia.

If you are uncertain if the book is a dictionary or an encyclopedia, remember that dictionaries typically contain short entries of a few sentences, and encyclopedias contain articles of a few pages.

In your research, it is better to use a combination of encyclopedias in order to get a full range of information about your topic.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Dictionaries

Dictionaries are used to define words, to verify spelling, to divide words into syllables, for word pronunciation, to check on usage, or to determine the history of a word. Dictionaries consist of general language or specialized format. Since many types of dictionaries exist, choose the one specific for your information need.

Two types of general language dictionaries:

- 1. Unabridged dictionaries** attempt to include all the words in the language available at the time of publishing. The resulting book can get very large, heavy, and cumbersome to handle.
- 2. Abridged dictionaries** are much smaller and contain only a select amount of the words found in the larger unabridged version.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Specialized Dictionaries

Specialized Dictionaries may include:

- **Slang dictionary** – defines words used in ordinary speech. Words may include jargon or obscenities.

Example: *McGraw-Hill's Essential American Slang Dictionary*
[electronic resource]

- **Thesaurus** – contains synonyms (similar) and antonyms (opposite) of specific words. A thesaurus is used when a writer wants to find an alternate term and/or a word that means the opposite of a specific word.

Example: *Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Specialized Dictionaries

Specialized Dictionaries may include:

- **Dual-language dictionary** – has two parts: 1) words in one language with definitions in a second language; and 2) words in the second language with definitions in the first language.

Example: *Larousse diccionario = dictionary : English-Spanish, español-inglés*

- **Subject specific dictionary** – contains words and meanings based on a particular field, such as a medical or scientific dictionary.

Example: *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Biographical Sources

Biographical Sources provide information on the lives of individuals. Focus may be on a single individual or on a group of people such as African Americans or men and women scientists. Biographical research sources at minimum include factual information such as the place and date of the individual's birth and death (if no longer living) and the individual's accomplishments.

Some biographical sources at the ARC Library include:

- ***Current Biography Yearbook*** – Provides biographical essays on mostly American individuals currently making history and headlines.
- ***Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*** – captures the experiences of women throughout world history.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Geographical Sources

Geographical Sources provide information about a location.

Some geographical sources may include:

- **Maps** – Available in paper or electronic formats
- **Atlases** – Bound collections of maps that are divided into three groups: current, historical, and thematic
- **Gazetteers** – A geographical dictionary or directory. A gazetteer is used in combination with a map or atlas and lists geographical names, locations, and/or physical features.
- **Travel Guides** – Helpful in planning trips. A travel guide will give information about a place such as where to find hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, and so on.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Directories

Directories list people, associations, organizations, and companies. They provide information such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, websites, and other unique data. Directories come in print and electronic format. A common directory is the telephone book.

Most directories are arranged alphabetically. In some specialized directories, entries are also grouped based on similar characteristics, such as location, organization type, product, or service.

Example: *The Directory of Business Information Sources*
Sacramento Street Guide and Directory

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.



Almanacs

Almanacs are typically annual publications and contain statistics and other general information in a particular subject.

Example: *The Facts on File World Almanac*
The Old Farmer's Almanac

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.



Handbooks

Handbooks provide a range of basic information and serve as handy guides on a particular subject. Many handbooks include a mix of definitions, short articles, statistics, and bibliographies; therefore, it may function as a specialized encyclopedia. A handbook may also be called a companion, guide, or manual.

Example: *CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink
Professional Guide to Diseases

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.



Government Documents and Statistical Sources

Government Documents are defined by the *U.S. Code* as any informational matter printed by the U.S. government, at government expense or as required by law. Basic government information sources include laws and official government records. Almost all federal government documents are published by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), which is the largest printing house in the world.

Statistical Sources describe issues with numbers. Most statistical sources are published by state, federal, or international agencies. The most common statistical source is the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, which is based on information from the United States Census.

Examples of reference books include encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, geographical sources, directories, almanacs, handbooks, statistical sources, and government documents.

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Primary and Secondary Sources

We've looked at magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, and newspapers as well as selected reference sources.

Now let's take a look at primary and secondary sources.

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Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary Sources are original, eye-witness accounts of an event, written at the time of the event.

Primary sources include items like

- reports on original research or experiments
- diaries
- letters
- laws and court records
- speeches
- statistics

An example of a primary source is a diary written by a member of the Donner Party describing his journey to California.

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Primary and Secondary Sources

Where primary sources are original events, think of secondary sources as secondhand accounts of an event.

Secondary Sources are written using primary sources and include comments on, interpretations of, or discussions about the original material. Secondary sources are usually written by someone other than the original author of the primary source.

An example of a secondary source is when a writer uses a diary written by a member of the Donner Party and writes about the experience from a secondhand point of view.

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Primary and Secondary Sources Combined

Primary and Secondary sources may get confusing because they can both be used in the same document.

For instance, a death certificate is a primary source for the date, time, and cause of death because this information is filled out at the time of the event. However, the information regarding the person's date of birth is considered a secondary source on a death certificate because the information is usually provided by a child or spouse, who was not around to witness the actual event.

A book based on the diary of a member of the Donner Party is a secondary source; however, it may include primary source excerpts from the diary that was written by the author of the diary.

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Primary and Secondary Sources

The importance of using both primary and secondary sources:

- Consider where you are getting your research information. Do you want an eye-witness or a secondhand account?
- Know that primary sources are not always accurate because you are trusting that the original author got the facts correct and didn't embellish or conveniently forget facts.
- Include a balance of both primary and secondary sources in your research.

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In Conclusion

Now that you have an idea of information sources available to you, let's look at when you might want to use one format over another. You will want to use many different formats for your research; however, here is a brief generalization:

- Use an encyclopedia for summary or background information.
- Use a book for a more comprehensive analysis of your topic.
- Use a newspaper or magazine for current topics.
- Use a scholarly journal for information on original research in a specific field.

While a lot of the resources discussed in this presentation are also found electronically, we will discuss using online library databases and the World Wide Web for research in later assignments.