

Types of Reference Sources

(Note: Many of these types are available in both print and electronic format.)

What are Reference Sources? works designed by arrangement and treatment of subject matter to be consulted for definite items of information, rather than read consecutively

Almanacs or Statistical Sources - annual compendium of practical dates, facts, and statistics. Can be current and/or retrospective and are often in table format. Can be general or related to a specific subject

Atlases - bound or boxed collections of maps, plates, engravings, etc. May contain accompanying text and are usually related in subject or theme

Bibliographies - works that list books, articles, essays, or websites by a specific person or about a specific subject. Sometimes entries/citations are annotated

Biographical Sources - contain articles about the lives and works of various individuals and may be broad or narrow in scope (Some only contain articles of deceased individuals)

Book Reviews – provide a brief critical assessment of a book’s thesis and analysis, often comparing the book to other titles in the field

Chronologies - list of events and their dates in order of occurrence. Helps to place people, events, organizations, etc., in context

Dictionaries - provide brief explanatory entries for words or topics related to a specific subject or field of inquiry, usually arranged alphabetically. **Note:** Some works labeled ‘dictionary’ are actually encyclopedias

Types of Dictionaries: **Unabridged** – attempts to include every word currently in use

Abridged – does not include every word

Etymological – gives word histories, how meanings evolve

Subject – focus on vocabulary of a subject or discipline

Directories - contains names, addresses, and telephone numbers and other information for persons, organizations, businesses, or institutions. There is usually a common theme

Encyclopedias - provide short, authoritative essays, usually arranged alphabetically by the heading and often followed by lists of further references, entries are often written by experts and signed. Coverage may be very broad subject areas or specialized areas

Gazetteers – define or describe geographical places

Handbooks and Manuals - provide a simple but complete treatment of a broad topic. Usually written for practitioners and are of compact size. Also referred to as companions or compendiums

Literature Guides - provide an evaluative discussion of the methods and materials for research in a selected area

Multivolume General Histories - provide information establishing a broader historical/theoretical context, along with a synthesizing narrative and analysis of topics, nations, regions, eras. Examine standard, accepted historical thought but do not include current, cutting edge historical theory

Sourcebooks - contain facsimiles or exact copies or the text of original source material