



LIBRARY GUIDE 14A REFERENCE TOOLS

- Reference = a resource (print or electronic) that a researcher “refers” to or consults.
- Tool = a resource (print or electronic) that helps a researcher carry out some of the basic tasks associated with research (finding definitions, background, statistics, etc.)

Dictionaries – usually contain an alphabetical list of words. These can provide words in a language, giving their definitions, spelling, pronunciation, etc. Alternatively, specialized dictionaries may provide the vocabulary of a particular subject, including definitions. In electronic databases the dictionary may be called a **thesaurus**.

Examples: *Webster’s College Dictionary*
Dictionary of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality

Encyclopedias – contain information on all subjects (general), or limited to a special field or subject (specialized). They have a systematic arrangement that may be alphabetical or topical/hierarchical. Superior encyclopedias include a bibliography at the end. An encyclopedia may contain definitions of key terms, background and history, theories or causes, procedures or applications, and much more. Encyclopedias are good resources for starting the research process because they give a broad overview and background on a topic.

Examples: *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (general)
Encyclopedia of Human Behavior (specialized)

Handbooks (non statistical) – offer a concise, but broad, overview of a subject or field of knowledge. They may be single- or multi-volume works and often follow a topical or hierarchical arrangement. Handbooks can replace encyclopedias in supplying background information.

Example: *Handbook of Artificial Intelligence*

Almanacs, Yearbooks, Data Books, Statistical Handbooks – provide compilations of statistics for either a wide range of subjects or specialized fields. Almanacs and yearbooks may also include coverage of a topic that is similar to (but not as extensive as) encyclopedias. Statistics may be updated annually or may only provide a one-time view of the field.

Examples: *The World Almanac*
State of Hawaii Data Book
International Trade Statistics Yearbook
Statistical Handbook of the American Family

Directories – offer lists of people, businesses, or organizations, generally providing the address or other contact information and perhaps a brief description.

Examples: local telephone book
Encyclopedia of Associations

Biographical Sources – contain information about the lives and contributions of people. In the field of literature, they may also contain some analysis of the author’s work and usually provide bibliographies.

Examples: *Current Biography*
British Writers

Bibliographies – list citations to books, articles, and other publications by or about a person, or on a specific topic. Annotated bibliographies provide summaries of the publications being cited. These are a useful and time-saving way to seek out material for a research project. In HPU libraries bibliographies will often be located in the circulating collections.

Examples: *Military History of the United States; an annotated bibliography*

Atlases and Gazetteers – atlases are usually collections of maps and charts, but they may also contain valuable data about the places they cover. Gazetteers are indexes to names of places, and may include factual information about the places.

Examples: *Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*
Oxford Dictionary of the World

Indexes, Abstracts, and Full-Text Databases – provide a means of locating topical information published in periodical sources (magazines, journals, or newspapers) and, in some cases, reports, books, or other publications. Their arrangement may be either in dictionary format (alphabetical) or topical, with a separate alphabetical subject index to the individual entries.

Indexes, in their simplest form, are like the index at the back of a book. As a reference tool, they provide only a citation (basic identifying information: author, title, source, date, and/or volume and pages).

Abstracts might be called annotated indexes, because they provide a summary of the cited article. Abstracts make it easier to determine whether the article contains the kind of information needed.

Full-text databases are electronic indexes that include the full text (often with images and/or graphics) of some or all articles cited.

REMINDER: articles cited with only abstracts may be available in HPU libraries – check the HPU *University Libraries Periodical List* (ULPL) online. Often these articles will be more extensive and scholarly in nature.

Subject headings included in any of the above will provide further assistance in determining the usefulness of an article, and will give additional terms to use that may improve the focus of a search.