



Types of Information Sources



Reference Books (Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Handbooks, Yearbooks)

General and subject-specific reference books provide brief overviews or summaries on any given topic. They can include background information, factual data, key ideas, important dates, and concepts.

Use:

- If you know very little about your topic, reference sources are an excellent place to start research.

How to Find:

- Use **QuickSearch** to find both **print** titles on the shelves and **online** titles via database services such as *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.
- Use the library's **research databases** such as *Gale Virtual Reference Library* to find reference articles.
- Use a **search engine** such as *Google* to find a reference resource on the **Web**.

Examples:

- *World Book Encyclopedia* (general); *African-American Encyclopedia* (subject-specific)

Circulating Books (Fiction, Nonfiction)

Books typically provide an in-depth examination of any given topic, usually from a retrospective point of view. Most research-oriented books are works of non-fiction (e.g., textbooks). Fiction works include novels, short stories, and poetry.

Use:

- When you need historical and detailed information on a subject, such as the civil rights movement in the United States.
- When you need to put your topic in context with other important issues.
- When you need several points of view in one book such as collected critical essays on Shakespeare's works.

How to Find:

- Use **QuickSearch** to find both **print** titles on the shelves and **online** titles via database services such as EBSCOhost's *eBook Collection*. You can also search other library catalogs.
- Use the **research databases** such as EBSCOhost's *eBook Collection* or ProQuest's *Safari Books Online*.

Examples:

- *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*; *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (non-fiction)
- *The Lord of the Rings*; *The Da Vinci Code* (fiction)

Periodicals (Journals, Magazines, Newspapers)

Journals, magazines, and newspapers published on a regular cycle throughout the year (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly). They provide up-to-date information on the latest developments on various issues or current events. Articles can be brief and general or in-depth and focused on a very specific or local topic.

Use:

- When you need up-to-date information about current issues, popular culture, or international, national and local events.
- When you want to read various points of view or popular opinions (e.g., editorials, commentaries).
- When you need scholarly articles or original research, need to find out what has been studied on your topic, or need references that point to other relevant research (journal articles).

How to Find:

- Use the Reynolds Library **Journal Locator** tool to find full-text periodical titles that are available in print or online.
- Use the library's **research databases** such as *Academic Search Complete* to search for periodical articles on a specific topic.

Examples:

- *Journal of Communication; Newsweek; Richmond-Times Dispatch*

World Wide Web (Web Pages, Pictures, Music, Video)

The Web allows you to access most types of information or multimedia on the Internet through a Web browser such as *Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla FireFox, or Google Chrome*. One of the main features of the Web is the ability to quickly link to information. The Web contains information beyond plain text, including images, sound, music, and video. Since anyone can publish on the web, you need to carefully evaluate what you retrieve through search engines such as *Google*.

Use:

- To find current news and events
- Expert and popular opinions on various issues
- Company information
- Information from all levels of government
- Information and online resources provided through the Reynolds Library

How to Find:

- Use a **search engine** such as *Google* to find web pages and other multimedia on the Web.

Examples:

- *Wikipedia, CNN, Facebook, Amazon*

Government Sources

Government sources from all levels of government (international, national, state and local) provide both historical and current information, and statistical data.

Use:

- To find information on government and social issues
- Historical or current data or statistics

How to Find:

- Use **QuickSearch**.
- Use the library's **research databases** such as *Academic Search Complete*.
- Use a **search engine** such as *Google*.

Examples:

- *Statistical Abstract of the United States, Occupational Outlook Handbook, National Center for Health Statistics*

Primary Sources

Primary sources provide first hand experiences of events. Information is generally presented in its original form, whether it is a work of literature or art, or an account of an event or experience, or original documents or resources such as interviews, speeches, questionnaires, letters, diaries, manuscripts, memoirs, etc. Primary source information may be found in books, periodicals, and web sites.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources provide second hand accounts of events. These sources include materials that have been reported, analyzed, or interpreted by people who do not have first hand knowledge of an event. Secondary source information may be found in books or periodicals, and on web sites.