

# **Development of Skills and Techniques for searching information from Reference Sources**

## **Reference Sources**

Reference sources can be a great place to start your research because they provide quick, authoritative introductions to a topic. They offer summarized, factual information in a clear and organized way. Common reference sources that provide this type of information are encyclopedias and dictionaries. Reference sources, such as encyclopedias or literary criticisms, will often cite additional sources such as periodical articles and books. Further, they often provide a good bibliography for you to explore in your research.

## **Examples of Reference Sources**

There are many reference sources, including dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesaurus, directories, and almanacs. More broadly, reference sources can also include bibliographies, manuals, handbooks, atlases, and gazetteers. You can find these resources in print and online.

## **Types of Reference Sources**

There are two types of reference sources as follows:

### **1. Primary Sources**

Primary Sources are immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection with it. Primary sources can include:

- ❖ Texts of laws and other original documents.
- ❖ Newspaper reports, by reporters who witnessed an event or who quote people who did.
- ❖ Speeches, diaries, letters and interviews - what the people involved said or wrote.
- ❖ Original research.
- ❖ Datasets, survey data, such as census or economic statistics.
- ❖ Photographs, video, or audio that capture an event.

### **2. Secondary Sources**

Secondary Sources are one step removed from primary sources, though they often quote or otherwise use primary sources. They can cover the same topic, but add a layer of interpretation and analysis. Secondary sources can include:

- ❖ Most books about a topic.
- ❖ Analysis or interpretation of data.
- ❖ Scholarly or other articles about a topic, especially by people not directly involved.
- ❖ Documentaries (though they often include photos or video portions that can be considered primary sources).

### 3. Tertiary Sources

These are sources that index, abstract, organize, compile, or digest other sources. Some reference materials and textbooks are considered tertiary sources when their chief purpose is to list, summarize or simply repackage ideas or other information. Tertiary sources are usually not credited to a particular author.

**Examples of Tertiary Sources:** Dictionaries/encyclopedias (may also be secondary), almanacs, fact books, Wikipedia, bibliographies (may also be secondary), directories, guidebooks, manuals, handbooks, and textbooks (may be secondary), indexing and abstracting sources.

## Development of Skills and Techniques of Information Searching from Reference Sources

The following are the skills and techniques of information searching:

### 1. Planning a Search Strategy

Define your information need: Before searching any information firstly we should know clearly what exactly we need. What, exactly, do we want to know? Are you just looking for statistics, or do you want to collect some qualitative information (life stories, local heroes, etc.) as well? The more precise you are in your thinking at the beginning, the easier you will find your search.

### 2. Decide which Sources to Use

There are a lot of different places where you can find relevant information, depending on your topic. Some of them include: Electronic sources, newspapers, magazines, books, atlas etc. A wise choice is made depending on the type of information needed.

### 3. Find out how they function

After selection of source one must find out, how that sources functions. For

example – how to find information in an encyclopaedia or dictionary or from some particular website.

4. **Run your search:**

Here actual research is conducted. All the planning done earlier is used and search for information is carried out.

5. **Collect and Save the Information**

All the information is gathered and saved in suitable form.

6. **Review and refine you search**

After saving all the information, one should go through all the material and refine it.

## **Types of Sources**

**There are two types of sources:**

1. Electronic Sources
2. Print Sources

## **GETTING INFORMATION FROM ELECTRONIC SOURCES**

- ❖ The Web allows you to access most types of information on the Internet through a browser. One of the main features of the Web is the ability to quickly link to other related information. The Web contains information beyond plain text, including sounds, images, and video.
- ❖ The important thing to do when using information on the Internet is to know how to evaluate it!

**Effective searching on internet can allow us to:**

- Find the materials we want amongst the huge number of online resources available
- (i) Google claims it searches >3 billion web pages
- (ii) More than 20,000 full text journals are online
- Newspapers, databases, books, company web pages, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, individual home pages, etc, are also online
- Save time and money

## **POINTS TO CONSIDER WHILE USING AN ELECTRONIC SOURCE**

The following points should be remember while using an electronic source:

1. Choose the source wisely.

2. For Quantitative Information we may refer electronic source.
3. Use Meta Search Engines or Search Engines for General Information e.g. Google
4. For Qualitative information
5. Use Virtual Libraries, Subject Directories
6. Encyclopedia, dictionary, the Web or even a textbook are usually best
7. This might depend on which sort of information you require.
8. Consider Domain name Extensions.
9. Careful choice of search term(s) is vital

### **Advantages of Electronic Resources**

1. Speed of searching
2. More access points
3. Ability to get information otherwise unavailable
4. Increasing amount of information is electronic
5. To find current information
6. To find information about companies
7. To find information from all levels of government - federal to local
8. To find both expert and popular opinions
9. To find information about hobbies and personal interests

## **2. EVALUATING AND EXAMINING PRINT REFERENCE SOURCES**

In this section we will focus on print resources. You might be wondering reference *books*? Isn't everything on online?

So why print?

We have to admit that the use of print resources for reference is dwindling. Though print reference collections are by no means dead, some believe that they are on their way out.

### **Some advantages of using print resources are:**

- Accuracy
- Relevancy
- Community preference
- Keeping track of how often source is updated
- Range of coverage
- Ease of use

- Best display of content

### **Following Sources are available in Print**

1. Books
2. Magazine
3. Journal
4. Newspaper
5. Almanac
6. Dictionary
7. Encyclopedia
8. Atlas
9. Government source
10. Books

**Books:** Books cover virtually any topic, fact or fiction. For research purposes, you will probably be looking for books that synthesize all the information on one topic to support a particular argument or thesis. Libraries organize and store their book collections on shelves called "stacks."

### **USES**

- ❖ When looking for lots of information on a topic.
- ❖ To put your topic in context with other important issues.
- ❖ To find historical information.
- ❖ To find summaries of research to support an argument.

**Magazine:** A magazine is a collection of articles and images about diverse topics of popular interest and current events. Usually these articles are written by journalists or scholars and are geared toward the average adult. Magazines may cover very "serious" material, but to find consistent scholarly information, you should use journals.

### **USES**

- ❖ To find information or opinions about popular culture.
- ❖ To find up-to-date information about current events
- ❖ To find general articles for people who are not necessarily specialists about the topic

**EXAMPLES:** *National Geographic, Ebony, Sports Illustrated, People,*

**Journal:** A journal is a collection of articles usually written by scholars in an academic or professional field. An editorial board reviews articles to decide whether they should be accepted. Articles in journals can cover very specific topics or narrow fields of research.

## USES

- ❖ When doing scholarly research
- ❖ To find out what has been studied on your topic
- ❖ To find bibliographies that point to other relevant research

## EXAMPLES

1. When doing scholarly research
2. To find out what has been studied on your topic
3. To find bibliographies that point to other relevant research

**Newspaper:** A newspaper is a collection of articles about current events usually published daily. Since there is at least one in every city, it is a great source for local information.

## USES

- ❖ To find current information about international, national and local events
- ❖ To find editorials, commentaries, expert or popular opinions

**EXAMPLES:** The Tribune, New York Times, Almanac

**Dictionary:** A reference book containing an alphabetical list of words with information about them - there are many different types of dictionaries like slang, historical, and etymological dictionaries.

**Encyclopedia:** A reference work (often in several volumes) containing articles on various topics (often arranged in alphabetical order) dealing with the entire range of human knowledge or with some particular specialty.

## USES

1. When looking for background information on a topic
2. When trying to find key ideas, important dates or concepts

## EXAMPLES

*African-American Encyclopedia*(subject encyclopedia), *Encyclopedia Americana*(general encyclopedia)

**Atlas:** An atlas is a collection of maps. It is typically a map of earth or a region of earth. There are atlases of the other planets (and their satellites) in the solar system. Atlases have traditionally been bound into book form, but today many atlases are in multimedia formats.

**Government Publications:** These include materials published by local, state, and federal

governmental bodies and agencies.

### **Poor Knowledge of resources**

- ❖ Consistently refresh your knowledge of reference sources available to you.
- ❖ Lack of follow-up.
- ❖ Questions occasionally grow as more research or follow-up is done- find out if further information is needed.

### **IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING REFERENCE SKILLS**

- ❖ **Saves time and energy:** It saves a lot of time of student who may not be able to find the relevant information. It saves a lot of energy as the student will now know where to find the relevant information and he will search with a proper strategy.
- ❖ **Prevents gathering of irrelevant information:** Students will be able to gather only the relevant information and avoid gathering irrelevant information.
- ❖ **Accuracy:** It makes the search and gathering of information accurate.
- ❖ **Beneficial for researchers:** Researchers and scholars will be benefitted if they are taught proper reference skills. It will help them to review the literature related to their research variables.
- ❖ **Make students more confident:** It will make students as well as researchers more confident in their work.
- ❖ **Reliable information:** We can get reliable information if we know where and how to find it.
- ❖ **Prevents wastage:** It prevents wastage of sources, time and energy.
- ❖ **Makes a person self reliant:** It makes students as well as researchers self-reliant.
- ❖ **Motivates a person to find out and learn more:** When a person knows how to find any information, he is self-motivated to learn more.
- ❖ **Economical:** Knowing where to find the needed information can save a lot of money as we will not spend it on wrong sources.

### **How to find reference sources?**

Library has reference materials online and in print. Print reference collections are typically made available near the reference desk. Some reference sources are shelved near the desk, where you can find them yourself if you'd like, and others may be behind the reference desk. Although most printed reference sources do not circulate (they cannot be checked out), you can easily photocopy or digitally scan and save the information you need.

- ❖ You will also notice that there are some reference books shelved in the main library bookshelves, or stacks. These can often be checked out. These are shelved with the main library books because the librarians have determined that those specific books are not critical to most of the reference questions that people ask, because they will be more useful if people are able to check them out, or because there is a newer version of the source that is kept in the reference department.
- ❖ You can find reference sources by doing a search in the library catalog for a specific title or type of reference work. You can also limit your catalog search so that your search location is “reference.” The main thing to keep in mind when searching for a reference source is to start with a much broader search than you would if you were looking for a regular book. This is because the set of books in the reference department is much smaller than the total collection. If you were to search with a specific search string that returned, say, 10 books from a collection of over a library’s collection of million books, using that same search string to search the much smaller reference collection of, say, 50,000 books might not find any that fit the search string.
- ❖ Another reason to search for a broad term is that many reference books are very general, but contain specific information. These books can’t be listed in the catalog under every specific thing that they cover in detail, so they’re just listed generally. If I were interested in learning more about a feminist approach to social epistemology in philosophy, I can guarantee I won’t find a reference source on that topic using the search string feminist AND “social epistemology” AND philosophy. However, if I search for philosophy, or maybe even “social epistemology,” I’ll find an encyclopedia on the general topic that includes a section on exactly my topic.
- ❖ Further, many reference sources are going online. Online reference sources are usually listed on the database page of your library’s website. These aren’t databases in the typical sense of a database of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. These are in databases of reference sources. For example, you can use the Encyclopedia Britannica in paper in the reference department, or you can use the online version of Encyclopedia Britannica. The online version will actually have different information. It can be updated more regularly to be more current, include newer topics, and can go into more detail because there is no space constraint.
- ❖ Some online reference databases will search across multiple resources. For example, you can search for “Maya Angelou” quickly and easily across multiple biographical reference sources online, instead of browsing one printed biographical reference source at a time. For more information on using databases.



## **Conclusion**

Reference sources can provide general background information (facts, definitions, dates, details), assistance in focusing on the topic, quick access to important factual and statistical information, and references to other sources of information. It is therefore a good place to begin your research. Reference materials include almanacs, handbooks, encyclopedias, and dictionaries. Reference books are separated from circulating materials because of their important role in research. So reference sources help the students to search the information in a systematic way. These sources help the students in the development of different skills.