What is a reference work?

A reference work is a source of information that is intended to be referred to rather than read. Most reference works are available in printed and electronic formats.

Many clients find printed books easier to browse through. However electronic works are increasingly widely used, especially by younger clients.

The Internet has added richness and complexity to reference work. Some Web-based reference sources are books mounted on the Net. Others are genuine products of this new and dynamic electronic environment.

To answer clients’ questions efficiently, you must understand the question, know what answer you are looking for, and be familiar with the available sources.

Many enquiries can be answered using reference works. This is particularly true for ‘ready reference’ questions, where clients need specific facts or details, rather than complex or background information.

This section deals with many common types of print and electronic reference works, and the combinations of reference works found on the Web.

When you have completed this section, you should be able to

- identify and evaluate different types of reference works
- answer requests for information using a range of reference works
- choose an appropriate reference work to answer a particular question.

The main topics in this section are:

- Evaluating reference works
- Examining reference works
- The reference collection
- Types of reference works

Evaluating reference works (1)

The following criteria are traditionally used to evaluate a reference work.

Authority

The publisher’s reputation is a measure of quality. Editors, advisers, consultants and contributors, and their qualifications and status, are also important.
**Purpose**
Why was the work was produced, and who is the intended client group?

**Scope**
Is the publication comprehensive or selective? Is it intended for specialists or the popular market?

**Bias**
Some reference works have an emphasis on information of interest to the country in which they are published.

**Arrangement / Index / Navigation**
Ease of use is vital. Printed works need a comprehensive and straightforward index, with references. Electronic works must be easy to navigate, finding what you want quickly and without getting lost.

**Production**
Printed reference works are often large and expensive publications, with attention to design, illustrations and maps, and binding. Similarly electronic works emphasise design and special features.

**Accuracy and recency of information**
Accuracy is most important. How up-to-date is the information? Large reference sources take years to compile: how and how often is the work updated? Check the recency of bibliographies. Test a work by looking up a topic you know well.

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**Evaluating reference works (2)**

**Electronic reference works**
Most traditional criteria are relevant to evaluating electronic reference works. However, it is more difficult to ‘examine’ an electronic work, since they aim to present the most attractive and immediate interface to the user.

Purpose and scope are usually implied rather that stated. Details like place and date of publication are often difficult to find, and may not be provided at all.

**CD-ROMs**
Many reference works on CD-ROM (e.g., encyclopaedias, atlases) are translations of books to electronic format, enhanced by features like sound and dynamic links to related material, both within the work itself and on the Net.

**Web**
The Web contains individual reference works (e.g., Encyclopaedia Britannica) (>www.britannica.com), and collections of works (e.g., LibrarySpot) (>http://www.libraryspot.com/). Users of the Net have a high
expectation of immediate responses, and web designers are constrained by the size of files. So sites usually provide a minimum of background information, and it is often difficult to determine even quite basic details, such the country in which the information originates.

It is still essential, as far as possible, to ensure that information retrieved electronically is authoritative, accurate, up-to-date, and unbiased.

Examining reference works (1)

To familiarise yourself with a reference work, you need to examine it closely, and think about the kinds of questions it may answer.

Printed reference works

Bibliographical details and authority of publication

First study the title page to determine the type of work and its scope, as indicated in the title, the author’s or editor’s name and background (qualifications, positions held, titles of earlier works), the publisher and the date of publication.

Purpose and special features

Read the preface or introduction for further information about the scope, special features, limitations if any, and comparison with other publications on the subject.

Quality of information and ease of use

Study the contents to determine its arrangement, the types of entries, use of cross references, any supplementary lists, indexes and the quality and kind of articles. Are they popular or technical, signed or unsigned, impartial or biased? Are bibliographical references included?

Supplementary or complete?

Compare the publication with earlier editions. Does this edition supersede earlier editions, or is it a supplement to earlier editions?

Examining reference works (2)

Electronic reference works

Bibliographical details and authority of publication

Scan the first screen and click on any links to information such as ‘About us’ or ‘About this product/site’. Look for clues about the type of work, its purpose and scope, including the title, the author or editor’s name and background (qualifications, positions held, titles of earlier works), the publisher and date of publication or last update of the site.

Ease of use

Use links and navigation buttons to move around. Explore any menus, and try to get an overview of the arrangement - e.g.,
are there broad subject groupings, can you browse as well as search for specific topics? Are there appropriate links to related topics? Investigate any special features - e.g., clicking a word to hear it pronounced. Do the features add to the value of the information, or are they just ‘bells and whistles’? Do they slow down the retrieval of information (especially on the Web)?

**Quality of information**

Test the content with some standard enquiries, and compare the results. Search for recent information you are familiar with, and see how up-to-date the answers are. Are the articles general or technical, signed or unsigned, impartial or biased? Are bibliographical references included?

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**The reference collection (1)**

A reference collection is a set of sources used to answer most ‘ready-reference’ questions - definitions, facts, illustrations, statistics, and so on.

A library’s collection of printed and CD-ROM reference works consists of

- encyclopaedias
- dictionaries
- bibliographies
- biographical dictionaries
- directories
- yearbooks
- almanacs
- atlases
- gazetteers
- handbooks
- manuals
- indexes

and other sources that provide readily accessible reference information.

It is arranged to facilitate convenient and rapid use by library clients and staff. These materials are usually not for loan outside the library.

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**The reference collection (2)**

The Internet is changing the nature of reference work and reference collections. Since the Web is ideal for locating up-to-date, geographically diverse facts and figures, it is increasingly used for responding to reference queries quickly.
This is particularly true for libraries operating online reference service. If staff members sit at computers connected to the Internet, receiving email enquiries either directly or via the library’s website, it is natural for them to search the Web for the answers.

Libraries and individuals build their own reference collections on the Web by bookmarking useful sites. If you accumulate a large number of sites, you may need to group them according to broad subject or other categories.

There are also websites that give access to a collection of reference sources from a single search screen. For example, the Internet Public Library (>http://www.ipl.org/ref/RR) states that its General/Reference Collection is ‘a collection of Internet resources ... chosen to help answer specific questions quickly and efficiently.’

**Types of reference works**

There is a huge number and variety of reference works. Many are general works, designed to answer specific questions and sometimes also provide more extensive information. They are usually intended for school students and the general public.

There are even more specialised reference works. They range from dictionaries and encyclopaedias on specific subjects (*A dictionary of politics, McGraw-Hill encyclopedia of science and technology*) to directories of particular types of people (*Directory of artists*) or organisations (*Directory of special libraries in Australia*), to regional or national atlases (*Atlas of Southeast Asia*), yearbooks (*Year book Australia*), and so on.

In this section, we look at some types of reference works. Discovering new reference sources and how to use them is a major ongoing task of any reference staff member who aims to provide a quality reference service.

The subtopics in this section are:

- Dictionaries and related works
- Encyclopaedias
- Geographical sources
- Biographical sources
- Directories
- Yearbooks and almanacs
- Handbooks
- Statistics
- Standards
- Annual reports
- Government publications
- Bibliographic tools
Dictionaries

A dictionary is a work containing a selection of the words of a language, usually arranged alphabetically, with explanations of their meanings, pronunciations, and other information.

The subtopics in this section are:

• Purpose of dictionaries
• Related works
• Description or prescription?
• Electronic dictionaries
• Types of dictionaries
• Using dictionaries

Purpose of dictionaries

A dictionary provides information about

• words
• meanings
• derivations
• spelling
• pronunciation
• syllabication
• usage.

It may also include synonyms, antonyms, illustrations, biographical facts, quotations, and/or geographical information.

Most people are familiar with general dictionaries. There are also language and subject dictionaries, and other types - e.g., phrases, quotations, abbreviations.

Related works

These works provide some of the same information as dictionaries.

Thesaurus

A thesaurus contains synonyms and related words and phrases. Most thesauri are arranged in classified order, though some are alphabetical.

A thesaurus is also a list of terms used in a database.

Lexicon
A lexicon is a dictionary, usually of an ancient language - e.g., Greek, Latin, Hebrew.

**Glossary**
A glossary is an alphabetical list of definitions, usually in a particular subject or field.

**Concordance**
A concordance is an alphabetical index of the principal words in a book - e.g., the Bible, or the works of an author - e.g., Shakespeare, with references to the text

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**Description or prescription?**

There are two approaches to editing a dictionary.

**The prescriptive approach** - outlines correct standards of acceptability and usage of words and phrases. The editors aim to maintain tradition, and prevent contamination of the language.

**The descriptive approach** - records words as they are used (and misused). A word or phrase used often enough becomes acceptable.

Most modern dictionaries are descriptive.

One of the best known prescriptive dictionaries is *The new Fowler's modern English usage*, now in its third edition, edited by R. W. Burchfield. There are several others.

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**Electronic dictionaries**

Text: There are many dictionaries on the Web. Some standard dictionaries provide full access - e.g., *Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary* (>http://www.mw.com/dictionary.htm). Some provide an online tour, and limited access to the content - e.g., *Oxford English Dictionary* (>http://www.oed.com/). Full access is available on subscription.

Most of the full-access electronic dictionaries are compiled by individuals, rather than major publishers. Therefore they do not have the authority of well-known compilers and publishers, and should be used with caution as references sources. Of course, many of them are fun to explore, provided the information is not taken as authoritative.

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**Encyclopaedias (1)**

An encyclopaedia is a systematic summary of all significant knowledge, or a summary of the knowledge on one subject.

No encyclopaedia can be comprehensive, although larger multi-volume sets claim to contain all the general information people need. A single volume cannot cover topics in any depth, but can be useful for straightforward factual information.
You should read the introduction of each encyclopaedia you use, since they are organised differently, have various emphases, and often suffer from a national or other bias.

Clients mostly use encyclopaedias to search for specific facts - who, what, where, when and how. They can also be the starting point for a more detailed search.

**Encyclopaedias (2)**

Many encyclopaedias are now available on CD-ROM or on the Web. They include

*Encyclopaedia Britannica (>www.britannica.com)*

*World Book Encyclopedia (>www.worldbook.com)*

*Columbia Encyclopedia (>http://www.bartleby.com/65/).*

The format enables sound and animation to enhance the presentation of information, particularly on CD-ROM. Cross-referencing is also easier, since a user can click on a hypertext link to be taken to a related article, an explanation (e.g., pronunciation guide), etc.

Electronic material gives the impression of being extremely up-to-date. However, it is important to check the recency of information, since it is only possible to revise all the information in a large encyclopaedia over a period of time.

**Geographical sources of information (1)**

There are three main types of geographical sources. They provide information about places, including towns, cities, villages, rivers, mountains and lakes.

**Maps**

These represent part of the three-dimensional world on a flat surface. There are many types, including physical, political and thematic maps.

**Atlases**

These consist of maps, and indexes to help users find places on the maps. Types include atlases of the world, space, regions, countries, historical events, and road or street directories.

**Gazetteers**

These are geographical dictionaries that list places, their locations, and other factual information. Recent editions provide up-to-date details, and older editions provide historical information. Entries may include pronunciation, location, area, population, geographical and physical descriptions and historical data.
Geographical sources of information (2)

Other reference sources also contain useful geographical information:

- **Encyclopaedias** - maps and descriptions of regions, countries, towns, cities, rivers, mountains, lakes, etc.
- **Yearbooks** - name and border changes
- **Dictionaries** - identification of major places, pronunciation of geographical terms and place names
- **Biographical dictionaries** - information on geographers and cartographers
- **Bibliographies** - details of books containing geographical information
- **Periodical indexes** - articles on geographical topics
- **Statistical sources** - geographical information in tables
- **Guidebooks** - history, culture, places of interest, climate, maps.

Geographical sources of information (3)

**Features of geographical resources**

- **Recency** - National boundaries and place names change. It is essential that geographical sources are kept as up-to-date as possible.
- **Uniformity of names** - Names in non-Roman alphabets can be transliterated differently, and may cause confusion. The best sources use standard international spellings.
- **Balance** - Be alert to possible overemphasis on the country of publication.
- **Ease of use** - Look for maps that are easy to read, and keys to map symbols, scale and projections.
- **Additional features** - Does the source contain extra details - e.g., tables showing the longest rivers, highest mountains, largest lakes? (Note: the bolding was back to front)

Biographical sources (1)

Biographical sources contain information about people, including details of each person’s full name, parents, date and place of birth, gender, education, personal life (e.g., family, interests), memberships, offices and positions held, achievements, honours, and awards.

They are usually arranged alphabetically by surname. Some sources include portraits and bibliographies that lead to more detailed information.

These sources, called biographical dictionaries or directories, usually include entries based on country, occupation or
profession, gender, race, whether the people are living or dead.

This means that you should find out what the client already knows about the person - e.g., are they alive or dead, what are they well known for, where are they from?

If the client cannot answer these questions, you may need to search first in

- the catalogue
- general reference sources - e.g., a general encyclopaedia
- current databases - e.g., Australian public affairs information service (APAIS).

Biographical sources (2)

Types of biographical sources

Universal or international
These include entries for people from all countries, and tend to be restricted to notable public figures (excluding popular entertainment and sporting personalities). They may include biblical, mythological or legendary people and may include living and/or dead people.

E.g., International who’s who, Encyclopedia of world biography

National or regional
These include entries for people from particular countries, states or local areas.

E.g., Who’s who in Australia, Australian dictionary of biography

Subject, occupation, race, gender
These are limited to a particular occupation (e.g., law), subject (e.g., music), or special characteristic (e.g., women, African-Americans).

E.g., New Grove dictionary of music and musicians, Women serial and mass murderers: a worldwide reference, 1580 through 1990

Current periodicals and periodical indexes
Some publications focus on up-to-date information about people as they become well-known. Others provide access to recent biographical articles in journals.

E.g., Current biography and yearbook, Biography index

Biographical sources (3)

Features of biographical sources

How information is collected
Some biographical dictionaries are compiled by historians and/or subject experts using primary and authoritative secondary sources. Others contain information supplied by the subjects themselves. The authority of the publisher is vital to ensure that the information is reliable, rather than what the subjects wish to be the case.

**Which biographical source?**

When choosing the best biographical source, listen to or read the question carefully:

**Is the person alive or dead?**

Can you find out their nationality, profession, or area of interest?

Does the client want brief facts, a longer description of the person’s life, or very current information about the person?

**Other biographical sources**

Other sources also contain biographical information, e.g.,

- Some dictionaries with special biographical lists (first item in the list of dots)
  - Encyclopaedias
  - Newspaper obituaries
  - Almanacs

These other sources of biographical information may not be current, or provide the depth of information that can be found in biographical dictionaries.

**Directories**

Directories are lists of people, organisations, courses, services, funding sources, directories and so on. They contain contact and often other details.

Directories of organisations include the full name of each organisation, its address, telephone number, names of personnel or office bearers, its function or purpose, and usually the date of establishment, a brief history, its activities, services, and publications.

Directories of people may contain limited information (e.g., a telephone directory), or fuller information (e.g., *Australian library and information people*).

A good directory should

- be up-to-date
- be up-dated regularly
- be easy to use, both in finding the required entries, and in finding information in the entry
- include sufficient detail to answer clients’ questions.
Familiarise yourselves with the directories in your library, and find some on the Web. Think about the kinds of questions they are used to answer.

**Yearbooks and almanacs**

Yearbooks and almanacs are annual publications that contain many useful miscellaneous facts. Since they are updated every year, their information is likely to be current. Their small size and straightforward arrangement make them easy-to-use ready reference sources.

**Yearbooks**

A yearbook contains up-to-date information in brief, descriptive and/or statistical form. However, remember that a 2002 yearbook, for example, contains information about 2001, or sometimes earlier.

Some types of yearbooks are:

- collections of statistical information relating to one or more countries, e.g., *Year book Australia, Statesman’s yearbook*
- supplements to encyclopaedias published once a year to update the encyclopaedia
- summaries of recent developments in a subject area or profession, e.g., *AAAS science and technology policy yearbook, Two wheels yearbook.*

**Almanacs**

Almanacs are annual publications of useful facts and statistics. Information is often condensed into lists or tables. They were originally calendars of months and days including astronomical information, but now include more miscellaneous facts.

Examples include *Whitaker’s almanac* and *Australian sports almanac.*

**Handbooks, manuals and news summaries**

**Handbooks**

A handbook is a concise source of information for a particular field of knowledge. Handbooks are useful ready reference sources on a subject area or an occupational field, e.g., *The law handbook, Occupational asthma handbook.*

Note that some so-called handbooks do not fit this definition. There are also many handbooks that do not include the word in their title.

**Manuals**

A manual is a book that gives instructions, rules or procedures on doing, making or performing something. Manuals cover a wide range of topics, including keeping
computerised accounts, sewing, and martial arts, e.g., *The manual of karate*.

**News summaries**

News summaries are weekly or monthly looseleaf digests of news events, stored in binders in date order. They are updated and cumulated at regular intervals, and include detailed indexes. Examples include *Keesing’s record of world events* (print and online), *Facts on file*.

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**Statistics**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is the official statistical organisation for the Commonwealth and State Governments. It collects statistical information for governments, business, educators, planners, community organisations, and the public. It aims to encourage and assist informed decision-making, research and discussion in the community.

The two main types of data collection are:

- **census** - data collection about everyone or everything in a group or population. First held in Australia in 1905, censuses have been conducted every five years since 1961.

- **sample surveys** - only a part of the total population is approached, e.g., *Use of the Internet by householders*

ABS data is available in print, CD-ROM, magnetic tape, cartridges, floppy disc, microfiche, and on the Web (>http://www.abs.gov.au/)

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**Standards**

Standards Australia develops Australian standards, often in association with international standards bodies.

Standards are statements of the minimum requirements to ensure that a product, material or procedure will do the job it is intended to do.

Standards are prepared by committees representing industry, consumer organisations, trade unions and government.

The standards are constantly reviewed and updated. When using standards ensure that you consult the most recent standard.

There are over 5000 Australian standards covering topics from building codes to children’s toys. They are available in hard copy, on microfiche, on CD-ROM, and on the Web. (>http://www.standards.com.au/)

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**Annual reports**

Annual reports are valuable sources of up-to-date information on organisations, government departments, companies and
statutory bodies. They contain mission statements, personnel
details, policies, descriptions of programs, and financial
statistics.

Many annual reports are now produced electronically, on CD-
ROM and/or on the Web, as well as in hard copy.

Annual reports on the Web include the Department of
Industry, Science and Resources 1999-2000 annual report
(http://www.isr.gov.au/department/annualreport99_00/index
.html) and the Country Music Association of Australia 2000
annual report

Check the recency of Web versions, as in many cases they lag
behind the printed reports.

What is the government?

The Commonwealth and each of the states has a government
which consists of the majority grouping of those members of
Parliament who have gained election. They have the power to
oversee government departments, introduce new policies, and
control spending through its budget.

Local government is elected in a similar manner. Its members
are usually called councillors and have the authority to spend
council money and oversee the services provided at a
municipal or shire level.

The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory
have elected Houses of Assembly, and their authority covers
most of the responsibilities of state and local governments.

In some areas, governments are directly responsible for the
administration of laws and regulations, and the delivery of
services. In others, they do not have direct responsibility, but
set out regulations under which private companies and
individuals operate.

The subtopics in this section are:
- Government responsibilities
- Three levels of government
- Federal government
- State governments
- Local government
- Statutory authorities
- The legislative process
- The Australian Government
- Parliament
- The judiciary
- Government departments
- Government publications
Three levels of government

In Australia there are three levels of government.

The Federal government operates from Canberra. Its powers are defined by the Australian Constitution. It is generally responsible for areas where Australia deals with other countries, and where there is a need for national consistency or uniformity. These include defence, immigration, taxation, quarantine, trade, and social security.

State governments exist in the capital city in each State. The State governments have their powers defined by their own constitutions. They generally have power over, for example, police, emergency services, public health and education, and roads.

The Territories derive their powers from the Commonwealth and are therefore not sovereign States. However, their responsibilities are similar to those of the States.

Local government powers are defined by State Acts. Generally local governments oversee public libraries, local roads, footpaths and drains, swimming pools, land subdivision, building permits, and other local services.

Federal government

Federal government responsibilities include:

- communications and the arts
- defence
- education and training
- employment
- energy
- environment
- family services
- finance
- foreign affairs
- health
- housing
- immigration
- industry
- law
- multicultural affairs
- primary industries
- regional development
- science
- social security
• sport
• status of women
• territories
• tourism
• trade
• transport
• veterans’ affairs
• youth affairs

A government department may cover several of these areas. However the combinations change frequently, depending on the allocation of responsibilities to Ministers.

Each department is headed by a Secretary or Director who is a senior public servant. These directors administer the areas within their departments and advise Ministers on the need for changes in legislation.

Ministers ensure that the departments implement laws passed by Parliament, and follow government policies.

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**State governments**

State government departments are overseen by State Ministers. Their responsibilities include the following.

• arts
• community services
• conservation
• education
• emergency services
• energy
• finance
• health
• minerals
• natural resources
• police
• sports
• tourism
• transport

State government departments are also headed by a Secretary or Director who is a senior public servant. They have similar authority and responsibilities to their federal counterparts.
Local government

Local councils have an administrative staff managed by a Chief Executive Officer. Their responsibilities include

- building approvals
- environment
- local records
- rate collection
- recreational services
- surveying
- town planning
- garbage

Local government revenue comes from:

- federal grants for libraries, swimming pools, community halls, etc.
- fines such as parking infringements
- fees for admission to swimming pools, recycling centres, etc.
- a share of income tax revenue
- state grants
- rates from private properties
- loans which spread money over several years.

Statutory authorities

Statutory authorities are government bodies, but they are different from government departments. They have specific powers defined by legislation, and are usually directed by a commission or board.

Many statutory authorities have been privatised - that is, sold to private companies. Some bodies remain partly owned by government. Others are completely sold to private enterprise.

Here are some examples of statutory authorities that have given powers by either Federal or State government to oversee their own responsibilities.

- Australia Post
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)
- Australian Wheat Board
- Australian Competition and Consumer Corporation
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
- National Trust of Australia
- Civil Aviation Authority.
The legislative process

Most parliaments have two houses. In that case, for a Bill to become law it must pass through both Houses of Parliament. A Bill, usually introduced by the government, is generally introduced into the Lower House where it goes through a detailed process of majority voting. It is then sent to the Upper House where the process is repeated.

If the Bill gains a majority vote in both Houses of Parliament it becomes an Act of Parliament.

The Act is given Royal Assent when it is signed by the Governor in the States, or the Governor-General in Canberra, acting as the Queen’s representative. A date is set for it to take effect and a notice is published in the Government Gazette.

The Australian Government

Australia's Constitution established three separate bodies to carry out the powers of government.

Parliament - the group of elected members in Canberra who sit in Parliament House, representing different parties, and debating new legislation. Parliament has the power to make laws. Hence it is the legislative branch.

The Commonwealth Executive - the government departments, staffed by public servants, and under the direction of a Minister. They have the power to administer laws and carry out the business of government. Hence they form the executive branch.

The Federal Judicature - the courts. They have the power to enforce and, when necessary, to interpret the laws. Hence they form the judicial branch.

Information about these bodies, and corresponding information about state and territory governments, is widely available in print and electronically.

Parliament

The Australian Parliament publishes the following:

- Acts - legislation which has passed all stages and been assented to
- Subordinate legislation - statutory rules, regulations, by-laws
- Hansard - verbatim record of parliamentary debates
- Votes and Proceedings (House of Representatives) and Journals (Senate) - daily record of business
- Notice Papers - what business is proposed
- Parliamentary papers - papers that have been tabled, ordered to be printed and made available to the public.
These include annual reports, reports of royal commissions and budget papers.

It also has a website (>http://www.aph.gov.au/), which is a valuable source of up-to-date information about the Parliament itself, and about individual MPs.

**Publications of the judiciary**

The Courts publish the following.

- Official court records - transcripts of court proceedings prepared by the Commonwealth Reporting Service
- Law reports - summaries of the facts of cases, concentrating on legal matters.

Examples of law reports include:

- Commonwealth law reports
- Federal law reports
- Administrative law decisions
- Each state has its own series of law reports.

These are also available in electronic form on the SCALEplus database (>http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/), produced by the Attorney-General’s Department.

**Government departments**

Each area of government is administered by one or more departments. The departments carry out the day-to-day business of government.

These departments are collectively called the Public Service, and may employ many people. They provide the many services we take for granted in our daily lives.

Government departments are headed by a Minister, who is a member of the ruling party, and usually therefore a member of Cabinet. He or she oversees the running of one or more departments, and reports back to Parliament.

The staff of government departments usually change only slightly when a new government is elected. However, the distribution of responsibilities within each department can change whenever there is a reshuffle of Ministerial portfolios in Cabinet.

All government departments have their own website. Most also produce print publications.


**Bibliographic tools**

*Using reference works*
Bibliographic tools are used to check bibliographic details. These tools are used by technical services staff, to verify details for ordering, and to assist in cataloguing. They are also used by reader services staff, in finding information - including preparing bibliographies - for clients, and in arranging interlibrary loans.

Many of these sources of information are electronic, as hard copy publishing is expensive, and electronic information is much easier to update quickly. Online information is most up-to-date, but in many libraries information on CD-ROM is easier and cheaper to access.

Tools dealt with here include

- national bibliographies
- union catalogues
- other library catalogues
- trade bibliographies

### National bibliographies

Many countries produce a national bibliography in some form, whether as a printed publication, a CD-ROM, or an online database. Usually this responsibility is accepted by the country’s national library. National bibliographies have three main purposes:

- to serve as a long-term record of the publishing output of the country
- to aid libraries in the selection and acquisition of new materials
- to serve as a current awareness and reference source for librarians, researchers and bibliographers.

Until fairly recently, many countries produced printed national bibliographies, which were used for acquisitions and cataloguing. The cost of publication, and the increasing use of electronic databases by libraries, have led to the cessation of many countries’ printed bibliographies, including *Australian national bibliography, Canadiana*.

National libraries are developing alternatives to provide access to nationally-produced and nationally-focused material.

### Union catalogues

A national union catalogue shows the holdings of a large number of libraries in one country. In Australia, the holdings of all major (and many smaller libraries) are recorded in the National Bibliographic Database (NBD) (>http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries/resource/nbd.html). This database is accessible on the Web via the set of Kinetica services (>http://www.nla.gov.au/kinetica/), consisting of
• KineticaWeb - for searching and updating holdings
• Kinetica Document Delivery (KDD) - for interlibrary lending
• Kinetica Client - for creating catalogue records.

Kinetica is treated in detail in another section of this course.

Other union catalogues contain the holdings of a number of libraries, usually related by
• subject - e.g., health
• region - e.g., Riverina
• type of library - e.g., schools
• type of material - e.g., serials.

**Other library catalogues**


Libdex (>http://www.libdex.com/country.html) provides access to libraries world-wide whose catalogues are available on the Web.

Libraries and individuals use them to locate bibliographic information, and to verify bibliographic details.

Online catalogues are searchable in one of two ways:
• via the World Wide Web, using a Web browser
• via Telnet, using Telnet software.

Telnet software is free to download (>http://www.tucows.com/perl/tucowsSearch), and provides access to some catalogues that do not have a Web version, or where the Telnet version is easier to search.

**Trade bibliographies**

A trade bibliography is intended primarily for booksellers. It lists books in print (i.e., available from the publisher), and gives the details needed to order them. Trade bibliographies are reasonably reliable, but should not be treated as authoritative.

Trade bibliographies are produced from information supplied by publishers. Their information does not meet library cataloguing standards. Works are included regardless of date of publication, so they are a good place to start looking if you do not know the date of publication.

Each trade bibliography focuses on one form of material - books, periodicals, spoken word cassettes, computer software, videos and so on. Some are national or regional
publications; others aim (with varying success) to be international. Many are available on CD-ROMs and/or online. Publishers’ and library suppliers’ websites are also a growing source of this kind of information.

**Periodical indexing and abstracting services**

Information in periodical articles, newspapers and conference proceedings is usually more up-to-date than information in books.

To locate these items if you do not have exact bibliographic details, or to search for subjects in this literature, you need a tool that provides citations (indexing) or summaries (abstracting) of articles and papers.

Most periodical indexing and abstracting services are available electronically. However, if you need older material which was published before the relevant database was produced on CD-ROM or online, you may still need to refer to printed copies.

The subtopics in this section are:

- Indexes
- Abstracts

**Indexes**

An indexing service, or periodical index, regularly and systematically indexes the contents of periodical and sometimes other forms of publication.

Some of these are general - e.g., *Australian public affairs information service (APAIS)*.

Others are restricted to particular subject fields - e.g., *Education index*, *Biography index*, or forms of material - e.g., *Book review index*.

There are also indexes published separately or at the end of a periodical volume - e.g.,

- Index to the Sydney Morning Herald
- Granger’s index to poetry.

The information in periodical indexes consists of the bibliographical citation and subject headings.

**Abstracts**

An abstracting service provides a summary of the contents of each article, report or book as it is indexed.

Types of abstract include

- **indicative abstract**: This is a brief summary that enables readers to decide whether or not they should read the original.
• **informative abstract**: These summarise the principal arguments and information, and is often used instead of the original.

• **evaluative abstract**: These comment on the value of the original.

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### Electronic databases

You are already familiar with a number of electronic databases, of which library catalogues are the most widely used. Electronic indexing and abstracting services are also examples. However, there are many ways of searching them, and clients often need help.

In an online service, information is stored on a host computer, and clients retrieve it via the Internet.

Many libraries have CD-ROM networks, which may enable clients to access more than one database at a time.

Electronic databases include

• **bibliographic** - citations, and sometimes abstracts, of periodical articles, conference papers or chapters of edited books. Some bibliographic databases cover a wide range of subjects. Others focus on one subject only.

• **full-text** - the entire text of publications and documents, searchable by computer. Many newspapers are available as full-text databases.

Most databases require payment of an annual subscription.

The subtopics in this section are:

• Online services

• CD-ROM databases

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### Online services

Examples of online services include

• **UnCover**: (http://www.ingenta.com) an online periodical article delivery service and current awareness alerting service. It indexes nearly 18,000 English language periodicals.

• **Current Contents**: (http://connect.isihost.com/) the contents pages of 7,000 science, social sciences, arts and humanities journals.

• **FirstSearch**: (http://www.oclc.org/firstsearch/) access to databases in physics, computing, electronics, social sciences and the humanities

• **Dialog**: (http://www.dialog.com/) access to over 600 industry databases, combined information management software
Detailed guidance in training clients, and in retrieving information from databases, is provided in other sections of this course.

**CD-ROM databases**

CD-ROM databases are often less expensive for libraries to subscribe to. They are not as up-to-date as online databases, but are very useful in subject areas where up-to-the-minute currency is not essential.

**AUSTROM**

This is an invaluable Australian collection of social science databases on CD-ROM. It includes

- Australian Education Index (AEI)
- Australian Federal Police Database (AFPD)
- Attorney-General’s Information Service (AGIS)
- Australian Library and Information Science Abstracts (ALISA)
- Australian Public Affairs Information Service (APAIS)
- Australian Architecture Database (ARCH)
- Australian Sport (AUSPORT)
- Australian Criminology Database (CINCH)
- Consumer Sciences Index (CSI)
- Database on English Language Teaching for Adults in Australia (DELTAA)
- Australian Family and Society (FAMILY)
- Multicultural Australia and Immigration Studies (MAIS).

These databases are available online through Informit (http://www.informit.com.au), which also provides access to other databases.

This material is treated in greater detail in *Using networked services*.

**Internet (1)**

The Internet is huge and diverse, and not very well structured. Many library staff and users find it daunting.

It is also an invaluable resource, and it is essential to become familiar with it. You need to use it often, and also to explore some of the many tutorials available.

Once you can use the Net efficiently, and are aware of a number of useful sites, you can refer many users to a site, and let them answer their own questions. Remember, however, that many users will need help to begin with, and some will have difficulty becoming independent searchers.
Remember too that there is no quality control over the information on the Net. There is also a great deal of duplication, which can slow your search.

To decide whether information is reliable, use the same criteria you use to assess other information:

- is the information supplied by a reliable authority?
- is the author well-qualified?
- is there evidence of bias?
- is the source of the information acknowledged?
- how recent is the information - i.e., when was the website last updated?

The Internet (2)

There are three approaches to finding information on the Internet:

1. If you have a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) or address, you can enter that directly - e.g., http://www.whitehouse.gov/ to contact the White House in Washington.

2. If you have found a website, you can go from one page to another by clicking on a link.

3. If you do not have a URL, you need to use a search engine.

Searching the Net using a search engine is dealt with in *Using networked services*.