

Definition of Types of Reference Books

- abstract** A brief, objective summary of the essential content of a book, article, or other work, presenting the main points in the same order as the original but with no independent literary value. An abstract can be indicative, informative, critical, or written from a particular point of view (slanted). In a scholarly journal article, the abstract follows the title and the name(s) of the author(s) and precedes the text.
- almanac** An annual compendium of practical dates, facts, and statistics, current and/or retrospective, often arranged in tables to facilitate comparison. Almanacs can be general (example: World Almanac and Book of Facts) or related to a specific subject or academic discipline (Almanac of American Politics).
- bibliography** A systematic list or enumeration of written works by a specific author or on a given subject, or that share one or more common characteristics (language, form, period, place of publication, etc.). When a bibliography is about a person, the subject is the bibliographee. A bibliography may be comprehensive or selective. Long bibliographies may be published serially or in book form. The person responsible for compiling a bibliography is the bibliographer.
- dictionary** A single-volume or multivolume reference work containing brief explanatory entries for terms and topics related to a specific subject or field of inquiry, usually arranged alphabetically (example: Dictionary of Neuropsychology). The entries in a dictionary are usually shorter than those contained in an encyclopedia on the same subject, but the word "dictionary" is often used in the titles of works that should more appropriately be called encyclopedias (example: Dictionary of the Middle Ages in 13 volumes).
- directory** A list of people, companies, institutions, organizations, etc., in alphabetical or classified order, providing contact information (names, addresses, phone/fax numbers, etc.) and other pertinent details (affiliations, conferences, publications, membership, etc.) in brief format, often published serially (example: American Library Directory). In most libraries, current directories are shelved in ready reference or in the reference stacks.
- encyclopedia** A book or numbered set of books containing authoritative summary information about a variety of topics in the form of short essays, usually arranged alphabetically by headword or classified in some manner. An entry may be signed or unsigned, with or without illustration or a list of references for further reading. Headwords and text are usually revised periodically for publication in a new edition. In a multivolume encyclopedia, any indexes are usually located at the end of the last volume. Encyclopedias may be general (example: Encyclopedia Americana) or specialized, usually by subject (Encyclopedia of Bad Taste) or discipline (Encyclopedia of Social Work).
- handbook** A single-volume reference book of compact size that provides concise factual

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information on a specific subject, organized systematically for quick and easy access. Statistical information is often published in handbook form (example: Statistical Handbook on the American Family). Some handbooks are published serially (CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics).

index Refers to an open-end finding guide to the literature of an academic field or discipline (example: Philosopher's Index), to works of a specific literary form (Biography Index) or published in a specific format (Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature), or to the analyzed contents of a serial publication (New York Times Index). Indexes of this kind are usually issued in monthly or quarterly paperback supplements, cumulated annually.

yearbook An annual documentary, historical, or memorial compendium of facts, photographs, statistics, etc., about the events of the preceding year, often limited to a specific country, institution, discipline, or subject (example: Supreme Court Yearbook published by Congressional Quarterly). Optional yearbooks are offered by some publishers of general encyclopedias. Most libraries place yearbooks on continuation order and shelve them in the reference collection. Yearbooks of historical significance may be stored in archives or special collections.

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