

Evaluating Reference Sources

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Reference sources are extremely valuable to librarians who need to know how to best help patrons locate information. Librarians must correctly identify what a client needs and provide this in an appropriate form. Knowing what sources exist is essential to any information professional. Reference sources can provide ready answers or lead to additional sources with the pertinent information. I examined 5 reference sources librarians can use to help their patrons. For one of my sources I looked at both the online and print versions. My conclusions follow:

Boxall, P. (2006). *1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die*. New York: Universe

FRONT

Publication date: 2006

Author/editor, publisher or sponsoring organization: Editor Peter Boxall, over a hundred contributors including literary critics, academics, novelists, and poets. Universe

Organization: Preface, Introduction, Title Index, Author mini-biographies with abbreviation key. Chapters are organized by time beginning with pre-1700 then continuing to cover 1700s, 1800s, 1900s, and 2000s. Arrangement is alphabetic after the initial chronological one.

The Preface was written by novelist, biographer, and poet Peter Ackroyd.

Boxall the editor writes The Introduction where he discusses at length reviewer qualifications, and especially the difficulty encountered selecting the books to be included. He also writes how hard it was limit entries to 300 words.

Purpose: Reader's Advisory

Intended audience: high school students, college students, avid readers

How to use the resource: Entries provide short (300-word) reviews. An avid reader can identify other works to read here. All the classics seem to be represented here.

Meaning of abbreviations, symbols, etc.: The only abbreviation list included is one to identify contributors.

FLIP

Pictures: Beautiful illustrations and color pictures are inside. The book cover does not do the visuals contained inside justice. It doesn't matter what pages the book is turned to, one or two pictures will be displayed. Without the visuals the book would not be as attractive. Pictures or illustrations of older books, book covers, and movie posters of books made into film are throughout the work.

Short or long entries: Short approximately 300-word entries. The brevity forces writers to immediately focus on what makes the work compelling.

Bibliographies: Included for Editor Peter Boxall and preface writer Peter Ackroyd. Each contributor also has a short biographical entry near the beginning.

Sections: Preface, Introduction, Contributor biographies/abbreviation key, Title Index, Table of Contents, Chronological divisions-alphabetic within these, Author index, General index.

FOCUS

Reader level: intelligent high school students, college students, and avid readers

Writing clarity: Clear, to the point, advanced, not written to everyone like a newspaper

Point of view: First person is emphasized as contributors express authoritative but still opinionated views.

FINALE

An author index and general index follow the alphabetic entries in the 2000s.

Acknowledgements and picture credits are found at the end.

Scope: All the classics, works the contributors and the editor feel should be included.

Critics question the inclusion and omission of various works. A book with this title however invites this discussion.

Audience: Written to avid readers, probably high-school and college-educated readers since classics are well-represented.

Format: Hardcover book, 8.5 X 6.4 X 2.4 inches

Authority: Editor Peter Boxall is a widely published senior English lecturer at Sussex University. Contributors are literary luminaries and include critics, academics, poets, and novelists.

Currency: Recent publications are represented, if anything the work may concentrate too much on modern authors.

Purpose: The book meets its purpose. The titles chosen include many that will remain undisputed, but the very nature of this ambitious work necessarily invites debate over what is selected or not.

Uniqueness: It tells why each title is significant using an economy of words.

User Friendliness: There are 3 indexes, alphabetic chronological arrangement, and a key to writer abbreviations. It is very user friendly.

Questions this resource answers:

How many of these books have I read?

What books can I read now that are similar or by the same author?

Why did my 8th grade teacher make me read this book?

Who are some good writers today?

What did they say about *War and Peace*?

Turner, B. (2006). *The Statesman's Yearbook 2007*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

FRONT

Publication date: October 2006

Author/editor, publisher or sponsoring organization: Barry Turner, Palgrave Macmillan

Organization of chapters, sections, or volumes: Table of Contents-Time Zones Map,

Flags of the World/Map of the World (Color Pullout Section), Key World Facts,

Chronology of World Events from April 2005 to March 2006, Addenda, PART 1: Essay:

The Misapplication of Military Expenditure, Essay: The Evolution of Democracy, Essay:

The World Economy, International Organizations, PART 2: COUNTRIES OF THE

WORLD A-Z, including the following sections: Key Historical Events, Territory and

Population, Social Statistics, Climate, Constitution and Government, Government

Chronology, Recent Elections, Current Administration, Current Leaders, Defense,

International Relations, Economy, Energy and Natural Resources, Environment, Industry,

International Trade, Communications, Social Institutions, Culture, Diplomatic

Representatives, Further Reading, Abbreviations, Place and International Organizations

Index, Index of Current Leaders

Purpose of the resource : Statistical

Intended audience: Originally designed for politicians this is now used by anyone

needing information on the politics, cultures, and economies of the world.

How to use the resource: The Table of Contents and the indexes make using this resource simple.

Meaning of abbreviations: A list of abbreviations is found near the end. It is a section in the Table of Contents.

FLIP

Pictures/Maps: Color pullout section w/political world maps and flags for 192 countries

Short or long entries: These are very detailed. I was surprised to learn even uninhabited islands warranted entries.

Bibliographies: No real bibliographies

FOCUS

Reader level: Junior High School level

Writing clarity: There is nothing vague here

FINALE

Indexes: Place and International Organizations Index, Index of Current Leaders

Scope: The World

Audience: Librarians, politicians, businessmen & students all have multiple questions that can be best answered here.

Format: 1 hard-cover 5 ½ x 8 ¼ size book about 2 ½ inches thick. There is a place and international organization index at the back.

Authority: The Statesman's Yearbook has provided this information for the past 143 years.

Currency: A new edition comes out each year with updated information.

Purpose: Provides comprehensive, accurate information about the political, economic and social status of every country in the world.

Uniqueness: There are time zone maps for printed on the endpapers at the front and back. International organizations are the first entries followed by inter-country treaties and world recognized awards like the Nobel prizes. An alphabetic list of countries follows with very detailed information like a description of government systems and the title of the national anthem. Larger countries like the United States contain detailed accounts of alphabetized individual regions (US states) within the country information.

User Friendliness: Information is very easy to access.

Questions this Resource Answers

Who is the current leader of Papua New Guinea?

What form of government does Ghana have?

How do I address Tongan Royalty?

What's the population of the Chuuk islands?

What is Western Samoa's biggest export?

Benbow-Pfalzgraf, T. & Martin, R. (2002). *Contemporary Fashion*. New York: St. James Press. March 28, 2002.

FRONT

Publication date: March 28, 2002

Author/editor, publisher or sponsoring organization: Taryn Benbow-Pfalzgraf and Richard Martin, St. James Press

Organization of chapters, sections, or volumes: Alphabetic. Volume is less than an inch thick but still comprehensive. History, education of designers, related works, articles, examples of clothing and accessories, influences and inspiration. This book describes

products in detail and historical along with contemporary designers. This is essentially an encyclopedia of the fashion business for the past 55 years.

Purpose of the resource : Descriptive

Intended audience: Fashion students, professors

How to use the resource: Academics, businessmen, anyone in the fashion business should use this work. Arrangement is alphabetic so use is just like any other type of encyclopedia.

FLIP

Pictures: Like an art book this volume should be aesthetically pleasing.

It is well researched and academic but its pictures and layout fall pitifully short of its content.

Short or long entries: History, education of designers, related works, articles, examples of clothing and accessories, influences and inspiration. This book describes products in detail and historical along with contemporary designers. Each alphabetically arranged entry contains a capsule biography or company history, a list of books and articles by or about the designer, an essay, and in some entries a brief quote from the subject on design philosophy or his or her work.

Bibliographies: A comprehensive bibliography of apparel designers, brands and significant retailers primarily from the United States and Europe but including designers from Australia and Asia.

FOCUS

Reader level: High school to college

Writing clarity: Advanced but clear

Point of view: None emphasized

FINALE

Nationality Index

Scope: The English-speaking fashion world.

Audience: Budding designers can learn from its predecessors. Fashion design and merchandising programs need this in their libraries.

Format: One oversized hardcover volume with black and white pictures scattered throughout.

Authority: The late Richard Martin was the former director for The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. An award bearing his name can be found at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. The additional editor for the second Edition built on what was there.

Currency: 2002 is the date of the second edition. Since many entries are historical, material really doesn't become dated. This edition added more companies and designers but kept everything else. Future editions will probably do the same.

Purpose: A comprehensive bibliography of apparel designers, brands and significant retailers primarily from the United States and Europe but including designers from Australia and Asia.

Uniqueness: The citations and writing make this an important scholarly work.

User Friendliness: The alphabetic arrangement makes it easy to use

Questions this resource answers

Who heads Versace now?

When did Vera Wang first begin selling wedding dresses?

What innovation did Chanel start?

What country is Gucci from?

Did Isaac Mizrahi go to school to learn fashion design?

SIRS Discoverer on the Web. Retrieved March 20, 2007 from

<http://www.slco.lib.ut.us/database-sirsknowledge.htm>

FRONT

Publication date: Articles from 1992-present are indexed

Author/editor, publisher or sponsoring organization: ProQuest

Organization of chapters, sections, or volumes: The front page is colorful and filled with kid-friendly links to references, websites, 15 different subjects like science and animals, a search feature allows kids to type a subject heading or a natural language/keyword.

Articles: From over 1200 magazines, newspapers, and government documents. Each article is chosen for its educational value, interest and reading level.

Purpose: Since this is a database, it tries to fill all areas which it does rather well

Intended audience: Children 1-9 grades

How to use the resource: Log on directly at the library or authenticate by entering library card number and password from home. Database is intuitive and is easy for most children to navigate.

Meaning of abbreviations, symbols, etc.: Icons, cameras and letters-there is a legend at the top of the screen that explains these. Reading levels are also color-coded and defined at the top.

FLIP

Pictures: Lots of pictures and colors

Maps: A “Maps of the World” section can be accessed immediately from the home page

Short or long entries: Shorter entries

Bibliographies: Pathfinder link from the homepage

Sections: Search box, Animals, Arts, Countries, Cultures, Drugs and Alcohol, Environment, Health and Human Body, Kid’s Corner, History and Government, Notable People, Personal Growth, Science, Sports, Social Issues, Technology, Discoverer Web Find, Websites for kids, References, Current Events, Encyclopedia, Spotlight of the month, 2006 World Almanac for Kids, Spotlight of the Month, Make an Easter Basket, Pathfinders, Biography, Fiction, Activities, Country Facts, Photo Essays, Pictures, Maps of the World, Dictionary, Thesaurus, Educator’s Resources

FOCUS

Reader level: Color-coded reading levels include General, Easy, Moderate, and Challenging

Writing clarity: Very clear

Are there cross references to other articles: yes, pathfinders, links to additional kid-friendly information is included.

Point of view: 3rd person but none is emphasized

FINALE

Databases really don’t have ends or beginnings

Scope: Comprehensive kid-friendly information

Audience: 1-9 grade children

Format: Colorful, easy-to-navigate, kid-friendly database

Authority: The database is widely used by various school districts and libraries

throughout the United States.

Currency: This is kept current, now there are Easter crafts

Purpose: To provide a comprehensive digital source for children to make learning self-directed and fun.

Uniqueness: There are other kids' databases but this is widely used and award-winning.

User Friendliness: Very nice!

Simpson, J. A., & Weiner, E. (1989). *The Oxford English Dictionary*. London:
Oxford University Press. (20 volume set)

And

Simpson, J.A. & Weiner, E. (1989). *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved March 20,
2007 from <http://www.oed.com/>

FRONT

Publication date: 1989

Author/editor, publisher or sponsoring organization: Chief Editor John Simpson, Deputy
Chief Editor Edmund Weiner, The Oxford University Press

Organization: There are 20 volumes in the print version, website is easy to navigate and
even includes a tour to familiarize patrons with the online resource.

History: The ambitious goals the Philological Society hoped to meet in 1857 seem
Modest in comparison with the incredible achievement their initiative catalyzed.

The OED is a living document that has been growing and changing for 140
years.

Purpose of the resource: A guide to the meaning, history, and pronunciation of over half a
million words. The dictionary traces how words are used in various quotations from

literature, articles and film scripts.

Intended audience: Students at every level will appreciate the sheer volume of information available on just a single word. Identify popular quotes here for illustrations, presentations and speeches. Teachers will love this resource. I can't imagine a library not having this as part of its collection.

How to use the resource: Forget the print version! The online version is the ONLY easy way to wade through the 20 volume print set!

FLIP

Arrangement 20 volumes, online equals fine-tuned search strategies. Boolean operators can be used for more precise results. Multiple-field-searching is not exploited enough. How does anyone not take advantage of the ease and speed online searching allows?

Short or long entries: Long, comprehensive entries. More are added each quarter.

Common meanings are not described first. Historical meanings matter most. What everyone expects is there: pronunciation, derivation, meaning and usage but so are quotations that illustrate how the word is used and refines meaning.

Bibliographies: A specialist group of bibliographers are reviewing the accuracy of the source quotations on which the definitions are built. Their research ensures that the most appropriate editions of works are cited, and that the evidence is dated accurately.

Sections: Limited with the print version, online has OED news, About the OED, Subscribe to OED online, Customer Service, Learning Resources, and the Word of

Day.

FOCUS

Reader level: Advanced general, Beowulf quotations will certainly be difficult for many to understand.

Are there cross references to other works: Quotations abound from other works

Point of view: None is emphasized

FINALE

The database makes this negligible

Scope: All people interested in the English language can benefit from this comprehensive work.

Audience: Students at every level will appreciate the sheer volume of information available on just a single word. Identify popular quotes here for illustrations, presentations and speeches. Teachers will love this resource. I can't imagine a library not having this as part of its collection.

Format: I love the online format best because it provides immediate access to the 20-volume OED as well as the 3-volume *Additions Series* and the approximately 1800-new-words each quarter. OED is a historical dictionary with words treated in chronological order organized according to when quotations were made or recorded. Recent developments are listed last in each entry.

Authority: The OED is the self-proclaimed "accepted authority on the evolution of the English language over the last millennium." Since 1150 this book has been an important

reference source.

Currency: New entries added each quarter keep this resource current

Purpose: A guide to the meaning, history, and pronunciation of over half a million words.

The dictionary traces how words are used in various quotations from literature, articles and even film scripts.

Uniqueness: There is nothing that even comes close to this!

User Friendliness: Very easy to use! The "Lost for Words," feature looks up random words when a patron who doesn't know what to enter. You can take an interactive OED tour to really explore the features included in the database.

Questions this resource answers

Where can I find a quote with the word Easter in it?

Why is the word bloody offensive to the English?

How many spellings does the word color have?

What is the correct way to pronounce tomato?

What are the definitions of the word globalization?

This review considers several reference sources in great detail. Each are valuable to library students. Understanding and using these will help me with my future patrons.