

INTRODUCTION TO

*Reference  
Work*

VOLUME I



BASIC INFORMATION  
SERVICES

WILLIAM A. KATZ

SEVENTH EDITION

# INTRODUCTION TO REFERENCE WORK

*Volume I*   **Basic Information  
Sources**

*Seventh Edition*

***William A. Katz***

State University of New York at Albany

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## PREFACE

As in previous editions, this seventh edition of *Introduction to Reference Work: Volume 1, Basic Information Sources* is almost totally rewritten. It is the author's conviction that the revolution in reference sources and the reference process requires virtually complete revision.

### NEW TO THIS EDITION

Today reference libraries turn to indexes, encyclopedias, or directories for the same type of information as they did decades ago. The essential difference is threefold, and this is reflected in the text's revisions. First, one may use not only a print source, but also an electronic database, whether it be a CD-ROM, online, or over the Internet. Second, the library offers access not only to local resources, but also to all that has been published since the beginning of printing. There is little information that is not within the reach of a computer keyboard in almost every library in the United States and Canada. Third, the reference librarian uses traditional basic reference works and now acts as mediator as well, a middle person between masses of information and the user who is unable to discriminate the good from the poor, the best from the better. More and more the reference librarian has become the key professional information expert. Today she or he is necessary to filter the mass of undifferentiated information that flows over national and international networks.

Other trends in this revision are based upon probable reference services in the next decade. The changes represent a consensus among working reference librarians:

1. Networks, from local ones to international systems such as Internet, literally open up the whole globe as one impressive, for the most part disorganized, source of information. The role of the reference librarian is to mediate between this mass of data and the uses of specific clients.

2. Public, school, and academic libraries will make more databases available over networks. The reference librarians will be called upon to solve problems as they arise for individual users.

3. The new technologies are likely to increase the amount of reference services.

4. Thanks to constant changes in technology and resources, the librarian will have to continually renew, sharpen, and master new skills.

5. Subject expertise is increasingly important, particularly as the number of reference sources become more specific and the users more sophisticated.

6. Demand for instruction in the use of everything from computers to networks to pamphlets and, more particularly, online CD-ROM searching will continue to grow.

This first volume is by way of a basic-training manual. No one can move into the finer points of reference services (present and future) without an understanding and mastery of basic reference forms, no matter in what packages they are delivered. The primary purpose, as in past editions, is to offer a lucid, accurate description of basic reference sources.

## PLAN OF THE BOOK

The organization is much the same as in previous editions. There seems to be no reason to change since the text is dealing with basics which, no matter what the information highway looks like or where it wanders, are essential to information understanding and mediation.

The first section, Introduction, considers the reference services process in Chapter 1 and, in Chapter 2, the parameters and meaning of the electronic library. Both chapters are expanded. They are an introduction to the second volume of this text, *Reference Services and Reference Processes*. The initial chapters serve as an explanation to two vital areas of reference services—the community served and the technologies employed in service.

As in the previous edition, Part II, Information: Control and Access, is concerned with bibliography and indexes. At this point, though, the basic layout changes. In previous editions the focus was first on the print version of a basic reference work, with a nod to CD-ROMs and online. No more. Now, because it is the author's firm conviction that in a decade most reference works will be

available primarily in an electronic format, the focus is on CD-ROMs and online. These are highlighted. Print is secondary.

Emphasis here is on form, not on specific titles. Each form, from bibliographies to biographies, is discussed. Examples are given of titles—and particularly those titles likely to be found in most public, academic, or school libraries.

In describing each reference title the primary focus is on content, and how that content differs from, say, similar titles. The use of the reference work is indicated. Where print is highlighted, the arrangement is stressed. Where an electronic format is considered, the search patterns at the computer keyboard, or with a mouse, are the primary interest.

No exhaustive effort is made to show how to search X or Y database. Basic search patterns, especially where they are found in similar databases, are considered, but sophisticated searching is not discussed. Why? First, most schools and libraries have separate, necessary courses on database searching—whether this be a CD-ROM or an Internet point. Second, software (in which the search is found) is as likely to change as rapidly as means of delivery of information. Third, the rapid advance of software for easy-to-use searching may eliminate most, if not all need to master complex search patterns. Speed and sophistication of searches may require more skill for librarians, but even that may change. What may be a valid explanation of a search today may be nothing but history tomorrow. On the other hand, the basic content, the basic search approach is not likely to change. And that is why both are stressed.

Part III, Sources of Information, follows the pattern of previous editions. Again, entries are as they were outlined for the first section. Here, though, the focus is on using “one-stop” information sources as well as how these fit into the average reference services arrangement.

A typical entry for a given reference work begins with the CD-ROM version. Under that is given the print version and under that the online version. (Where there is no electronic database format, this is so indicated and the print version is given by itself.)

For each title, basic bibliographical information is given, including prices. It is important to recognize that prices are representative of relative costs. They change each and every year. Still the basic price difference, say, between an index in print and on CD-ROM is at least suggested. Note, too, that online costs are given primarily for DIALOG and in the per hour fashion. DIALOG and other online services are going to other methods of charging but, again, at least the per hour figures give a relative idea of cost.

Bibliographical data are based on publishers’ catalogs, *Books In Print*, *Gale Directory of Databases*, and examination of the titles. Online and CD-ROM titles, for the most part, have been used at a computer terminal. Also, the author has turned to excellent reviews for support and assistance—particularly those in the *Library Journal*, *Online*, *Database*, *RQ*, and *Choice*. The information is applicable as of late 1995 and, like price, is subject to change.

### **Suggested Reading**

In both volumes, suggested readings are found in the footnotes and at the end of each chapter. When a publication is cited in a footnote, the reference is rarely duplicated in the “Suggested Reading” section. For the most part, these readings are limited to publications issued since 1990. In addition to providing readers with current thinking, the more recent citations have the added bonus of making it easier for the student to locate the readings. It is beyond argument, of course, that *all* readings need not necessarily be current and that many older articles and books are as valuable today as they were when first published. Thanks to many teachers who have retained earlier editions of this text it is possible to have a bibliography of previous readings.

Thanks are due to the reviewers who critiqued this book. Eileen Abels, University of Maryland; Bahal El-Hadidy, University of South Florida; Ellen Getleson, University of Pittsburgh; Doug Raeber, University of Missouri; and Antonio Rodriguez-Buckingham, University of Mississippi. Thanks are also due to the editors of this volume, Bill McLane and particularly Ronda Angel whose diligence and imagination have vastly improved this edition. Thanks also to the indexer.

***William A. Katz***



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# **PART I**

## INTRODUCTION

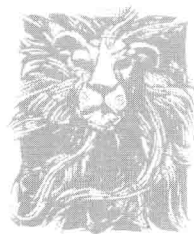




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## CHAPTER ONE

# REFERENCE LIBRARIANS ON THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY



Reference librarians answer questions. Queries may come from presidents or grade school children. The answer may be in a complex gathering of materials or may be a simple fact. Librarians act as mediators between the puzzled user and too much, or too little, information. As experts in matching questions with answers they are necessary navigators of an information highway which increasingly becomes more labyrinthine. Tortuous to follow, to discover the on- and off-ramps, the information highway's perplexities require an experienced, intelligent guide. The reference librarian is that guide.

The Sumerian librarians of some 5000 years ago responded to questions by consulting their cuneiform clay tablets. Today, the librarian turns to a computer and to a vast and growing technology for acquiring, storing, and retrieving data. A computer monitor, a keyboard, and a printer are found in the modern reference library. The librarian, or user, types in a subject, key word, author, or a multiple of other signals. The computer searches in the database(s) for what matches the signal terms. The response appears on the screen. Usually it is in the form of a citation to a specific article in a magazine (often with a description of that article, i.e., "abstract"). The user may then move on to another bit of data or print out what is on the screen. The user may download the material as well. "Download" is self-explanatory; it is a method of transfer of data from the main online computer source to the user's computer. The copy is made usually on a disc or diskette which can be viewed or printed.

CD-ROMs and online processing and communication networks such as Internet are at the heart of this textbook and discussed in detail throughout. Most readers will know what these are and, indeed, will have worked actively with



one or all of the format. Still, as a brief reminder: a CD-ROM (“compact disc-read-only memory”) appears to be a CD from which one plays music. It holds up to 250,000 pages of text. Also, if “multimedia” programmed, it can hold pictures, sound, music, and so on. “Online” refers to information gathering from a server or mainframe computer’s “database.” Internet is a good example. Information in digital form is impressive. For example, the Library of Congress has taken 195 years to collect close to 14 million books. The Internet’s World Wide Web has added about 10 million electronic documents at a quarter million Web sites in less than three years. The importance of quality and selection aside, there is no question about the future of digitalized information.

All of the various electronic information databases are accessed at a computer, either a home PC (personal computer) or a library terminal. At a minimum even the smallest library will have one computer with a popular, general index on a CD-ROM. In 1996 approximately 80 percent of American libraries, regardless of type or size, have some type of CD-ROM reference work, usually an index. Online and additional CD-ROMs are found in about 50 percent of the medium to large libraries. The larger, the richer the library the more evidence there is of electronic forms of information. Small- to medium-sized libraries still rely primarily on printed reference works. No matter what type or size the library, all reference sections still rely on printed materials. Most reference questions are answered from such works, particularly as the electronic databases rarely cover data published before the mid-1980s.

The confusion is the degree of choice. Now reference librarians not only have countless reference sources to select from, but almost as many potential delivery systems, from print to CD-ROMs and magnetic tapes to online. Which format is best? Which CD-ROM, out of a half dozen possible choices of the same reference work, is best? Each question requires an individual decision. There is some compensation: “Countless choices mean complexity and, sometimes, even chaos. But choices, complexity, and even chaos mean that (librarians) have the opportunity to be in control. This control may be manifested in the search engines and interfaces we use; the pricing options we select (or if we don’t like any of them, getting the information elsewhere); and the form, format, and appearance of the information we retrieve. Our ultimate form of control is always having the choice to select which . . . systems we choose to continue to search.”<sup>1</sup>

Reference librarians do a number of things besides mastering electronic formats. They teach how to use CD-ROMs and online; are experts on acquisition of information sources; and are equally skilled in knowing what should be discarded from the collection. From day to day they take part in countless meetings and often act as administrators. Then there are the nitty-gritty aspects of the profession. Fixing the jammed printer next to the computer terminal or

<sup>1</sup>Carol Tenopir, “Changes and Choices,” *Library Journal*, December 1994, p. 34.