
Handbooks on Library Practice

PRINTED REFERENCE MATERIAL

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY
GAVIN L. HIGGENS



THE LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION
LONDON

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Published by Library Association Publishing
Limited, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE
and printed and bound by
Redwood Burn Limited, Trowbridge.

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First edition 1980
Second edition 1984

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Printed reference material.—2nd ed.

1. Reference books—Bibliography

I. Higgins, Gavin L.

011'.02 Z1035.1

ISBN 0 85365 995 8 (cased)

ISBN 0 85365 776 9 (paper)

Typeset by Input Typesetting Ltd, London SW19 8DR

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Preface to the First Edition

The third (and final) edition of *INTRODUCTION TO REFERENCE BOOKS*, by A. D. Roberts, appeared in 1956. First published in 1948, the book was written because the author considered that existing textbooks on the subject were badly out-of-date. The work was a great success, and I still have on my own shelves a copy of the first edition, which I bought in 1949 when I was a student.

The period since 1956 has been one of great significance in the field of librarianship in general, and in the area of information retrieval and dissemination in particular; it has, in fact, been the period of the 'information explosion', during which a vast amount of reference material has appeared for the first time. Many important and well-established items, which the reference librarian now takes for granted as being an integral part of his stock, had not appeared in print when Roberts produced his final text. Examples which spring to mind include *BRITISH TECHNOLOGY INDEX*; *GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS*; *MCGRAW-HILL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*; and *WHO OWNS WHOM*.

A growing awareness of the need for effective library-based information services has resulted in the establishment of many new libraries, particularly in the fields of industry, commerce, and further education. The number of universities has increased, and some

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30 polytechnics have been created. To deal with the information explosion, many more librarians and information scientists have been needed; extra schools of librarianship have been formed, and larger annual intakes of students accepted. Finally, The Library Association's examinations have been largely replaced by degrees in librarianship, or by postgraduate diplomas in the subject.

In 1976, the Panel of Assessors of The Library Association concluded that there was a demonstrable need for a work which would effectively up-date Roberts. In producing this work, at their request, I have kept Roberts' framework in mind: due account has been taken, however, of subsequent developments such as on-line retrieval, and appropriate space has been allocated to conference proceedings, symposia, standard specifications, patents, reports, statistical materials, and microforms.

The objective has been to provide, for students and researchers; recently appointed reference staff; and practising librarians, working in small information units, with limited stocks, a practical handbook containing:

- (a) some general remarks on reference materials, their evaluation, and use;
- (b) a consideration of the reference process, including general strategies for dealing with reference enquiries;
- (c) a series of succinct chapters, each by an authoritative contributor, dealing with the various categories of reference material.

Each chapter normally consists of a short general/historical introduction, followed by brief descriptions and comparative critical evaluations of individual items, including those, where appropriate, in microform. It concludes with citations and references, numbered sequentially, as in the text; and with suggestions for further reading. It will be apparent that some contributors have provided these suggestions in the form of a narrative, while others have preferred to list items alphabetically, and to add any necessary notes of explanation. Students should examine both methods, and assess their respective merits and disadvantages. The discerning reader will notice that throughout the text there are variations in bibliographical presentation. Although the British Standards Institution

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has published recommendations relating to bibliographical references (BS 1629: 1976), the librarian and the researcher will still encounter such variations; the opportunity has therefore been taken to provide examples in these chapters.

A work of this nature and length cannot, and should not, aim to be comprehensive; as its title states, it is intended to be a handbook: therefore it does not deal in depth with the literatures of special subject fields. Instead, it concentrates on categories of reference material. Fortunately, two excellent surveys of the literature are available—Walford's *GUIDE TO REFERENCE MATERIAL*, and Sheehy's *GUIDE TO REFERENCE BOOKS*. The first edition of the British work by Dr Walford was still in the production stages in 1956; in contrast, the American work now edited by Sheehy was originally issued in 1902, and had respectively as its previous editors Alice Kroeger, Isadore Mudge, and Constance Winchell. The present work is in no way intended to duplicate Walford or Sheehy; wherever possible, students and practising librarians should use it in conjunction with one or both of the guides.

In general, a structured approach has been adopted in the writing of this book. There would be little point in presenting a detailed account of the value and contents of such a generally available work as *WHITAKER'S ALMANACK*, since all of our readers should have access to it, and be able to examine it for themselves. In deciding at what length to write on any particular item, or kind of reference material, we have been guided by its relative importance, and by the extent to which it is likely to be available in small, medium, or large reference systems; we have also taken into consideration the existence of other satisfactory accounts which the student can read to supplement our own description. Where possible, we have taken a first-rate, easily obtainable example, and used this as a criterion against which other examples can be measured.

Finally, I should like to record my grateful thanks to all the contributors, who cheerfully accepted their allotted chapters—and met their deadlines!

GAVIN HIGGENS

May 1979

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In this second edition the coverage of the subject has been increased by the addition of three new chapters. These deal respectively with printed visual sources, videotex information and communication systems, and indexes.

The chapter on local studies has been retained, since many reference librarians have to administer and exploit collections of local interest, and researchers make extensive use of such source material. Significantly, in 1983, the University of York instituted pilot projects to test a method for the construction of a bibliographic database of printed materials in this general field.

The Editor would welcome any constructive criticism about the contents of PRM, so that future issues may meet, in the best possible way, the needs of its users.

March 1984

G.L.H.

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