

*A Guide to*

*Library  
Research  
Methods*

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## Preface

Yet another book on how to do research—why?

The answer lies in the nature of the subject. Quite simply, a multitude of options are involved in doing research, and every writer who looks at them will have a different perspective on how they may be categorized and on which elements should be emphasized over others. My own view has been formed partially on the basis of experiences I've had as an academic researcher at the doctoral level, as a private investigator with a detective agency, as a graduate student in library science, as a free-lance researcher, as a reference librarian at two universities, as a specialist in government documents and microforms, as a database searcher, and as a general reference librarian at the largest library in the world. A second forming element derives from my having observed thousands of other researchers at work, which I have had the opportunity to do for many years. What the aggregate of all this has suggested to me is that most researchers unconsciously work within a framework of very limited assumptions about the extent of information that is easily available to them; and, further, most have only very hazy notions of what is the range of *methods* of searching. It strikes me, too, that other writers on the subject who are not librarians tend to overlook some fundamentally important steps and distinctions in describing the research process, and even unconsciously to perpetuate certain harmful notions. And some librarians who have written on the subject have not placed the weight and emphasis on certain matters

that scholars and other investigators require; indeed, library guides frequently offer little more than lists of individual printed sources with no overall perspective on methods or techniques or research. And very few writers of any sort give examples of what to do—or of what not to do, which may be the more instructive.

Much of what I've discovered over the last fifteen years I have had to learn "the hard way," and I especially hope to save the reader from some of the more egregious mistakes and omissions I've been guilty of myself at one time or another. Unlike many people whom I've had the occasion to help, I have had the fortunate (although painful) experience of having had such mistakes systematically brought to my attention by the several shifting professional perspectives I've had on the same types of problems. What this has done for me, I think, is to make certain patterns in research behavior more evident, specifically:

- Patterns in the types of questions that people ask, and in how they ask them.
- Patterns in the usually unconscious assumptions they hold about what can be done.
- Patterns in the bad advice they are sometimes given by teachers, employers, and colleagues.
- Patterns in the mistakes and omissions that reduce the efficiency of their research.

Viewed collectively, these patterns tend to suggest the areas in which most people need the most help, and it is on this group of concerns I wish to concentrate. I hope especially to give readers a sense of the principles and rules involved that are applicable in any situation, and not just an annotated bibliography of particular sources. I also hope that, through some of the examples I've come across in my own research projects and in helping others (from which I've sometimes created composite examples for this book), this guide will give readers a sense not only of the strengths of the various approaches but of their limitations as well. And I hope to provide a perspective of how the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of searching tend to correct and balance each other in the total information system.

This book could not have been written without the help and expertise of many people. I especially want to thank D. W. Schneider and

Fred Peterson, without whom the project would never have been started. Francis Miksa provided a solid grounding in the principles of systematic research, and a number of other colleagues have provided useful advice, information, or criticisms of the manuscript. Among the latter I wish to thank Adele Chwalek, Lucinda Conger, Sally Fleming, Nannette Gibbs, Gary Jensen, Carolyn Lee, Maria Lacqueur, Rodney Phillips, Roberta Scull, Paul Wasserman, and Steve Zink. Linda Sacks, Theresa Rosen, and Eugene Garfield from the Institute for Scientific Information were most helpful; and I am grateful to the H. W. Wilson Company for permission to quote extensively from one of their booklets.

The list of people from whom I have learned much at the Library of Congress would include whole sections of the Library's staff directory. I am particularly indebted to those from whom I received especially useful information, examples, or criticism: Sam Andrusko, Carol Armbruster, Pat Bernard, George Caldwell, Agnes Ferruso, John Feulner, Judy Furash, Ann Gardner, Anne Marie Gwynn, Annette Hale, Victoria Hill, Richard Howard, Anna Keller, Brent Kendrick, Sandy Lawson, Sarah Pritchard, Judith Reid, Bill Reitwiesner, Dave Smith, and Virginia Wood.

While this book assembles the insights of many people, I must emphasize that its shortcomings are attributable only to myself. The opinions, value judgments, and criticisms expressed within it are also my own; they should not be taken to represent the official views or policy of any organization with which I am or have been affiliated.

*Washington, D.C.*  
*October 1986*

T. M.

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## Abbreviations

<b>ARBA</b>	<b><i>American Reference Books Annual</i></b>
<b>A&amp;HCI</b>	<b><i>Arts &amp; Humanities Citation Index</i></b>
<b>BRS</b>	<b>Bibliographic Retrieval Services, a commercial company that provides dial-up access to computer databases</b>
<b>ISI</b>	<b>Institute for Scientific Information, publisher of <i>Citation indexes</i></b>
<b>LC</b>	<b>Library of Congress</b>
<b>LCSH</b>	<b><i>Library of Congress Subject Headings</i></b>
<b>NTIS</b>	<b>National Technical Information Service</b>
<b>NUC</b>	<b><i>National Union Catalog</i></b>
<b>OCLC</b>	<b>Online Library Computer Center (maintains database of cataloging records from many libraries)</b>
<b>RLIN</b>	<b>Research Libraries Information Network</b>
<b>SCI</b>	<b><i>Science Citation Index</i></b>
<b>SDC</b>	<b>System Development Corporation, a commercial company which provides dial-up access to computer databases</b>
<b>SSCI</b>	<b><i>Social Sciences Citation Index</i></b>
<b>WLN</b>	<b>Western Library Network</b>



# 1

## *Initial Overviews: Encyclopedias*

The best way to start many inquiries is to see if someone has already written an overview that outlines the most important facts on the subject and provides a concise list of recommended readings. And this is precisely the purpose of an encyclopedia article.

Unfortunately, the *abuse* of encyclopedias tends unnecessarily to limit their effectiveness both for the student writing a term paper and for the business executive, professional, or independent learner the individual will become after leaving the classroom. This abuse comes in two forms: (1) in expecting an encyclopedia to be the beginning *and end* of a complex inquiry, and (2) in expecting the general encyclopedias that everybody knows about to provide a level of detail found only in the specialized encyclopedias that very few people know about. When students get inadequate results from general sets, they frequently tend to change their overall assumptions regarding the future use of all encyclopedias.

The first point to be emphasized is that encyclopedias should be regarded as good starting points for nonspecialists who need a basic overview of a subject or a background perspective on it—but that they should not be seen as compendiums of “all knowledge” that will make further specialized research unnecessary. Nor should one expect currency from such sources—it is the newspaper or the journal and not the encyclopedia that one should turn to for current events (a distinction that seems to be lost on many encyclopedia salesmen). Part of the

problem people have with the encyclopedias is that schools (even universities) tend to leave students with only hazy notions of what *other* sources lead quickly to the more specialized or current information, and so researchers often don't perceive what should be starting points within a clear context of what lies beyond.

The second point to be emphasized is that a deeper level of the specialized information is available in encyclopedias if one knows enough to look beyond the familiar *Britannica*, *Americana*, *World Book*, or *Collier's*. There are scores of specialized sets, or sometimes one-volume works, covering particular fields of knowledge—"specialized" in the sense of concentrating on certain subject areas, not in the sense of being written in the jargon of specialists. The whole purpose of any encyclopedia is to provide an orientation to someone who is not already conversant with the subject being discussed. A real expert will usually not need an introductory overview within his or her own field, but may require one for other areas.

Sometimes, however, the expert will need a large overview of recent or technical developments within his own field; but the sources providing these perspectives are not introductory and they are written in a way that assumes the reader already knows the basics. For them, the researcher will turn to review articles, not encyclopedias. The business executive, professional, or independent learner who has left academia will get the most mileage out of encyclopedias by using the specialized sets in conjunction with, or as background for, these review articles (see Chapter 7).

But even researchers still in school will usually get more information from specialized rather than general encyclopedias. People seeking introductory articles in the sciences, for example, will often be better served by the *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology* (20 vols.; McGraw-Hill, 1987), which is the standard set in its field, rather than *Britannica*, *Americana*, *Collier's*, or *World Book*. Similarly, those in the social sciences will frequently be better off turning to the authoritative *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (15 vols.; Macmillan, 1930–1935) and its successor and supplement, the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (18 vols.; Macmillan, 1968–1979). Students in the arts, too, should consult the specialized works in these areas, among them the excellent *Encyclopedia of World Art* (15 vols.; McGraw-Hill, 1959–1968) and the *New Grove*

*Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. (20 vols.; Macmillan, 1980). (Don't be misled by the term "dictionary"—in library and publishing terminology it refers simply to the alphabetical arrangement of articles without regard to their length, so it is often synonymous with "encyclopedia.")

Among the scores of relatively little-known specialized encyclopedias these titles are especially good; other works that are considered standard in their fields include:

*Dictionary of American History* (8 vols.; Scribner's, 1976)

*Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols.; reprint, 11 vols. and supplements; Scribner's, 1927— )

*Dictionary of National Biography* (22 vols. and supplements; Oxford University Press, 1917— )

*Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (16 vols.; Scribner's, 1970–1980)

*Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (5 vols.; Scribner's, 1973–1974)

*Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (13 vols.; Scribner's, 1983— )

*Encyclopedia of American Religions* (2 vols.; McGrath, 1978)

*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (8 vols. reprinted in 4; Macmillan, 1967, 1972)

*New Catholic Encyclopedia* (17 vols.; McGraw-Hill, 1967–1979)

*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols. and supplement; Abingdon, 1962)

*Encyclopedia of Education* (10 vols.; Macmillan, 1971)

*International Encyclopedia of Education* (10 vols.; Pergamon, 1985)

*International Encyclopedia of Higher Education* (10 vols.; Jossey-Bass, 1977)

*International Encyclopedia of Psychiatry, Psychology, Psychoanalysis & Neurology* (12 vols.; Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977)

*Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (1 vol.; Funk and Wagnalls, 1973)

*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Mathematics* (2 vols.; MIT Press, 1977)

*Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia* (13 vols.; Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972–1975)

Although the above are certainly important, they by no means exhaust the field. Some other representative titles that may suggest the range of available works include:

- The Australian Encyclopedia* (6 vols.)  
*Cassell's Encyclopedia of World Literature* (3 vols.)  
*Dictionary of Named Effects and Laws in Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics*  
*Encyclopaedia Judaica* (16 vols.)  
*Encyclopaedia of Islam*  
*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (13 vols.)  
*Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Physics* (9 vols. and supplements)  
*Encyclopedia of Accounting Systems* (3 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of American Economic History* (3 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy* (3 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of American Journalism*  
*Encyclopedia of American Political History* (3 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Anthropology*  
*Encyclopedia of Banking and Finance*  
*Encyclopedia of Biochemistry*  
*Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (4 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Chemistry*  
*Encyclopedia of Computer Science*  
*Encyclopedia of Crafts* (3 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice* (4 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Earth Sciences* (A series of one-volume encyclopedias covering Oceanography, Atmospheric Science and Astrogeology, Geochemistry and Environmental Sciences, and Geomorphology; other volumes are planned)  
*Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (4 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Electronics*  
*Encyclopedia of Engineering Materials and Processes*  
*Encyclopedia of Fluid Mechanics* (6 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Food*  
*Encyclopedia of Historic Places* (2 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Human Behavior* (2 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Seventies* (a companion volume to *Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties*)  
*Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (36 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Management*  
*Encyclopedia of Microscopy*  
*Encyclopedia of Military History from 3,500 B.C. to the Present*  
*Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture*



*Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*  
*Encyclopedia of Physical Science and Technology* (15 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Prehistoric Life*  
*Encyclopedia of Psychology* (4 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Religion* (16 vols.)  
*Encyclopedia of Soviet Law*  
*Encyclopedia of Spectroscopy*  
*Encyclopedia of the American Constitution*  
*Encyclopedia of Themes and Subjects in Painting*  
*Encyclopedia of Urban Planning*  
*Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* (4 vols.)  
*The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (32 vols.)  
*Grzimek's Encyclopedia of Evolution*  
*Guide to American Law: Everyman's Legal Encyclopedia* (12 vols.)  
*International Encyclopedia of Statistics*  
*Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (9 vols.)  
*McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Energy*  
*Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (4 vols.)  
*Macmillan Illustrated Animal Encyclopedia*  
*A Milton Encyclopedia* (9 vols.)  
*The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History* (projected  
40+ vols., in progress)  
*Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa* (12 vols.)  
*Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia*  
*World Encyclopedia of Peace*  
*World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* (2 vols.)  
*World Press Encyclopedia*  
*Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations* (5 vols.)  
*Worldmark Encyclopedia of the States*

Some of the subjects suggested here are covered by other specialized works, too; and then there are encyclopedias for still other subjects as well.

Foreign-language encyclopedias are often overlooked, but they too are very valuable. Often they are the only sources for information on obscure figures who played roles in the history of foreign countries, and their illustrations are sometimes more useful than those in the English-language sets.

If you wish to find out if your own library has an encyclopedia on