

Reference

Reference should be one of the **first steps** in your research strategy

Reference: Assortment of information that has been gathered, summarized, arranged, and published by human-beings that have some meaningful scope.

Reference material allows you to get a **broad overview** of your subject or topic and gather **background information**. It also **introduces language** that is specific to the research subject area. This can aid you in designing your research question and picking out search terms. At the initial stages of research, general information is necessary. A good general reference item should provide enough description to suggest narrower categories of inquiry. It might also suggest the size and scope of the general topic. Subject-specific reference material will focus on specific things.

The Print reference is located next to the two green love seats just beyond the circulation desk. They are organized by Dewey Decimal Classification System ranging from call numbers 001-999. In our print reference collection you will find subject-specialized and general, non-circulating material.

Basic reference search strategy:

- Read background information on your research topic in 1 or more general encyclopedias.
- Read more specialized information on your research topic in 1 or more specialized encyclopedias.
- As you are reading take notes for new language and terminology, names, issues and events that pertain to your topic that you will want to look up further on in the research process.

Encyclopedia: Reference work that holds a summary of information from a particular or general branch of knowledge. Use an encyclopedia to choose a topic, familiarize yourself with key aspects of that topic and to brainstorm search strategies.

General Encyclopedia:

Example: Encyclopedia Britannica

Subject Specific Encyclopedia: *more acceptable to cite than the general encyclopedia*

Example: Encyclopedia of Sociology

Statistical Abstracts: A work that contains statistical information or data.

Example: Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present

Directory: A work that identifies people, organizations, government agencies, libraries, archives, and other entities a researcher may wish to contact.

Concordance: A list of words in a specific work or group of works by the same person.

Example: Complete Concordance to the Bible, New King James Version

Almanac: Miscellaneous assortment of practical information on a variety of topics.

Example: Old Farmer's Almanac

Dictionary: A work that contains a collection of words and their definitions.

Example: The Oxford-Duden Pictorial Spanish-English Dictionary

Biographical Dictionary: Provides relatively short accounts of the lives of prominent people.
Example: Who's Who in America

Handbook: Brings together a whole array of basic information about a field/topic.
Example: CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics

Atlas: Group of maps
Example: Atlas of the Civil War

Thesaurus: Synonym dictionary
Example: Roget's Thesaurus

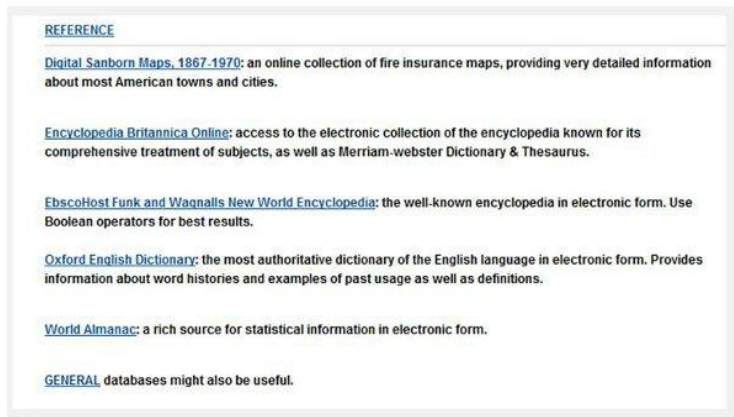
How to find a subject-specific reference resource in the online card catalog:

Perform a *keyword search* using the **AND Boolean Operator**

Examples: Encyclopedia **AND** Crime
Dictionary **AND** Crime
Thesaurus **AND** Crime

To get to our online reference resources:

- go to www.ic.edu
- click on the **QuickLinks Drop-down Box** on the top right hand side of the screen
- Click on the **Library** link located halfway down the list
- Click on **Database by Topic**
- Click on the **Reference** link



The screenshot shows a library reference page with the following content:

REFERENCE

[Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970](#): an online collection of fire insurance maps, providing very detailed information about most American towns and cities.

[Encyclopedia Britannica Online](#): access to the electronic collection of the encyclopedia known for its comprehensive treatment of subjects, as well as Merriam-webster Dictionary & Thesaurus.

[EbscoHost Funk and Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia](#): the well-known encyclopedia in electronic form. Use Boolean operators for best results.

[Oxford English Dictionary](#): the most authoritative dictionary of the English language in electronic form. Provides information about word histories and examples of past usage as well as definitions.

[World Almanac](#): a rich source for statistical information in electronic form.

GENERAL databases might also be useful.

The Internet Public Library: <http://www.ipl.org> is a great online reference resource. Click on Resources by subject and browse to find a subject-specific reference material that suits your needs