

Finding and Using Reference Materials

Have you ever needed or wanted to know.....

- the population of some city or country?
- the definition of a term or phrase in an unfamiliar field?
- the maximum harbour draught of a port?
- all the chemical reactions of a particular chemical structure?
- a Shepard's Citation listing all the authorities citing a particular case, statute, or other legal authority?

What Is a Reference Collection?

A library's Reference Collection is used to gather together in one convenient location standard references like encyclopedias, handbooks, and dictionaries that will provide answers to questions on any topic in any field of research. A Reference Collection can either be electronic or print.

- For **electronic reference resources**, refer to the JKW Library's directory [Article Databases by Subject/Discipline](#), available on the JKW Library's homepage. Select the subject or discipline that represents the type or category of information you need, and in the resulting list of electronic resources/article databases, the reference sources for that subject/discipline will be designated with a yellow star ★.
- For **hardcopy reference source** refer to the JKW Library's [ClipperCat](#), the library's online, publicly-accessible catalog.

Typical Reference Sources

Although there are many more types of sources in a Reference Collection than is practical to cover here, following are some of the most commonly collected types of reference books.

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|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| • Almanacs | • Directories | • Statistical Works |
| • Atlases | • Encyclopedias | • Yearbooks |
| • Bibliographies | • Gazetteers | |
| • Biographies | • Handbooks | |
| • Dictionaries | • Indexes | |

If you are looking for:	Try searching for:
A biography of Elvis Presley	A biographical dictionary of contemporary musicians. Your subject keywords might be <i>music</i> and <i>biography</i> . Try variations on the words, such as <i>musician</i> or <i>musicians</i> and <i>biographical</i> or <i>biographies</i> .
The history of General Electric Company	An encyclopedia of company histories. Try searching by subject keyword for <i>company</i> and <i>history</i> and <i>encyclopedia</i> .
Demographic data for Charleston, South Carolina	A statistical source for the United States. You might try using <i>united states</i> and <i>demographics</i> as your starting subject keywords.
Recent developments in mainstreaming handicapped children	A handbook or manual that covers recent developments in education. Try searching the subject keywords <i>education</i> and <i>handbook</i> .
The definition of the musical term <i>a capella</i>	A dictionary of music. Try the subject keywords <i>music</i> and <i>dictionary</i> .
A date-by-date overview of American history for the year 1886	A chronology of American history. Try <i>united states</i> and <i>chronology</i> as your subject keywords.

Williams Library, Texas A&M University at Galveston, May 26, 2010
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