Reference Tools

Keep these in mind as you conduct the reference interview!
Types of Reference Books*

- General: broad in scope and deal with all topics.
- Specialized: narrow, subject/topic specific.
- Books: may have online equivalent
  - Online content may be “hidden” or not search engine accessible (i.e. subscription only or dynamic)
Dictionaries

- Purpose: to define words
- Other features might include
  - pronunciation
  - etymology
  - abbreviations
  - grammar and usage guides
  - illustrations
  - gazetteers
  - biographical entries
Types of Dictionaries

**General:**

- **Abridged:** Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Basic English
- **Unabridged:** Oxford English Dictionary (OED)
  - OED Online (by subscription; PCC has [http://www.oed.com/](http://www.oed.com/))
- **Bilingual/translation** Swahili-English Dictionary
  - Google translate (accuracy varies)
- **Linguistic** The Buzzword Dictionary; 2001 English Idioms
Types of Dictionaries:

Specialized: Focus on a discipline or subject; may also be called a ‘glossary’

Examples:

- Blacks Law Dictionary
- Dictionary of the Bible
- The Oxford Dictionary of Dance
- The Computer Glossary: the Complete Illustrated Dictionary
- McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms
- American Sign Language Handshape Dictionary

Online equivalents may be available; may require subscription
Encyclopedias

- More detailed than a dictionary

Definition from **ODLIS**:

“A book or numbered set of books containing authoritative summary information about a variety of topics in the form of short essays, usually arranged alphabetically by headword or classified in some manner. An entry may be signed or unsigned, with or without illustration or a list of references for further reading.”
Encyclopedias

- **General**: all topics
  Goal is to put all the world’s knowledge in 20+ volumes.
  - *World Book Encyclopedia* (print and online)
  - *Encyclopedia Britannica* (print and online: Britannica.com)
  - Wikipedia

- **Specialized/subject specific**: Might be one volume
  - *Encyclopedia of Religion*
  - *Encyclopedia of Sports*
  - *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*
  - *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Costume and Fashion: from 1066 to the Present* (pub in 1994)
Indexes and Databases

Subject guides to:
- books
- periodicals
- websites

What’s the difference between an index and a database?
Indexes and Databases

- General:
  - Book Review Index (book reviews published in periodicals)
  - Essay and General Literature Index (essays published in periodicals)
  - Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature
  - ProQuest (online database of periodical articles)

- Specialized:
  - Art Index
  - Humanities Index
  - Granger’s Index to Poetry
  - Grove Art Online
  - Grove Music Online
Almanacs and Yearbooks

- Statistics and events in a given year.

- **General:**
  - *World Almanac*
  - *Statesman’s Yearbook*
  - *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

- **Specialized:**
  - *Almanac of American History*
  - *Astronomical Almanac*
  - *Native American Almanac*
Atlases and Gazetteers
(Geographical Information)

**General**
- Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World
- National Geographic Atlas of North America
- Webster’s New Geographical Dictionary
- Google Maps

**Specialized**
- California Gold Camps
- Atlas of American Women
- World Atlas of the Oceans
- Historical Atlas of California
Biographical Sources

Bio = about people

General

* Biography In Context (subscription)
* Biography.com
* Current Biography
* Who’s Who in America
* Dictionary of National Biography
* Dictionary of American Biography

Specialized

* American Men and Women of Science
* Contemporary Artists
* Contemporary Authors in *Literature Resource Center* database
* Dictionary of Scientific Biography
Handbooks, Manuals, Directories

- Handbooks – guides to information
- Manuals – guides, “how – to”
- Directories
  - Lists
  - Direct you to source or contact
  - Phone books
  - Yelp!
Handbooks, Manuals, Directories

**General**
- Encyclopedia of Associations
- Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory
- United States Government Organization Manual
- Online directories – guides to websites
  - CA.gov
  - Usa.gov

**Specialized**
- Handbook of Chemistry and Physics
- Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy
- The PDR Family Guide to Prescription Drugs.
- Handbook to American Literature
How do you choose?

- Define the question
- Consider the *type* of information needed.
- Select the best source to find the information.
  - Print or online: may depend on library’s collection and date sensitivity of topic
- Don’t be frustrated if you’re wrong!
  You may need to use more than one source