


## Subject: Library and Information Science

Production of Courseware

 -Content for Post Graduate Courses



**Paper No: 04** Information Sources, Systems and Services

**Module : 06** Encyclopaedias: Use and Evaluation



### Development Team

Principal Investigator  
&  
Subject Coordinator

Dr. Jagdish Arora, Director  
INFLIBNET Centre, Gandhinagar

Paper Coordinator

Mrs Renu Arora  
Former Head, Education and Training, NISCAIR

Content Writer

Dr Pawan Gupta / Dr Usha Pawan  
Former Director, Rajasthan University  
Library/Formal Associate Professor, Department of

Content Reviewer

Mrs Renu Arora  
Former Head, Education and Training, NISCAIR

## **Module 6: Encyclopaedias: Use and Evaluation**

### **I. Objectives**

This module will acquaint the users with various types of encyclopaedia which serve as background sources of information. After learning this module, the users will be able to understand the usefulness of different types of encyclopaedias, and will come to know some typical encyclopaedias available in libraries and how to make use of these to search specific information. The objective is:

- To permit conceptualise background sources of information.
- To know a few encyclopaedias, providing background information.
- To help evaluate encyclopaedias.
- To describe a few encyclopaedias for background information.

### **II. Learning Outcome**

This module will acquaint the students with various types of encyclopaedias which serve as background sources of information. After learning this module, you will be able to understand the usefulness of different types of encyclopaedias, and will come to know some typical encyclopaedias available in libraries and how to make use of these to search specific information. The module will also conceptualise background sources of information, explain a few encyclopaedias by providing background information. You will also learn to evaluate encyclopaedias and be able to describe a few encyclopaedias for background information.

### **III. Module Structure**

1. Introduction
2. Types of Encyclopaedias
  - 2.1 General Encyclopaedia
  - 2.2 Subject Encyclopaedias
  - 2.3 Single Volume Encyclopaedias
  - 2.4 Some Indian Encyclopaedias
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5. Evaluation of Encyclopaedias
  - 5.1 Authority
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  - 5.7 Limitations
  - 5.8 Special Features
6. References

## **1. Introduction**

“A book designed by the arrangement and treatment of its subject matter to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively...”<sup>1</sup> is defined by the A L A Glossary of Library and Information Science as a reference book.

Curiosity to know, the need to find out a fact or piece of information has driven men to produce what is known as encyclopaedia. The encyclopaedias consolidate the standardised information, the information which is more permanent in nature, or as people may like to identify it as background information. Traditionally the encyclopaedias have made efforts to answer a variety of questions from all age groups, more often on all subjects, seeking general overview of a given subject area.

The term encyclopaedia is often applied to reference works having articles on one or all branches of knowledge. These are mostly arranged in an alphabetical order, are often profusely illustrated, and have a detailed bibliography to make it authentic and to afford further reading by the users. Encyclopaedias have a good index and many cross references to help the users to have a better and easy access to complete information available in the encyclopaedia. Encyclopaedia is also termed as ‘cyclopaedia’. The term ‘cyclopaedia’ is often restricted in usage to smaller encyclopaedias which are limited in their scope to a single branch of information or a relatively smaller subject area.

Due to obvious day to day usage by all types of users these are increasingly acquired and kept up-to-date with supplements, yearbooks, etc in libraries and information centres. It may be stated here that encyclopaedias as sources of information constitute an essential part of the reference collection, more so as secondary source of information. Being physically voluminous and costly publications, encyclopaedias are not normally acquired by individuals. This is another reason for maintaining stock of encyclopaedias in the libraries. These are extremely valuable in making available factual, general, and background information on a variety of subjects to the users, and hence suitable for solving regular inquiries on the reference desk. To find this type of information, people visit libraries, or now-a-days approach internet resources, e-encyclopaedias, etc.

## **2. Types of Encyclopaedias**

The encyclopaedias can be grouped differently by using different characteristics. Generally the encyclopaedias are broadly grouped into two broad categories, i.e. General Encyclopaedia, and Subject Encyclopaedia.

The encyclopaedias may also be grouped by the size or number of volumes, i.e.: Single volume or Multi-volume encyclopaedias.

Often the encyclopaedias are also divided by the user group for whom these are intended i.e. children encyclopaedias, junior encyclopaedias, and adult encyclopaedias. The encyclopaedias may also be grouped by the area covered by these, i.e. universal encyclopaedias or regional / national encyclopaedias; or by use of language as a characteristic i.e. English encyclopaedias or German encyclopaedias.

## 2.1 General Encyclopaedia

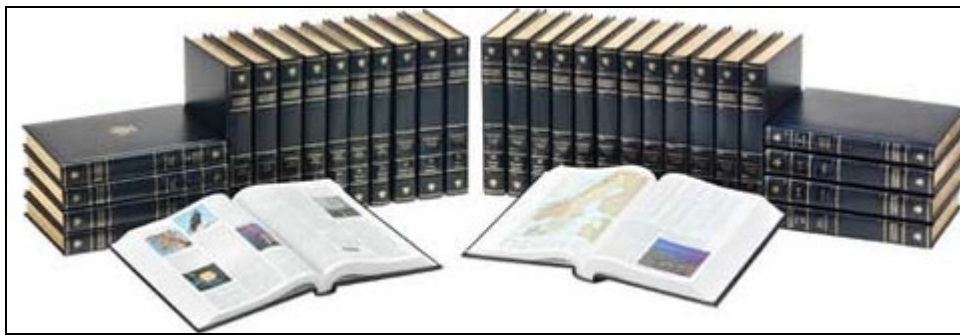
These encyclopaedias are meant for all types of users interested in general information about any branch of knowledge. These encyclopaedias include a large number of articles giving key information on all subjects, i.e. about all the branches of knowledge. Most of the general encyclopaedias are arranged in an alphabetical order however some are arranged in a classified order. As the name suggests these are intended for the general readers.

As the knowledge grows and keeps changing, the encyclopaedias bring out, rather occasionally, revised editions, the reason being the heavy cost and time required to do such an extensive work. Many of the general encyclopaedias, in place of issuing new and revised editions, therefore bring out supplements / annuals / yearbooks to keep them up-to-date. Most of the general encyclopaedias are multi-volume sets.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica can be taken as an example of the general encyclopaedias.

**The New Encyclopaedia Britannica.** 15th ed. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1974. 30 volumes.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica has a large presence in the libraries and information centres. It has been extremely popular encyclopaedia with a long history. Its first edition was published in 1768-1771 in 3 volumes. Its fourteenth edition was published in 1929, and has been revised with reorganisation till 1973. The fifteenth edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica was published with a modified title as the 'New Encyclopaedia Britannica'.



**Fig.1: The New Encyclopaedia Britannica**

This edition consists of thirty volumes organised in three parts:

- Part I is named as Propaedia which consists of one volume.
- Part II, named as Micropaedia, consists of 10 volumes, and
- Part III, named as Macropaedia, consists of 19 volumes.

This edition was offered a new approach to learn a subject, as the Propaedia acts as a guide to the Encyclopaedia, and gives an outline of complete knowledge and can be considered as a mapping of knowledge presented in the Macropaedia.

Micropaedia works as a detailed index to the Macropaedia and provides brief information with each entry. Its entries link with the articles of the Macropadia giving volume number and page number of the Macropaedia as the reference. Micrpaedia entries include a large number of cross references, which enhance its value as an index to the Macropaedia. The Micropaedia is helpful as a source for quick access to brief information on any aspect of knowledge.

Macropaedia contains lengthy articles on different topics, and are meant for serious readers. Experts and subject specialists have contributed Macropaedia articles. Each article often carries a detailed and annotated bibliography. Macropaedia articles have a universal appeal due to its comprehensive coverage of the subject matter.

Ever since its 15<sup>th</sup> edition was published, it was criticised for lack of a typical index, usually carried by encyclopaedias. In order to mitigate this criticism, the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1985 was printed with a two-volume index, leading to increase in its volumes. The new set of 32 volumes also re-numbered its volumes as follows:

- Propaedia: 1 volume
- Micropaedia: 12 volumes
- Macropaedia: 17 volumes, and
- Index: 2 volumes.

In order to update the contents of the encyclopaedia since 1938 'Britannica Book of the Year' has been published annually.

With the growing emphasis on production and use of electronic documents, the Encyclopaedia Britannica too declared the cessation of its print publication. After 244 years of its existence in printed form, the Encyclopaedia Britannica has now gone out of print. Now Encyclopaedia Britannica is available online (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013 Ultimate DVD). The last print-version is its 2010 edition.

Some other examples of the general encyclopaedias are:

**Encyclopaedia Americana.** New York: Grolier, 2005. 30 volumes, (ISBN: 0-7172-0138-4).

The first edition was published in 1903-1904 as a 16 volume set. The 1912 edition carried its title only "Americana".

The Encyclopaedia contains short articles on specific subjects. The Encyclopaedia is strong on American towns and cities with abundance of biographical sketches. A new revised edition was published in 1918-20. It is a good, comprehensive multi-volume encyclopaedia for general use. Most of the articles are signed and carry bibliographies. It has adopted the continuous revision policy. Every year some articles are revised but new editions are published at intervals.

Since 1923, "Americana Annual : An Encyclopaedia of Events" has been published which records the events of the previous year.



**Fig.2: Encyclopaedia Americana**

The Encyclopaedia Americana 2005 Edition has more than 45,000 articles, many of them running to considerable length (the "United States" article is over three hundred thousand words), written by experts in easy-to-understand language. The Encyclopedia Americana is written by over six thousand contributors, and most articles are signed by their contributors.

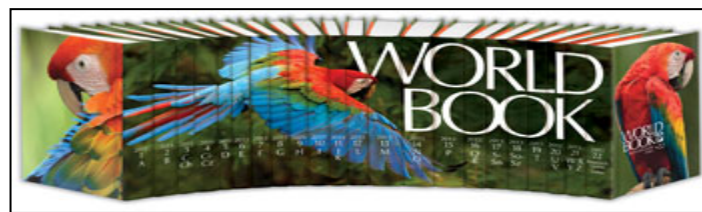
Its coverage of American and Canadian geography and history has been a traditional strength. The latest demographic information on nations, their capitals, and most populous cities is included. Major revisions are observed in articles on science and technology, society and politics, visual and performing arts, etc, along with new biographies in different subject areas.

Handy search features make the Encyclopedia Americana easy to use:

- Fact boxes highlight statistics and essential information.
- Chronological tables provide a quick view of history.
- Cross-references direct readers to related articles and subjects.

**World Book Encyclopaedia 2013.** 22 Volumes. Spinescape. ISBN: 978-0-7166-0113-5. The World Book Encyclopaedia is a general encyclopaedia published in the United States. It was first published in 1917. It is a good all-purpose junior encyclopaedia for school children above the age of 15 years. It is arranged word by word alphabetical order. It contains short signed articles with bibliographies. The World Book Yearbook reviewing events of previous year is also published every year.

The 1917 had eight volumes. New editions have and continue to appear every year with some exceptions.



**Fig.3: World Book Encyclopaedia**

The World Book is publicised as a "family" encyclopaedia for readers above 15 years of age. It claims to be the most up-to-date commercial

encyclopaedia, with 33 percent of its pages revised each year. Illustrations account for about one third of the layout, and some 80 percent are in colour. The encyclopaedia makes heavy use of cross-referencing and contains a large analytical index of more than 150,000 entries.

It has also produced a Braille edition (in 1962, of 145 volumes). An electronic version of the encyclopaedia for Macintosh and Windows computers started in 1990. An international version, aimed at English-speakers was also produced in 1992.

Since 1998, it has a print edition, a CD-ROM edition, and an online version called the World Book Online Reference Center. The online version includes all of the articles contained in the print set as well as several thousand additional articles and the contents of every yearbook World Book has published since 1922.

The 2013 edition claims to have revised 1,600 articles, with new or revised 200 maps, 1,200 illustrations, 4,000 revised pages, and more than 30% of pages revised. This edition has over 25,000 photographs and illustrations.

Some efforts are being made to produce encyclopaedia in Hindi and other Indic languages too. A popular encyclopaedia in Hindi language was produced by Nagri Pracharini Sabha from Banaras (Varanasi), which is:

**Hindi Visva-kosh**, Varanasi: Nagri Pracharini Sabha, 1960-71. 12 volumes. This is the only major Hindi encyclopaedia, but is not a balanced publication. It does not have bibliographies at the end of articles. Illustrations are poor, and needs revision.

Efforts are on to have 'On-Line **Hindi Vishwakosh**'. A joint project of Central Hindi Institute, Agra (Ministry of Human Resource Department, Government of India), and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC, Noida) is on for bringing out Hindi Encyclopedia ('Vishwakosh' Published by Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Varanasi) on Internet in public domain. It is a collection of more than 12,000 topics, with search facility in Hindi. Information is in alphabetical as well as categorised form.

## **Wikipedia**

The Wikipedia is a general encyclopaedia and is meant for use by everyone. The 'wiki' is an information technology for creating collaborative websites. This has given a tool in the hands of the public to be author in a small specialised area in an electronic resource on the web. As a result Wikipedia is a product before us, which we create and use simultaneously.

English "Wikipedia is running Media Wiki version 1.23wmf18 (7253e5a). It has 4,478,917 content articles and 32,513,694 pages in total. There have been 702,452,534 edits. There are

827,603 uploaded files. There are 21,001,904 registered users, including 1,415 administrators. This information as of 07:10, 25 March 2014.”

Wikipedia is a registered trademark of the not-for-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Wikipedia came into being in 2001, and is now “one of the largest reference websites, attracting 470 million unique visitors monthly as of February 2012. There are more than 76,000 active contributors working on more than 31,000,000 articles in 285 languages.”

Naturally, the Wikipedia differs from “paper-based reference sources in important ways. Unlike printed encyclopaedias, Wikipedia is continually created and updated, with articles on historic events appearing within minutes, rather than months or years. Older articles tend to be more comprehensive and balanced; newer articles may contain misinformation and/or un-encyclopaedic content. Any article may contain undetected vandalism. Awareness of this helps the reader to obtain valid information and avoid recently added misinformation.”

Wikipedia is available in languages other than English. Wikipedia has more than two hundred and eighty languages, including a Simple English version, and related projects include a dictionary, quotations, books, manuals, and scientific reference sources, and a news service (see sister projects). All of these are maintained, updated, and managed by separate communities, and often include information & articles that can be hard to find through other common sources.

Wikipedia has its own weaknesses, and article quality. A few statements from the Wikipedia given below are self explanatory.

“Allowing anyone to edit Wikipedia means that it is more easily vandalized or susceptible to unchecked information, which requires removal”.

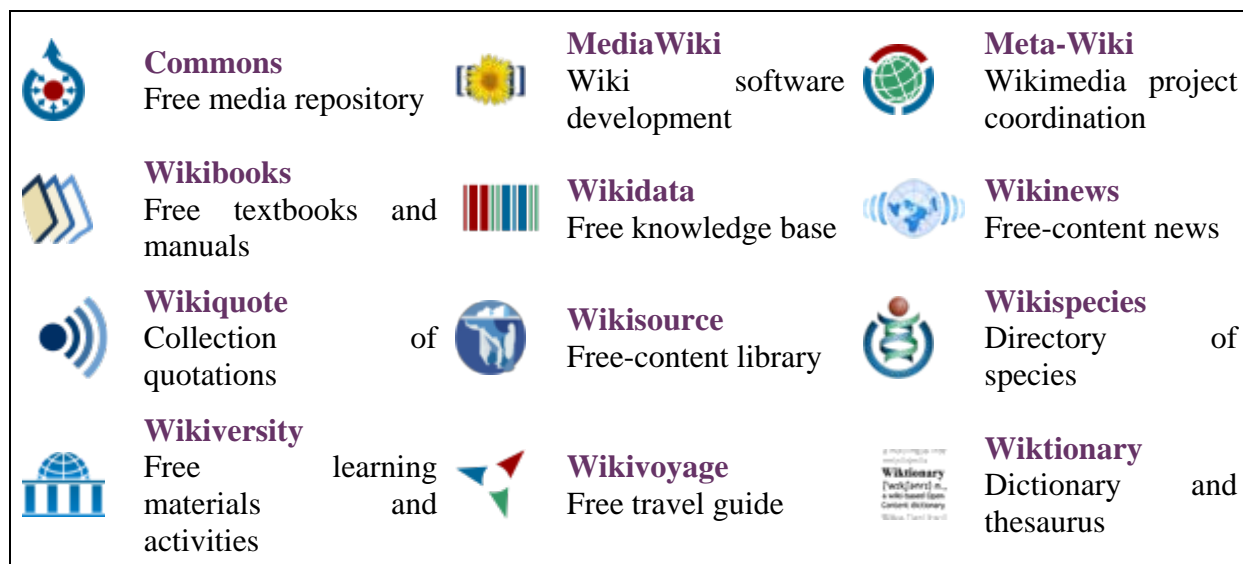
“Wikipedia is written by open and transparent consensus—an approach that has its pros and cons”.

“That said, articles and subject areas sometimes suffer from significant omissions, and while misinformation and vandalism are usually corrected quickly, this does not always happen”.

“Wikipedia is written largely by amateurs”.

The “Wikipedia is hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization that also hosts a range of other projects:





**Fig.4: the projects which are part of the Wikimedia Foundation**

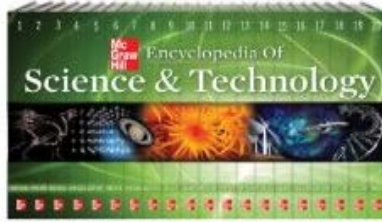
## 2.2 Subject Encyclopaedias

The subject encyclopaedias are restricted in the coverage. These include information on a single broad subject. Often these are also known as special encyclopaedias as they are meant for specialists in a particular subject area. Like general encyclopaedias these are also arranged alphabetically or by the subject. Subject encyclopaedias are available in almost all subjects. Therefore these are available in large number.

A typical multi-volume subject encyclopaedia is McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology.

**McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology.** Ed 11. New York, McGraw-Hill, 2012. 20 Volumes.

The McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology is a serious attempt to discuss science and technology. It contains more and discusses at depth information on science and technology than the general encyclopaedias. This edition “is a major revision, with 2,500 new and thoroughly revised entries, and updates on more than 7,000 entries” and has a large number of illustrations (about 13, 000 in two colours) and 100 full-colour plates. The value of subject content can be estimated by a simple fact that more than 5,000 international scientists and engineers, which include numerous Nobel Prize laureates, have contributed to this edition. The encyclopaedia lays emphasis on pure science and technology. The articles, usually at the end, have bibliography.



**Fig.5: McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology**

The users can search and locate information in many ways, besides finding an article alphabetically in the volumes. They can:

Use the index with over 1, 50, 000 entries in the index, Search through 'Topical Index', which is a list of all articles in a specific subject, and can use the 'Study Guides'. The Study Guides are provided for the major disciplines, For Example physics, engineering and technology, chemistry, geosciences, biology, and health. All these features are included in its volume 20.

The encyclopaedia is also available in the form of a CD-ROM (version 2.0).

In order to update the contents of the encyclopaedia since 1962 'McGraw-Hill Yearbook of Science and Technology' has been published which review the new knowledge created in a year, and supplement this encyclopaedia.

In 1999 a new service was offered, by the McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology, as an online access entitled 'AccessScience'. The 'Access Science' provides "gives subscribers web access to a fully searchable McGraw-Hill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology... , new and revised entries are added frequently... users can read breaking science news stories, view science research updates, and read more than 2, 000 biographies of scientists." Its editorial team is led by Sagan-Award-winner John Rennie and comprises "more than 8,900 scientists and engineers, including 38 Nobel Prize Winners as well as recipients of other major scientific prizes such as Franklin Institute Awards".

Other examples can be seen as:

**International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences**/ed. by David L. Sills. New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968-80. 18 volumes.

**International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.** Editor William A. Darity, Jr. Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. ISBN: 9780028659657 (Preceded by Subject Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1930-35))

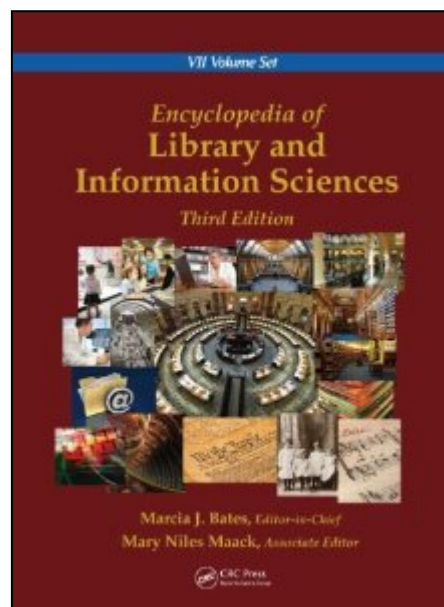
The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences was first published in 1968 and was edited by David L. Sills and Robert K. Merton. It contained seventeen volumes and thousands of entries, written by scholars around the world. Disciplines included in the encyclopaedia are anthropology, economics, geography, history, law, political science, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and statistics.

The 1968 Encyclopedia was initially intended to complement MacMillan's earlier Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (fifteen volumes), which had been published from 1930 to 1967 and was edited by Edwin Robert Anderson Seligman and Alvin Saunders Johnson. But in practice it replaced the earlier Encyclopaedia. A complete volume devoted to biographies of 215 social scientists was published as in 1980.

The 2nd edition is composed entirely of new articles, and was published in 2008, edited by William A. Darity, Jr.

**Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences**, Third Edition (Online/Print version). Edited by Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack. 2009, ISBN-10: 084939712X, 978-0849397127.

The first edition of the encyclopaedia, under the editorship of mainly Allen Kent and Harold Lancour, was published over a long period of time, beginning in 1968 (Kent, Lancour et al. 1968-2003). The first thirty-three volumes appeared in alphabetical order, the first "A" volume came out in 1968 and the "Z" volume did not appear until 1982. After this a number of supplements were published, roughly two per year, up to volume 73 (this volume comprises indexes to Volumes 48-72), which appeared in 2003. Miriam Drake was appointed Editor for the second edition, which appeared in 2003 (both online and in paper). A supplement came out in 2005 (Drake 2003-2005).



**Fig.6: Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Sciences**

The first and second editions were different in coverage. The first edition was strong on both library science and information science. The second edition cut back substantially on information science and related fields. Many articles on national library associations and profiles of individual academic libraries were added. The third edition is published by Taylor and Francis

under the editorship of Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack (with the help of a 50-member Editorial Advisory Board). Both the principal editors i.e. **Marcia J. Bates** (Professor, University of California at Los Angeles) and **Mary Niles Maack** (faculty in the University of California at Los Angeles since 1986) are renowned persons.

Available in print or as an online subscription, this edition of the encyclopaedia, in addition to library and information science, covers disciplines like archives, museum studies, informatics, information systems, knowledge management, records management, social studies of information, etc. It also covers the cultural institutions of more than 30 countries. It is claimed to have more than 70 percent new material. This edition also includes classic articles of historical importance from earlier editions.

This Taylor and Francis encyclopaedia is also available through online subscription, offering a variety of extra benefits for researchers, students, and librarians, including: Citation tracking and alerts, Active reference linking, Saved searches and marked lists, HTML and PDF format options, etc.

Some other examples are:

**Encyclopedia of Dairy Sciences**, edited by John W. Fuquay. Academic Press (ISBN: 978-0123744029). 2nd ed. 2011. 4 vols.

**Encyclopedia of National Anthems** (new edition), edited by Xing Hang. Lanham, MD, and Plymouth, Scarecrow Press, 2011 (ISBN: 978 0 8108 7662 0).

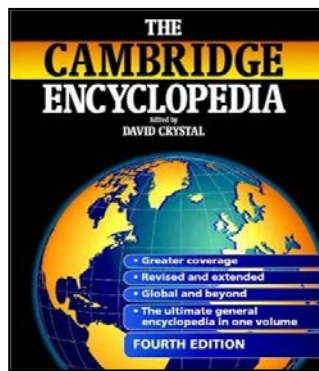
**World Encyclopedia of Police Forces and Correctional Systems**, 2nd Edition. Gale, 2006. ISBN: 1414405146, 9781414405148. eBook. Published in print form: 2007.

### **2.3 Single Volume Encyclopaedias**

Due to growth in the number of subjects and increasing specialisation, there is a tremendous growth in the number of single volume reference works published as encyclopaedias. They far more exceed in number than the general encyclopaedias. Moreover due to their increasing demand and need of even individual families these are produced in almost all the subjects. Thus single volume encyclopaedias are considered a separate group.

**The Cambridge Encyclopaedia.** can be taken as an example of the single volume general encyclopaedia. It has been published by the Cambridge University Press, with reputation for its authority and reliability.

This in its 4th hardcover edition (ISBN: 978-0521790994), was published in a handy size (27.7 x 23.4 x 7.1 cm), in 1308 pages, in 2000.



**Fig.7: The Cambridge Encyclopaedia**

“The Cambridge Encyclopaedia now is a “significantly expanded and updated” fourth edition. It is a popular single-volume encyclopaedia with concise entries. Being a handy volume and as it is not intended for the subject specialists it can be used in homes, offices, etc. The encyclopaedia is arranged alphabetically, with an easy-to-use Ready Reference section. Its coverage is broad, from people and places to scientific concepts, the media, philosophical ideas, etc.

### **The Columbia Encyclopaedia**

It has been produced by the Columbia University Press, and marketed by Gale Group.

The 6th hardcover edition with ISBN: 978-0787650155, is in size (14.9 x 9.8 x 3.7 inches), and is in 3200 pages, published in 2000.

Columbia Encyclopedia, like Cambridge Encyclopedia is international in scope and useful for quick location of information. It was first published in 1935 and continues its relationship with Columbia University. Its fourth edition published in 1975, is a fully revised edition. Like other encyclopaedias, it is alphabetically arranged and is stated to cover 7,000 subjects. “There are 50,000 entries, with maps and line drawings interspersed throughout. Almost one-third of the articles are geographic, with coverage including all countries of the world.” It has also been published in two volumes.

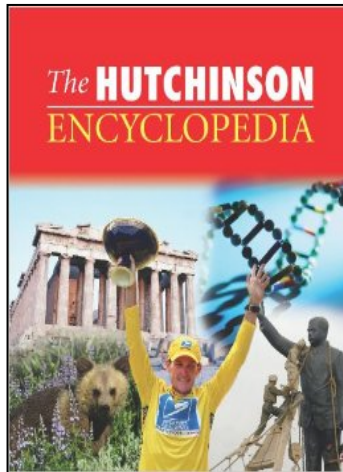
An electronic version of the Columbia Encyclopedia is also available and is licensed by several different companies for access over Internet. It is updated on a quarterly basis. Unlike many other major English-language encyclopaedias, the complete content of the Columbia Encyclopedia is available online to individual users without payment (for example <http://www.encyclopedia.com/> offers free access to the content of this encyclopaedia along with many other reference sources.

Many other single volume encyclopaedias are popular. A few of these are:

### **Hutchinson's Encyclopaedia.** Hutchinson, 2005.

It is considered as a good single volume encyclopaedia for children above 14 years age. This was published as Hutchinson's Twentieth Century Encyclopaedia in 1948. It is designed for use in the home, libraries and schools. It attempts to be readable by reducing the use of technical language. A small subset of the Encyclopaedia is available for free but full access requires subscription. It

is frequently revised. Its eighth edition has been published as the Hutchinson Encyclopaedia in 1988.



**Fig.8: Hutchinson's Encyclopaedia**

With Walter Hutchinson as editor, new edition has over 17,000 articles, including genetically modified foods, the situation in the Middle East, globalization, etc. It is profusely illustrated, and has fact boxes, timelines, quotations, and web links, etc.

## 2.4 Some Indian Encyclopaedias

There have been efforts in India to produce encyclopaedias in different Indian languages. Some examples are:

- In 1846-51, **Bidyakalpadntma Arthata Mbidha Bidyalisayaka Recna** (Encyclopaedia in Bengali) by Rev. Krishnamohan Benerjee. Published in 13 volumes.
- **Cyclopaedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia** by Edward Balfour was printed in 1857.
- **Jnanacakra Yani** Gujarati Encyclopaedia. Published in 9 volumes (1918).
- **Hindi Vishwakosh.** Varanasi: Nagri Pracharni Sabha,'1960-70. Published in 13 vols.
- **Vigyanam Timananthpuram:** Balan Prakashan1956-69. Published in 6 vols.
- **Marathi Vishwakosh.** Bombay: Maharastra Rajyasakitya Sanskriti Mandal, 1973.
- **Sankshipta Odia Jnanakosha:** Encyclopaedia Orissana. Cuttack: New Students Store, 1963-65. Published in 4 vols.

- **Encyclopaedia of Scheduled Castes in India.** Gyan Books. 2007.

### 3. Electronic Considerations

With increasing web access to sources in the institutions as well as with individual users, a large number of libraries are considering switching over to acquiring electronic version of encyclopaedias as well. In some cases like Funk and Wagnall's Encyclopaedia has already ceased its print version (in 1997), and the example has been followed by the Encyclopaedia Britannica now. It is not evident that other publishers will follow this. Some of the publishers are making available both print as well as electronic version as CD ROM/DVD, offering free as well as fee based access on the web.

Some encyclopaedias available in CDROM or DVD format are:

Name	Site
Encyclopaedia Britannica.	<a href="http://www.britannica.com/">http://www.britannica.com/</a>
Kirk Othmer Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology.	<a href="http://jws-edck.interscience.wiley.com:8095/index.html">http://jws-edck.interscience.wiley.com:8095/index.html</a>
Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology. Online - Free Access, Updated three times a year.	<a href="http://www.sociologyencyclopedia.com/public/">http://www.sociologyencyclopedia.com/public/</a>
Columbia Encyclopedia.	<a href="http://www.bartleby.com/">http://www.bartleby.com/</a>
Encarta Encyclopedia.	<a href="http://encarta.msn.com/">http://encarta.msn.com/</a>
Nupedia.com	<a href="http://www.nupedia.com/">http://www.nupedia.com/</a>

Encyclopedia Americana, Crompton's Interactive Encyclopedia, Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia, Microsoft Encarta are available in CD-ROM version also. World Book Millennium (in CD-ROM) also has World Book Discoveries in DVD. There are many more general as well as specific subject encyclopaedias in more than one version or are available in electronic version.

It may be noted that most encyclopaedias have offered electronic versions during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or later.

Encyclopaedias online access and electronic versions have become cost effective for libraries during the last few decades. Some publishers are already offering free online access to encyclopaedias. Thus the funds can be saved and gainfully employed for use in acquiring other sources of information.

Although electronic encyclopaedias with web based access are becoming common and cost effective too, cost alone should not be the reason to switch over to the electronic access to encyclopaedias in the libraries. Other considerations like availability of space, category of users, number of clients to be served, institutional policy of preservations, and the overall policy of the library to acquire electronic resources should be considered before switching / opting for electronic version of encyclopaedias.

#### 4. Uses of Encyclopaedias

An encyclopaedia provides knowledge and information on all subjects. It can be termed as a base of all reference work in the library. Very often people tend to equate reference works with encyclopaedias. Even librarians, due to its organisation and ready availability of information on all areas, first turn to encyclopaedia.

Statement of some of the authors on reference work highlight the importance attached to encyclopaedias in reference work.

Denis J. Grogan in his book 'Encyclopedias, yearbooks, dictionaries, and statistical sources' states, "...often, justifiably so, the source of first resort, the encyclopedia is perhaps the best known category of reference book. ...and it is all too easy to underestimate them." On the other hand William A. Katz has termed the encyclopaedia as "the most useful single source of information".

R. L. Collison has marked the value of encyclopaedia by saying that it is "the basis of any enquiry work". Similarly, E. P. Sheehy has viewed encyclopaedia as "the backbone of much of the reference work in any library".

The encyclopaedias are first approached for simple fact finding, but these are useful in many other ways. Some of the uses of encyclopaedias have been briefly stated below:

- i. There may be a lot of information on a given subject / topic available in the library, but encyclopaedias offer 'concise, digested and in some cases simplified account'. Often what users need is a brief, concise, and digested write up on the subject and not a detailed account, as given in monographs or books.
- ii. There may be many areas in which library may not hold monographs or books due to a variety of reasons, the encyclopaedias here too help and provide information.
- iii. Sometimes users might seek information on topics which are limited in scope or are on a specialised area, and library may not have much on the topics in its collection. The encyclopaedias help us with information in such cases. In such cases material finding approach is satisfied by the encyclopaedias.
- iv. In many areas which are current and there may be but a few books in these areas, the encyclopaedias along with their supplements / annuals / yearbooks are a rich source of information in these areas also.
- v. "General encyclopaedia can serve as a gateway to understand the most profound or intricate knowledge human beings have yet produced". As Grogan has rightly pointed out, New Britannica availed the services of 4300 scholars including Nobel laureates, Milton Friedman, and Linus Pawling, etc., in preparing the set.



- vi. Bibliography generally provided at the end of an article leads to documents useful for further study of the topic. Even this helps the library increase the use of many monographs / books available in its collection. We may call it satisfying the third law of library science made by S. R. Ranganathan. For Example, 'Every book its reader'. Often encyclopaedias are viewed as a source of valuable bibliography, and indirectly these function as a good subject index to valuable documents.
- vii. Encyclopaedias act a subject index to knowledge. The indexes of the encyclopaedias are quite detailed. It may be interesting to note that the number of index entries in an encyclopaedias most often outnumber the articles in the encyclopaedia. In a large number of encyclopaedias the number of index entries may be 10 to 20 times the number of articles in it.
- viii. Encyclopaedias are expected to present information in an impartial and balanced manner. They deal with all points of view on a subject. The monographs on the other hand are considered to discuss the point of view of its authors in greater details.
- ix. Encyclopaedias are a useful source to know about the genesis and growth of a topic. The articles in encyclopaedias normally present a process / object / custom / practice, etc in a historical perspective.
- x. Encyclopaedias are a useful source of biographies. Very often biographical reference sources do not cover less popular persons in different subject areas. Very often the encyclopaedias are 'the only sources of biographical information' on a person who is not very famous and thus not covered in standard biographical reference sources.
- xi. Encyclopaedias, many a times, are a rich source of geographical information. The encyclopaedias may at times be a good source to begin search about a geographical feature.
- xii. Even the older editions of some encyclopaedias are considered valuable. They provide the state of knowledge at the time these were published for almost any topic. These topics or areas may not even be included in the later editions of the encyclopaedias. In such a condition these are of greater value. For example, Encyclopaedia Britannica's 9th and 11th edition is often cited as examples for their scholarly articles.
- xiii. Colour plates, black and white photographs, and other illustrations are profusely used in encyclopaedias, and are very helpful in understanding a subject.
- xiv. A point of caution, however, is relevant here. Although, editors of encyclopaedias lay special emphasis on scholarly treatment of subject, but the researcher should not rely on encyclopaedic work, and should "suspect every statement and do ... best to verify it".

A librarian may help and guide a research scholar to a specific subject encyclopaedia as a place to begin before moving on to a more extended research. The researcher can consult and also refer

to the sources given in the bibliography given with the article. But a research scholar should also refer to the latest publications to get updated and have reliable information.

## **5. Evaluation of Encyclopaedias**

Before acquiring an encyclopaedia in a library, the librarian should evaluate the encyclopaedia. Compilation and producing an encyclopaedia happens to be a costly project, the reputed publishers do make efforts to have a good team of expert writers, good indexing persons for preparing indexes, artists for lay out plans and preparing illustrations, effective editorial team, etc. Librarians should make carefully select encyclopaedias depending upon the availability of funds, needs of users, electronic resource acceptability, space, etc.

Like other reference sources a variety of check points can be used for this purpose. These are:

- Authority
- Scope and purpose
- Treatment
- Arrangement
- Format
- Revision
- Limitation
- Special features

### **5.1 Authority**

The reputation of the editor, consultants, contributors, etc can be of value in evaluating authoritativeness of the encyclopaedia. The reputation can be judged from their academic qualifications and experience of their publications in the past. The reputation of the publishers (history of their publications especially the reference sources), their editorial staffs, indexers, artists, photographers, etc should be evaluated. An encyclopaedia cannot be produced by an individual, and there must be an efficient team with the publishers to produce work like an encyclopaedia.

### **5.2 Scope and Purpose**

The encyclopaedia has a definite stated plan. It carries articles with a definite structure and style. All this is continuously monitored and supervised by the editorial staff. The coverage of the encyclopaedia should match with the stated subject coverage. The facts given in the articles should be accurate. It lends reliability to the subject covered. The subject coverage should be balanced. All this goes in the scope of the encyclopaedia.

Publishers / editors state the purpose of the encyclopaedia in the preface / introduction. The librarians should make it a point to randomly check a few articles from some of the volumes and verify whether the stated purpose has been ac

### **5.3 Treatment**

The articles in the encyclopaedias should be readable, be easy to understand, and objective. The articles should be equally helpful and informative to the subject specialist as well as the laymen. The political, national, and religious bias should not be there. Moreover, the encyclopaedia articles should be in a style suitable for the intended user age group.

### **5.4 Arrangement**

Encyclopaedias are usually arranged in an alphabetical or classified order. It depends upon the plan of the editors, etc. The arrangement of the articles should be helpful to the users in locating the information easily. To make it easy for the users the subject index should be detailed one with minor topics, necessary cross references, etc.

### **5.5 Format**

Encyclopaedia format includes physical features and aesthetics. It includes the appearance of the encyclopaedia, page make-up, illustrations, diagrams, maps, tables, quality of paper, printing, and binding, etc. The encyclopaedia should be appealing and it should be easy to handle. The quality of the paper is of importance since the encyclopaedia is expected to last for many years. The paper used should be free from acid, adequate weight, and opaque, etc. Attention should also be paid to the typography i.e. good typefaces should be used. Binding should withstand frequent handling and should be long lasting.

### **5.6 Revision**

Since knowledge by its nature happens to grow and change, encyclopaedias should have a definite plan / policy for revision. Different methods could be publication of annual volumes to include revised and supplementary information; or periodical revision: revising the entire encyclopaedia after a given period; or continuous revision policy: where encyclopaedia has permanent editorial staffs that do systematic revision of the articles.

### **5.7 Limitations**

Encyclopaedia cannot cover all the knowledge. It is chiefly meant to provide background information and thus cannot give a detailed treatment to each and every subject. Often minor subjects get a poor treatment. Even annuals or yearbooks of the encyclopaedias cannot cover all the knowledge produced in a year. Obviously the encyclopaedias have limitations of size, etc. Some encyclopaedias often have greater details about the country from where they are published whereas other countries are not treated at par. Such features should be observed by the librarian at the time of acquisition.

## 5.8 Special Features

Encyclopaedias, because often have some special features, are valued. Special features pertain to good bibliographies and their arrangement: also included as a separate appendix and arranged in a classified manner; inclusion of a variety of appendices: viz, on measures and weights, abbreviations, pronunciation, errata, etc increasing the value of encyclopaedia; a detailed index with plenty of 'see' and 'see also' cross references improving searching and access to information; variety of illustration enhancing the value and readability of articles; inclusion of numerous biographies increasing the value of encyclopaedia; inclusion of special guide to use encyclopaedia -- acting as an assistance to users (as Propaedia in Encyclopaedia Britannica); etc. All such features increase the value of a specific encyclopaedia in the library, and should be considered while making a decision to add encyclopaedia in the library collection. The librarian should also consider seeing some 'secondary evaluation sources and library journals' which are helpful in selecting a new encyclopaedia.

There are some encyclopaedias which under arrangement amongst some publishers, publish an encyclopaedia under different titles, acquiring these can cause loss of funds, and duplication in the reference collection. To cite an example:

The Macmillan Family Encyclopaedia. 2nd fully revised and updated edition, London: Macmillan, 1982, 21 vols. is also available under other names i.e. Academic American Encyclopaedia. Danbury: Grolier, 1983, 21 vols, and Lexicon Universal Encyclopaedia. New York: Lexicon, 1984, 21 vols. This has also been published under the title Grolier International Encyclopaedia, Lexicon Universal Encyclopaedia, Macmillan Family Encyclopaedia, Barnes and Noble New American Encyclopaedia, and Global International Encyclopedia. This was originally published by some other publisher (Arete Publishing Co.) in 1980. There are some other examples too of this nature. **Librarians, in particular need to be aware of it!**

## 6. Summary

In this module, you have been acquainted with various types of encyclopaedias which serve as background sources of information. We have explained about the usefulness of different types of encyclopaedias, some typical encyclopaedias available in most of the libraries and ways of making use of these to search specific information.

We have learnt that encyclopaedia contains information about people, places, events, and things. Encyclopaedias are general or special as these may deal with all areas of knowledge or may be limited to just one subject area. A general encyclopaedia includes information on topics in every field of knowledge. Specialized encyclopedias provide more detailed and technical information on specific area of knowledge such as arts, science and technology or social sciences. Specialized encyclopaedia is also known as subject encyclopaedia.

Besides the above, we have learnt about the details of some encyclopedias, electronic versions available of several encyclopedias, Indian encyclopedias, uses of encyclopedias and steps involved in evaluation of encyclopedias.

## 7. References

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- 8 Young, Heartsill, editor. A. L. A. Glossary of Library and Information Science, Chicago, American Library Association, 1983. p. 188.
- 9 A number of websites of individual encyclopaedia, amazon.com, etc have been used.