
UNIT 1 REFERENCE AND INFORMATION ACCESS TOOLS : AN OVERVIEW

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Reference Work
- 1.3 The Reference Sources/Books
- 1.4 Need for Reference Sources/Books
- 1.5 Reference Queries
- 1.6 Role of Computers
- 1.7 Summary
- 1.8 Answers to Self Check Exercises
- 1.9 Key Words
- 1.10 References and Further Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

Reference service is one of the important services provided to the users of libraries and information centres. Such services are usually provided by consulting documents where the required information is likely to be available. It is therefore, vital that librarians should be conversant with different types of services and their features so that the information can be provided without much difficulty.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- know the importance of reference work in a library;
- role of reference sources/books in providing information;
- identify the need for reference books/sources;
- describe the process of giving reference service;
- study the role of computer in the reference service;
- relate a reference enquiry to a reference source/book;
- define a reference book/work and state their characteristic features;
- differentiate reference books from ordinary books;
- define reference service; and
- enumerate varieties/kinds of reference books sources.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Libraries have always been engaged in providing services to their users. Maximum utilization of resources is the principle underlying the heart of the very concept of the librarianship which is the collective sharing and use of the records for the benefit of society as a whole and of the individuals making up the society in particular. In the first law of Library Science too Dr. Ranganathan has emphasized that 'Books are for use.' In reference work, thus, the qualified library professionals supplement the various facilities of the library by providing personal assistance to individual users in search of information. The role of the reference librarian is to give assistance to the library users by exploiting the library collection to the maximum.

Reference work is the actual assistance given to the users in need for information. It enables librarians and users to understand where the recorded information exists and helps in searching the needed information. This activity has been designed in the libraries for the convenience of the users. The library materials require exploitation if it is to be of benefit to the people coming to the library.



Generally most libraries have a separate reference section or collection. The librarian usually provides reference services on the basis of this collection of reference books which are placed in a prominent and separate section of the library. Majority of the users are familiar with reference books as many of them have dictionaries, encyclopaedias, yearbooks, etc. at home as part of their private collection.

In this Unit, we provide you an overview of reference books/sources, which are very useful for providing information quickly to the users. You will also get an exposure to the requirements and necessity of a reference department consisting of reference collection in a library.

1.2 REFERENCE WORK

The purpose of reference work is to allow information to flow efficiently from information sources to those who are looking for it. In the day to day activities in the libraries, the librarian has to rely on reference books of the library, which you would have seen's kept separately in the library and is generally not issued out of the library. All of us are very much familiar with the reference books of which the most popular ones are the dictionaries, and encyclopaedias In fact many of us have such books at home and use these quite frequently.

Since the beginning of libraries, the librarians have been extending informal help to individual users in the use of library collection. The origin of the reference service can be traced from late 19th century in academic and public libraries and it has been to a large extent influenced by various social and economic developments in the society. The underlying rationale for reference service has been based on four aspects, namely, to develop the role of the library as an educational institution, to assist academic community, to help users select best documents from the vast universe of books and to justify the existence of the library to the persons/people who provide financial support.

The reference work often referred to as reference service in libraries, has come a long way in the twentieth century. It has developed its scope from mere assistance to users to utilization of subject specialists, development of many books and techniques for reference and use of computers to satisfy the information needs of scientists, researchers and others. All these have become possible due to a sound theoretical framework in the reference work, which indicates three distinct approaches for giving reference service. They are: (a) conservative approach, (b) liberal approach, and (c) moderate approaches.

- a) The conservative approach is based on the fact that the users should be instructed on how to use books and libraries rather than on delivery of information.
- b) The liberal approach lays emphasis on the fact that the users be provided with relevant and necessary information rather than giving the documents itself where the information may be available. Here it is felt that information given to a user should be in a form that permits its immediate use.
- c) The moderate or the in between approach seems to be in most common one in the present day libraries. There is an increased use & bibliographic books and the facility of computer as an information storage and retrieval device has boosted the liberal approach. The librarians today have access to a vast store of information and knowledge aids including print and non-print media. All these can be exploited to the maximum extent possible to give services to the users. Therefore, a user can acquire the information needed by him either or without the help of the librarian.

The users in many cases need not come to library. The reference requests of the users can be satisfied even by sending a messenger to the library or on the telephone or by post if these can be effectively conveyed. Now, this can even be satisfied by electronic mail.

The reference queries differ from library to library. In most of the public libraries, the type of queries include assistance regarding finding of books from the catalogue or some queries from the general public regarding the public utilities. In the academic libraries, the reference work relates mostly to books or queries by students concerning the course conducted by the parent institution of the library. But in the higher level of academic, libraries, special libraries and information units, the reference queries are of intensive kind as the users here are specialised which include professors, researchers, planners, managers, policy makers and senior level



personnel. Therefore, when we talk or write about the reference service and/or the reference work, it is actually keeping in mind the last category of users requiring specialised services.

Self Check Exercise

1) List the chief reasons for providing reference service in Libraries.

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.3 THE REFERENCE SOURCES/ BOOKS

A basic question arises then when we start discussing reference books, that is what books and other materials a reference library should stock and how they should be organised so as to constitute a reference collection.

The reference collection should include three classes of materials:

- reference books such as, Dictionaries, Encyclopaedias, Bibliographies, Yearbooks, Directories, Biographies;
- standard works of information such as Gazetteers, Atlases, etc.;
- all such materials that cannot be lent for home reading such as indexing and abstracting periodical, statistical sources; and

In the above, the first two categories are intended to fulfill the genuine function of a reference library that is - the supply of information.

Reference books are referred to as compilation, specifically designed to provide items of in-formation in a most convenient form. The main conventional categories are encyclopaedias, dictionaries, directories, yearbooks, bibliographies biographical and geographical information sources. The reference collection of any library should include the best and latest editions of the encyclopaedias, dictionaries and other reference books, bibliographical sources, indexes, catalogues and guides, standard histories and gazetteers, editions of the classic works of literature. Authoritative works on other subjects should be added as far as budget permits, especially those, which are more fitted for occasional consultation rather than for continuous reading.

The reference books are many in number. No single library can afford to buy all the available reference sources. Also there is no available select list, which can indicate ideal reference collection for an ideal library. More complexity has arisen due to availability of reference books in other media other than the print media. But ultimately, the best reference collection is said to be the one, which is useful for both the reference librarian and the users.

For convenience sake, peers have classified the reference sources into primary sources, secondary sources and tertiary sources based on the type of information sources included in them.

Primary Sources

These are materials, which are original in nature. They usually take the form of a journal article, a monograph, a dissertation, a report or a patent or documents in archives. These materials are also referred to as primary sources as they have not passed through any filtering mechanism like condensation, interpretation or evaluation and are the original work of the author. The primary sources are very large in number and can be usually accessed with the



help of some secondary source like, a bibliography, an indexing service, or an abstracting service.

Secondary Sources

A secondary source is one that gives information about a primary source. The original information is selected, modified and rearranged in a suitable format for the purpose of easy location by the users, e.g., indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, encyclopaedias, yearbooks, gazetteers, who's who. An autobiography is a primary source whereas a biography written by other person is a secondary source.

Tertiary Sources

The tertiary sources consist of information that is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources. These include lists of all kinds of sources of reference works like the encyclopaedias, dictionaries, yearbooks, bibliography of 'bibliographies, almanacs, etc.

By classifying and defining reference sources, we can get only an indication of their relative currency and the relative accuracy. Their main purpose all the time remains the same, that is to match a question/query of the user with a suitable answer from any of the sources.

Self Check Exercises

- 2) State the three classes of reference materials required in an ideal reference collection.
- 3) Name briefly the three broad categories of reference sources

Note: i) Write your answers in the space given below.
 ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

.....

1.4 NEED FOR REFERENCE SOURCES/ BOOKS

The present day society is in the process of development and is entering the information age. In this new age, information becomes a resource as well as a commodity, and its handling and processing also becomes a main activity. In this information age, or post-industrial society, the demands will be focused on the knowledge of what to gather, how to gather, process and utilize it. It is in this context we have to know/study the need for reference sources. The users have varied information needs and requirements. Our user can be students, teachers, researchers, scientists, technologists, specialists, planners or policy-makers. The average user does not have access to information required by him because he does not know where to look for it

Besides, the users have also several other requirements such as:

- need to obtain information quickly for a specific requirement area;
- awareness of newly generated information is difficult;
- need for selection of information, as there is overabundance of information;



- would specialization only in a restricted subject area;
- obtain copies of required material or the material itself; and
- criteria for evaluation and selection of reference materials.

All these requirements/needs of the users can be met by having access to proper and up-to-date reference books. The reference books help the librarians and libraries in maintaining the information banks from which answers to users' queries and materials required by the users are available. In other words, the sound basis for any reference service in a library is the reference books maintained by the reference staff of the library. This means that reference service is not just answering question posed by the users by using an appropriate reference tool but it is also about maintaining the information resource banks from which information is provided to users. It also includes establishing links with information providers both inside and outside the library environment.

The problems faced by the users mentioned above can be overcome, by restoring to some of the following techniques:

- identification of reference books available in the library;
- locating reference books and their suppliers outside the library;
- organising new reference books in e library to cater to the identified information needs of the users; and
- cooperating with other libraries and information org a 'lores to pool the resources together.

The development and generation of information is dependent on the access, location and dissemination of the relevant documents. The reference service in the library takes care of the function of making available the information whereas the library activity of acquiring, organizing, and preserving the reference materials is something which the users are not aware of, but is of-maximum relevance to them.

Self Check Exercises

- 4) Why do users require reference sources?
- 5) How can the librarians help the users to locate information and to overcome the problems faced by them?

Note: i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.5 REFERENCE QUERIES

The most important aspect in the reference work relates to the reference questions with their corresponding reference sources. You are aware that for the majority of the questions asked in



the libraries, reference sources are the most logical starting point for searching information. Much of the reference work involves the knowledge of the reference books and matching the questions to their sources.

The different categories of queries received in the libraries relate to:

- Author/title queries;
- Directional and administrative enquiries;
- Fact-finding queries;
- Material-finding queries; and
- Research queries.

Not all the queries relating to the above require the services of trained library professionals. For example, for directional or administrative enquiries any library staff can direct the users to find information. For author and title queries, the library catalogue or index can very well provide answers to the users in addition to bibliographies. All the other kind of queries, viz., fact-finding or material-finding or the research queries require the services of the professional and most experienced ones. There can also be library queries where during search for an answer the user may change the questions. The enquirers in such cases are only provided with minimum of instructional services. Many times, there can be residual enquiries which are leftovers of parts of previous queries or questions for which no answers are available in the library. In such instances, a clarification by a senior library professional can be offered to the user in a polite manner so as to avoid disappointment.

Given below are some reference questions and the types of reference sources :

Type of questions	Corresponding examples of queries	Types of reference sources
Current awareness	<i>Where can I find all latest papers published in chemistry?</i>	Indexing/Abstracting Serials on the subject
Language	<i>How can I find the meaning of the word 'unobtrusive' ?</i>	Dictionary
Trend	<i>What developments took place in computer industry during last year ?</i>	Yearbook
Book	<i>Where can I find a list of all books on the subject of 'Information Technology' ?</i>	Bibliography/Trade Catalogue
Background	<i>How can I get brief information on Australia or Olympics?</i>	Encyclopaedia
Institutions/ Organizations	<i>Please give me the names and addresses of Engineering Colleges In India</i>	Directory/Handbook
Biography	<i>Biography of K.R Narayanan, President 6/India</i>	Biography

The reference librarians should be able to look analytically at all the questions that are put to them, analyse them and then only provide the required reference sources.

You will study the details about the types of reference sources in the next Unit.



Self Check Exercises

6) Indicate the different categories of queries visible in the libraries.

Note: i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.6 ROLE OF COMPUTERS

As you are aware, the introduction of computers in the libraries has brought about sea-change in the various services provided by modern libraries. The use of computers has also tremendously enhanced the image of the reference service of the libraries. Presently, computer has been taken for granted as an important component of reference work. Computer searching has now become an essential part of reference work in most of the large libraries.

The use of information technology can be envisaged as a two-way process, the organization of internal information sources in any electronic format and an external tool to access information sources in any format. This helps in forming a basis for future resource sharing and helps in skillful processing, analysis and supply of information so as to effectively use the valuable resources.

The reference environment is affected by the growth of information technology. The various areas influenced are listed below:

a) Electronic Dictionaries

Several language dictionaries have been made available in CD-ROM (Compact Disc - Read Only Memory) format which have made searches very easy and much more user-friendly. A dictionary in CD-ROM can combine text, images and sound in one package and make cross - referencing a very simple process. Example: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

b) Online Databases

Source and reference databases have been at the forefront of the electronic publishing industry and will continue to be there in the years to come. They can be incorporated in the library in CD-ROM format or by direct contact through a gateway with the host system itself. This is a major area of interest for the organisations which lack secondary and tertiary information sources. This is a major area of interest in our libraries for information professionals and these developments pose many challenges for providing reference services. In this area organizing compatible indexing, abstracting and indexing terms bank for multilingual information materials is essential so that more number of users can benefit from this type of materials.

Some very popular databases that can be searched online are:

MEDLARS DATABASE

DIALOG

Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) etc.

c) Teletex and Videotext Systems

Libraries in the developed countries offer reference services using the broadcast teletex systems like the ORACLE and CEEFAX, covering a variety of topics such as news, advertisements, teleshopping and entertainment. Private cable television companies can also access these systems by dialing the required codes.



Videotext services, such as the one known as PRESTEL, produced in the Great Britain by the Post Office uses the telephone network, as the access mechanism and a television set as the terminal. Systems like Prestel can also be set up in libraries to provide information access. These types of services, if constantly updated, can constitute excellent information retrieval sources which can be an asset for any library's reference department.

d) Online Catalogues

The Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) supplement the existing card catalogues and can be consulted for comprehensive searches. Here the users have the choice for searching materials available in more than one place. Most of the OPACs are very user-friendly and are helpful to naive users who have no idea about searching materials in the libraries. The user after having access to such catalogues usually become self sufficient and seldom require the services or help of the reference staff while using libraries or accessing information.

The developments in information technology are greatly affecting reference services in libraries of various countries. But what is more important is that incorporation of information technology in libraries and especially in reference environment raises other issues, such as, the existence of telecommunications infrastructure, technical support for equipment maintenance and review of library science courses so that the professional can be ready to meet the new challenges. It is time now for the information professionals of our country to put into practice the techniques of reference work. And technology provides us with a powerfull search and display device which will only be effective in the presence of a sound theoretical and practical knowledge of the professionals involved in the task,

Self Check Exercise

7) Mention the areas of information technology that have influenced the reference environment.

Note: i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.7 SUMMARY

When library services became available to users, it was thought that just a reference librarian at desk was good enough. But, in the recent times it has become clear that a reference librarian can serve users only if some proper and standard reference books are also available. This is due to the varied information needs and requirements of a wide variety of our users.

At present, financial constraints are everywhere. This makes selection of materials very critical as waste of materials must be eliminated and services be maintained. The choice of information technology in such reduced resource circumstances appears to be the most viable and possible solution. Electronic information has, therefore, become more concentrated and centralized. There are many ways and means to have access to this kind of information.

1.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

1) The underlying rationale for reference service has been based on four aspects, namely, to develop the role of the library as an educational institution, to assist academic community, to help users select best documents from the vast universe of recorded intimation and to justify the existence of the library to the persons/people who provided financial support.



- 2) The reference collection should include three classes of materials:
 - strictly reference books
 - standard works of information
 - all such materials that cannot be lent for home reading
- 3) The three broad categories of reference sources are: primary, secondary and tertiary. These are based on originality of materials.

Primary Sources

These are materials, which are the most authentic and original. They usually take the form of a journal article, a monograph, dissertation, report or a patent. These materials are also referred to as primary as they have not passed through any filtering mechanism like condensation, interpretation or evaluation and are the original work of the author. The primary sources are very large in number and can be usually accessed by the help of some secondary source like, an indexing service or an abstracting service.

Secondary Sources

A secondary source is one that gives information about a primary source. The original information is selected, modified and rearranged in a suitable format for the purpose of easy location by the users.

e.g. An abstracting periodical or a bibliography. Tertiary Sources

The tertiary sources consist of information that is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources. They include lists of all kinds of sources of reference, works like the encyclopaedias, dictionaries, yearbooks, bibliography of bibliographies, almanacs, etc.

- 4) The users require reference sources as they have following problems:
 - need to obtain information quickly for a specific problem area or query.
 - need for selection of information, as there is overabundance of information
 - wants to specialize only in a restricted subject area
 - difficulty to obtain copies of required material or the material itself
 - difficulties and inadequacy of time for evaluation and selection of materials
 - impact of information technology on society
 - modern information access tools and technologies developed for library and information centers,
 - The users can overcome the problems faced by them based on following aspects:
 - identification of reference books information access tools available in the library
 - locating reference books and their suppliers outside the library
 - organising new reference books in the library to cater to the information needs
 - setting up cooperative mechanisms with other libraries and information organisations so as to pool the resources.
- 6) The different categories of queries visible in the libraries relate to:
 - Author/title queries
 - Directional and administrative enquiries
 - Fact-finding queries
 - Material-finding queries.
 - Research queries.



- 7) The following areas of information technology have influenced the reference environment:
- Electronic databases
 - Online databases
 - Teletex and Videotext systems
 - Online Public Access Catalogues.

1.9 KEY WORDS

- Online Access** : It is interactive access to computerized databases of information.
- Reference Books** : The books which are used to answer immediate questions of users. These books are kept for reference only and are not allowed to be used outside the library. Any publication, which is used to obtain authoritative information.
- Reference Material** : Books and other library materials which may not be borrowed for use out of the library, either because of their nature is such that they are prepared for brief consultation rather than for continuous reading, or they belong to a reference collection from which items may not be borrowed.
- Reference Service** : Is the establishing of contact between Reader and Book by personal service.
- Teletex** : A broadcast system, providing pages of regularly updated in-formation accessible to user. It acts like an electronic newspaper.
- Videotext** : It is an interactive system, using telephone lines and is avail-able to subscribers only. It provides extensive information to searchers through hierarchically structured pages.

1.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Grogan, Denis J. (1992). *Practical Reference Work*. 2nd ed. London: Library Association Publishing.
- Grogan, Denis, J. (1982). *Science and Technology: An Introduction to the Literature*. 4th ed. London: Clive Bingley.
- Higgins, Gavin (ed). (1983). *Printed Reference Material*. 2nd ed. London: Library Association.
- Katz, William A. (1992). *Introduction to Reference Work*. Vol.1: Basic Information Sources. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Ranganathan, S.R. (1961). *Reference Service*. 2nd ed. reprint. Bangalore: Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science.