

2010-2-3 Notes

LIS 620: Information Sources and Services

Encyclopedias

Encyclopedias

- Uses
 - Fact-Finding
 - Represent humanities and social sciences
 - Water down science
 - Hard to know what's been left out if that's not your area
 - General Background Information
 - Basic information to get your feet wet
 - Pre-Research Information
 - 1ST place you get information
- Problems with encyclopedia
 - No pictures in biographies
 - Hard to find information in them
 - Can be so specific that you find nothing
 - Too general to find any information
 - The Day the Universe Changed by James Burke
 - Available from the TLC
 - **The greatest invention are indexes**
 - Information is no good if it's not organized
 - Part 4 or 5 talks about it
 - A photo would help visualize
 - Some have straight ABC order
 - Others have a general index to help you find things within the arrangement
 - Usually in the back
 - Encyclopedias have biases based upon political eras
- *Brockhaus* is the mother of all other encyclopedias other than Britannica
 - More like a dictionary with a short, precise definitions
- *World Book*
 - The length of articles are more indicative if they are taught in school curriculum
 - These articles are written by reading experts
 - A graded presentation (easier to more difficult)
 - Has pretty pictures
- *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology*

- A graded presentation
- Hormonal influx causes students to be so easily distracted and not think. ☺
- People are still trying to hide information from each other
- *Britannica*
 - Most scholarly
 - Most in-depth
 - Most respected

Types of Encyclopedias

- Hypatia of Alexandria
- By level of audience
 - Only really worry about the ones written solely for children
 - General/adult
 - Subject (professional/specialist)
 - We can use professional as educated adults
 - Specialists are more for in-depth stuff
 - High school vs. adult

Types of Encyclopedias

- By format
 - Multi-volume vs. Single volume
 - Print vs. electronic
 - Electronics' advantages
 - Ease of use
 - Content may not be as rich
 - 1st version of electronic versions are usually super multimedia pimped out
 - Foreign-language
 - Sometimes it's the only way to find information out about another place
 - i.e. Great Soviet Encyclopedias
 - We thought at the time that Soviet Union's real power was not military but brains

Scope

- Focus on purpose
 - Defined in terms of audience
- Subject coverage

- Ideally, should be uniform from discipline to discipline
 - This isn't how it really happens though! :D
- Ideally, should be timely
 - Ex: Pop culture is not referenced recently
- Ideally, should be free of bias
 - See current controversies like evolution vs. creationism
 - Marie Curie is sometimes still lumped with her husband
- General encyclopedias are revised about 10% each year
- Subject encyclopedias can update faster year to year
- Libraries generally keep older encyclopedias since they are like time capsules of the era they were printed in
- Audience
 - Usually refers to age level
 - *World Book* approach (by article) vs. *Childcraft* approach (by set)
- Arrangement and style of presentation
 - Alphabetization
 - Cross references and index
 - Length and breadth of article

Format of Encyclopedia

- Illustrations
 - Number proportional to length of article?
 - Up to date?
 - Do they enhance text, or serve as filler?
 - They should have some relation to the text
- **Memoir** is what things feel like looking back instead of **autobiography** which is fact-based research
- User friendliness

Foreign Encyclopedias

- In larger academic libraries
- Italy: *Enciclopedia italiana di science letter et arti (1927-31)*
- Spain: *Espasa (1905-)*
- Russia: *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*

Subject Encyclopedias

- Difference from general encyclopedias:
 - Continuous revision vs. single edition
 - Expected to hold field for 30-35 years
 - Written and edited by known experts
 - Understood definitions, biases, etc.
- Since these are so specific, as librarian, if you need help to look up the words to understand the topic, you'll have to look it up
- Revisionist history: writing culture and social movements from the bottom of society instead of from the POV from the rich
- Older editions may still be useful

Uses

- Second level of research process
 - All the old wives' tales about how to do stuff
 - Windex is a great floor cleaner 😊
- For more "advanced" users in some fields
- Ready-reference for experts
- "Grounding" for any subject
- Bibliographies

Types

- Cover whole field
 - Ex: *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
 - *New Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*
 - *Encyclopedia of Religion*
 - Are not biased in the way you think of
 - The best of scholarship in that field
 - Worldwide represents most religions
 - Translated in a readable, intelligent way
 - Cover new field
 - *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*
 - *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*
 - *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*
 - Just now getting enough information to publish whole encyclopedia
 - Cover new topic or aspect of field
 - *Encyclopedia of Death*

- *Encyclopedia of Baseball*
- *Encyclopedia of Jazz*

How to Remember Them All? Don't!

- *First Stop* (1989)
 - Indexes 450 Subject Encyclopedias by subject
 - It gives you a place to start searching for information
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