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A Showcase of Specialty Reference Books: Orders of Battles, Graphic Indexes, and Other Lesser-Known Types of Works

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Endnotes

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3. See Gift Contract Form at <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs/laupuslibrary/histcoll.cfm>.
4. For an article opposing most deselection in medical libraries see: **Luft, Eric v.d.** "Surviving the Danger Period: Collection Development in Medical Special Collections." *Watermark*. 31, no. 2, Spring 2008, p. 29-34.
5. Although the evaluators did not consult it for this project, the 2008 edition of **ACRL's** "Guidelines on the Selection and Transfer of Materials from General Collections to Special Collections." <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/selectransfer.cfm> might be especially useful for collections that have not been recently evaluated, have not had a policy of transferring books to special collections, and/or were established many years ago.
6. Help in identifying history of health care materials: **Allen, Margaret.** "Celebrating Nursing History: What to Keep." *Nursing and Allied Health Resources Section. Medical Library Association*. Updated Oct. 30, 2005. <http://mahrs.library.kent.edu/resource/reports/weeding.html>. **Eldredge, Jonathan D.** "Historically Significant Journal Articles: Their Identification in Older Bound Journal Volumes Designated for Weeding and the Creation of New Access to These Articles". *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*. 89, no. 1, Jan. 2001, p. 71-75. <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=31707&blobtype=pdf>. **Flannery, Michael A.** "Building a Retrospective Collection in Pharmacy: A Brief History of the Literature with Some Considerations for U.S. Health Sciences Library Professionals." *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*. 89, no. 2, April 2001, p. 212-221. <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=31729&blobtype=pdf>. **Shisler, Carol M.** "Evaluating Your Nursing Collection: A Quick Way to Preserve Nursing History in a Working Collection." *Journal of the Medical Library Association*. 95, no. 3, July 2007, p. 278-283. <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=1924961&blobtype=pdf>.
7. This label was originally devised to satisfy an accreditation team that opposed including older material in with their profession's circulating books.
8. The **Country Doctor Museum** in Bailey, N.C. <http://www.countrydoctormuseum.org>.
9. **ABE.** <http://www.abebooks.com>. **AddALL.** <http://used.addall.com>. or **Alibris.** <http://www.alibris.com>.
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A Showcase of Specialty Reference Books: Orders of Battles, Graphic Indexes, and Other Lesser-Known Types of Works

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The Internet has become an all-purpose reference tool these days, but, as those of us in reference and collection development know, reference books offer information with a depth and accuracy that is often missing on the free Web. Everyone is familiar with common reference books like encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, atlases, and handbooks. But have you ever heard of an *ordinary of arms*, *gazetteer*, or *formulary*? Do you have any books with *graphic indexes* at your library? Have you ever run across an *order of battle* while sauntering through the reference stacks? Here's one that has perplexed me for a while — how is a *cyclopedia* different from an encyclopedia? And, I know what a chronology is and I know what a bibliography is — but what's a *chronological bibliography*? Knowing the terms for these specialty types of reference books can help us decide what reference books to use for patrons' questions, or whether a potential purchase fits into our collecting policy. You probably already have several of these types of books in your reference collection, and you might hear about others in this article that would make good additions. Several of them are subtypes of the standard types of reference works, and others are wholly unique. Many are available in print as well as eBook formats. Let's look more closely at some of the lesser-known members of the reference world!

Specialty Types of Reference Books

Order of Battle — provides summative, standardized entries for all the military units (divisions, regiments, battalions, etc.) in a particular war. Orders of battle have a very different design than military history encyclopedias: the orders of battle are set up according to military hierarchy instead of alphabetical topics. To take one example, *Order of Battle, U.S. Army, World War II* shows everywhere each unit was stationed throughout the global conflict, every campaign that each unit fought in, and, in many cases, insignias, photographs, and narratives. In addition to use by military historians, veterans refer to orders of battle to

document their unit's participation in a particular battle. Genealogists can peruse an order of battle to find out where a grandparent was stationed. Most major wars now have an order of battle; type in "order of battle" and the name of the war in your **OPAC** or **WorldCat** to find them.¹

Gazetteer — gives locations and often descriptive information about towns, ponds, hills, and other geographic features. Gazetteers are different from atlases in that they don't include maps but rather tell you where the place is, sometimes using geographic coordinates. I know what you're thinking: **MapQuest** and **Google Earth** can find places for you in a flash. Specialized gazetteers, however, can prove quite valuable to researchers by bringing together contextual information that Internet search tools usually don't. For instance, *The Literary Gazetteer of England* gives you not only the location but also the *significance* of various places associated with over 500 English authors. You can find out what famous writers came from, or lived in, a specific town. It also tells of references to the places in literary works even if the author did not reveal the name of the town or feature. For example, read about the downs that **Tennyson** immortalized in his lyrics, or find out which buildings in Bedford likely inspired the various destinations in **Bunyan's** *The Pilgrim's Progress*.²

Book of days — lists the major events that happened on each day of the year. Sometimes, books that fit into this genre are called by other terms, so you may have to experiment with various keywords to find them. Sure, Internet search tools can help us find out what happened on a given day as well. Once again, however, the reference book can provide much more specialized, substantial information. For example, there are books of days for the literary world and Minnesota history that focus on memorable events in those areas. Books of days come in handy for organizing weekly exhibits or programs, answering questions for those "what happened on your birthday" papers often encountered in public and high school libraries, or helping scholars

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discover contextual facts such as what authors were born on the same day.³

Calendrical convertor — “Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492” — on the calendar that Europeans used, that is. But when did he sail the ocean blue on the Aztec, Chinese, or Zulu calendars? I use the term *calendrical convertors* to refer to those books that can help with this type of question because they translate dates from one calendar to another. Some are chock-full of algorithms that can perform the conversions. Others offer tables that correlate the dates on the Western calendar with the dates on the other calendars. Hard core historical researchers and archaeologists make the most of these sophisticated, semi-mathematical tools.⁴

Graphic index — You are sitting at your reference desk when an archaeologist approaches with a piece of pottery that has a mysterious symbol on the side. She asks you what the marking means. But, how do you look up a symbol when you don't even know what it's called? You'll need a *graphic index*, sometimes known as a *pictographic dictionary*. These tools allow you to find information using pictures rather than the traditional linguistic way. You might try **Carl G. Liungman's Dictionary of Symbols** which offers a graphic index in the back that groups symbols by common features such as crosses, circles, and other shapes. You can glance through these groups until you find the symbol, and you'll get a citation number that will refer you to a section with the meaning. There are several other types of graphic indexes. Coin collectors use photographic indexes of coins a lot. Another example is the *Oxford Visual Dictionary* which offers diagrams of many things in everyday life. It can help answer those questions like “A part on my bicycle is broken — it's the thingamajig between the circle-part and the whatchamacallit-pole. What do you call that thing?” Turn to the diagram on bicycles and direct the patron to point to the part in question. You'll also find diagrams of hair dryers, clothing, animals, plants, and aircraft carriers. Another fascinating graphic index is the *Classified Directory of Artists' Signatures Symbols & Monograms*. This is just the thing for a patron who has a painting with an abbreviated, seemingly-unidentifiable artist signature. You can work some reference magic by flipping through the artist symbols in this book until you find a match!⁵

Armory — a key to the study of heraldry, this type of work shows the symbols of various families. An armory is organized by family names. A similar type of reference book is the *ordinary of arms*, which is arranged by the heraldic symbol. Look up “**Spencer**” in an armory to find out that the family seal is a red and white shield with seashells across the front. On the other hand, look up “eagles” in an ordinary of arms to find out which families feature that animal in their coat of arms.⁶

Reverse Dictionary — One type of reverse dictionary lets you look up words by their

endings rather than their beginnings (good tool for linguistic scholars and poets looking for a rhyme). You can look up “-ance” and find “disturbance,” “significance,” and “redundance.” The first of these types of reverse dictionaries goes back all the way to **Erasmus Alberus** in 1540. Another type of reverse dictionary lets you look up the definition; it gives you the word. This is very useful when you have a word on the tip of your tongue. For example, let's say a patron asks you what the term is for the fear of heights. Choose one of the keywords from the definition, either “fear” or “height.” Look up those words, and you'll find “acrophobia.” A reverse dictionary also finds subtypes; searching under “camp” will find words like “bivouac” or “gulag.” If you're talking with a patron and can't remember what those little study rooms in your library are called, look for “library” and you'll glance through words like “stack,” “Dewey Decimal System,” and “shelfmark” until you come to the answer, “carrel.” The reverse dictionary associates words in various ways to help lead you to the right one. Great for public libraries with lots of crossword enthusiasts, any library that serves writers, or anyone (like me) who occasionally has mental blocks.⁷

Concordance — A free-standing index to a work of literature. Many of us are familiar with concordances for the *Bible*. Nowadays, free, online versions of the Scriptures and other literature are keyword searchable, nullifying the need for most concordances. However, there are still times when we would need to use one, such as for texts that are copyrighted and not available online.

Discography — provides standardized entries of musical recordings with label information and production details that allow for precise identification. According to *Oxford Music Online*, a discography is not the same as a conventional catalog, which supplies only basic description. A discography “goes beyond this information to establish all the facts that distinguish one recording from another or identify a recording issued in more than one format, and may also distinguish multiple recordings of a work by the same performer.”⁸ For this reason, a discography usually includes the album's label name, master number, format, songs, performers, and reissues. This meticulously-crafted type of reference book arose in part to help sort through the massive tidal wave of jazz album production in the twentieth century, as many of the albums were produced with slightly different labels by various studios. One musical scholar notes that “discography” was coined for a “new reference book, unlike any ever published — a book that tried to give standardized information about each record that might interest a serious jazz collector.”⁹ Some discographies may encompass a genre such as *The Essential Rock Discography*,¹⁰ a book organized by alphabetical order of the band name and offering profiles as well as album lists. Others focus on one musician and may have separate chapters for releases, sessions, and *Billboard* chart listings. In another example, *All of Me: The Complete Discography of Louis Armstrong*, the compilers arrange the recordings chronologically

and include a tune index at the back. Other discographies are listed by record label.¹¹ All in all, the discography is another reference tool with a unique history — and a great value for today's librarian.

Filmography — You guessed it — it's a cousin of the discography, except it focuses on movies rather than music. It may concentrate on a particular director, actor, time period, or theme.

Cyclopedia — Another word for encyclopedia! The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* notes that cyclopedia comes from the Greek words for “circle” and “learning.” When European encyclopedists of the early modern period tried to translate the ancient Greek word for encyclopedia they incorrectly left off the *en-* prefix at first. Eventually, they discovered the error. Accordingly, a Dutch scholar of the time, **Vossius**, observed that among the authors of his day “cyclopedia was used by some authors, but encyclopedia by the best”.¹² Encyclopedia eventually came to be the more commonly used term, but some authors still prefer the slightly erroneous title of cyclopedia.¹³ However, the content of a cyclopedia is usually just as accurate!

Lexicon (or lexikon) — the original, and a still used, meaning is a dictionary of Hebrew, Greek, Syrian, or Arabic. However, the term has also broadened its meaning over time. Lexicon is now applied to any dictionary for a specific field or subject area, similar to a glossary. Business people can make use of lexicons like *The Digital Lexicon: Networked Business and Technology A-Z*, and political scientists can consult *Coming to Terms with Security: A Lexicon for Arms Control, Disarmament, and Confidence-Building*.¹⁴

Fieldbook (or fieldguide) — originally a booklet that a surveyor used to jot down measurements, or an album that a botanist used to collect specimens. Today in the sciences, fieldbooks are usually reference books with descriptions and illustrations that help readers identify and evaluate particular subjects (such as insects, birds, rocks, etc.) that might be hard to distinguish against other closely-related members of the same type. Some fieldbooks also have “identification keys” that categorize subjects. Students of botany will find the *Field Guide to Wildflowers* to be helpful before and after heading out to a foray in the forest. In addition to fieldbooks for animals and plants, there is even a *Field Guide to Bacteria*. However, in addition to its use in the sciences, fieldbook sometimes means any type of book that practitioners from any of the professions use while out in their fields, sort of like a manual. For example, teachers may consult fieldbooks that tell them how to implement various techniques in the classroom. Another interesting example is the *Field Guide to the American Teenager* (this one is for parents, of course).¹⁵

Formulary — lists the formulas and standards for making chemicals and drugs. A formulary for medicines is called a *pharmacopeia*. Accordingly, *The United States Pharmacopeia* is an authoritative reference book for the medical field. Sometimes “formulary” applies to

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food industry standards; my favorite is *The Formulary of Candy Products*.¹⁶

Catalog of Incunabula — I have passed by the reference shelves a few times and noticed catalogs, bibliographies, or checklists of incunabula. These works list incunabula, books or pamphlets printed before 1500 (although it sometimes refers to any books that are the first in their genre). Incunabula comes from the Latin words “cradle” and “birthplace.”¹⁷ (OK, I admit that incunabula itself is not a type of reference book, but I’ve noticed it often occurs in reference book titles, especially in archives and academic libraries, so I thought I would mention it!)

All the Kinds of Bibliographies — True, **WorldCat** and other tools can generate a bibliography on a topic in seconds; however, human-created, print bibliographies can still help committed library sleuths find and evaluate materials in ways that online tools may not. Here are some specialty bibliographies:

- An *analytical bibliography* may evaluate the content, but it also describes the physical aspects of books, including such things as the editing work, editions and reprints, source material, manuscripts leading up to publication, locations of extant copies, textual errors, book size, cover page, colors, illustrations, etc. Many include photographs of the books. Subtypes include *descriptive*, *textual*, and *historical bibliographies*. *Descriptive* indicates that the listing provides in-depth information about the book’s physical characteristics. *Textual* means the bibliographers compare the original manuscript of the book to its subsequent printings with a keen eye towards any discrepancies. *Historical* means that the bibliography discusses the history of the technology and people producing the books in addition to the book itself (albeit sometimes historical simply means that the bibliography covers a historical topic). Grab an analytical bibliography if you are helping historians, literary experts, book arts scholars, book collectors, or patrons who’ve found mysterious tomes in their attics.
- *Enumerative* means the bibliography doesn’t usually include a lot of annotation — but it can give you a fairly comprehensive listing.
- Use a *chronological bibliography* to see the order that an author published their works, or the publication order of books about

a subject. These are great for tracing the history of an idea. Consult *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1985: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography* to view year-by-year the titles published on this topic, and thus see how the vision of a perfect society changed over time.

- An *exegetical bibliography* lists works that interpret the *Bible*, and is usually arranged in the order of the Scripture verses.
- And, finally, a *biobibliography* lists the works both *by* as well as *about* a figure. The subtitles of these works sometimes describe their contents as “a primary and secondary bibliography” of a person.¹⁸

Conclusion

Specialty reference books instill value in our collections. Some of them are nuances or imitations of standard works, and they should merit a place in our collections along with the more commonly-titled ones. Others give us vistas for searching that standard reference books do not. Collectors or bookworms like me are fascinated by these books’ intricacy, highly-focused contents, and unique ways of packaging information, but all librarians can keep these tools in mind when serving patrons or purchasing new titles. One caveat: sometimes these terms may be used a little imprecisely, so always examine the subject headings and other information to get a good idea of the book.

For most librarians, reference books, whether in electronic or print format, play a key role in their service. True, Internet search engines can do some of the same things for our patrons, and each librarian must decide for themselves which dictionaries, encyclopedias, or specialty tools should have a place in their reference toolbox. In making your choices, please note that many reference books are more useful the more specialized they are. For example, a general gazetteer has faded in significance in this age of **MapQuest** and **Google Earth**, but a literary gazetteer can shed light on many facts that would be hard for patrons to find otherwise. Further, we should realize that specialty reference books offer a custom-made portal for their contents in contrast to general search engines. Finally, as with the specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias that most of us consult, the information in these specialty reference works is often of higher quality and greater substance than what’s offered on the free Web. In short, specialty reference books have an intellectual craftsmanship that gives them great value even in today’s highly-**Googled** world. 🍄

Endnotes

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