



Guidelines for Reference

Collection Analysis and Investment

Last updated August, 2013

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1. Purpose.

The reference collection is developed to meet the research and teaching needs of the University community. Reference sources should be adequate to guide students to the resources they need for the completion of class assignments and research papers, and to assist faculty in planning lectures and course assignments. The collection should also guide faculty and graduate students to research materials available within and outside the VCU Libraries. General informational sources should be purchased if funds are available.

2. Scope of the Collection.

A. Language.

Materials are collected primarily in English. Foreign language encyclopedias and other major reference works are selectively acquired.

B. Chronological Limits.

No limitation, but in many areas only the most up-to-date materials are retained in the reference collection. Older standard reference works of historical and scholarly interest are selectively retained. Superseded editions are generally not retained although material of potential historical value may be transferred to the stacks.

C. Format.

The collection includes a variety of formats. The choice of format should be based on careful planning, including a review of the anticipated and actual demand for a product, support for online and/or distance education, cost, equipment needs, system support, space, ease of use, reliability of access and timeliness.

D. Second Copies/Replacements/New Editions.

Multiple copies of reference books are purchased occasionally if the title is frequently requested or if faculty have placed it on class research resource lists (example: thesauri, style manuals, dictionaries). The same material may be purchased and/or accessed in different formats based on the search capabilities offered by the additional format, the need for an archival copy, the demand for the material, and the availability of access from outside the library.

Replacements are purchased if a title has been lost, stolen, or defaced beyond repair and it is of lasting value to the collection.

New editions will be considered for purchase if the title continues to fall within reference collection development guidelines and funds are available. Purchasing decisions will take into account the need for more current information, the extent to which an edition varies from the older edition already in the collection, and cost. For example, an annual publication may be purchased every other year, rather than every year.

E. Duplication.

Duplication of materials between the reference and other VCU Libraries collections should be limited. Exceptions are titles for which there is evidence of heavy use (e.g., *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, *Physicians' Desk Reference*).

F. General Guidelines for Selection.

The following factors should be considered in the selection of new materials:

1. Perceived usefulness of the publication.
2. Strengths and weaknesses of the existing collection related to current needs of the University.
3. Favorable reviews or inclusion in basic reference collection guides.
4. Reputation of the author and publisher.
5. Currency of the topic.
6. Format of the publication.
7. Date of publication.
8. Price of the publication.
9. Language of the publication.
10. Relationship of the title to current standing order obligations.

3. Specific Types of Reference Materials – Criteria for Selection.

A. Almanacs, Annuals and Yearbooks.

General and subject almanacs, annuals, and yearbooks are acquired selectively. For the most part, only current editions are retained in reference. Some encyclopedia yearbooks and key annual reviews are kept in reference.

B. Bibliographies.

Major international, national and trade bibliographies of general interest or relevance to academic programs are collected (Example: *National Union Catalog*, *British National Bibliography*, *Books in Print*). Major archival and guides to the literature of a particular discipline or field are also collected.

C. Biographical Sources.

Comprehensive works dealing with professional, national, and international biography, including both retrospective and current biography, are acquired for the reference collection. Also acquired are selected regional works for the United States, emphasizing Virginia and Richmond. Specialized sources are acquired when they relate to the curriculum and/or research interests of the University community.

D. Dictionaries.

1. English Language

A variety of English dictionaries are collected, including abridged, unabridged and college editions of general dictionaries and specialized dictionaries on etymology, slang, pronunciation and dialect. Thesauri and guides to usage are also collected.

2. English-Foreign Language

Reference collects current editions of bilingual dictionaries where English is one of the languages for as many foreign languages as possible.

3. Foreign Language

Major standard foreign language dictionaries are collected. The number and types of dictionaries vary from language to language depending on the linguistic or cultural importance of the language and their relevance to the curriculum.

4. Subject Dictionaries

Authoritative dictionaries covering terminology in subject areas included in the reference collection are collected.

E. Directories.

Major directories are purchased for the collection. Electronic format is highly preferred.

F. Encyclopedias.

1. General English Language

Major college and adult level encyclopedias are acquired. In most cases, the latest print edition is held in reference and superseded editions are housed in the stacks. The 14th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is retained in Reference for its historical value. If funds allow, one encyclopedia set is replaced every year on a rotating schedule. CD and Internet access to encyclopedias are also provided.

2. General Foreign Language

Encyclopedias in languages or area studies taught at the university should be considered for purchase as funds allow.

3. Subject

Reference collects current authoritative encyclopedias in subject areas of interest to the university community. Older editions of subject encyclopedias which retain substantial reference value are also kept in reference.

G. Geographical Sources.

1. Atlases

Authoritative international, national, regional and state atlases (current and historical) are collected selectively. Subject atlases (commercial, political, ethnic, etc.) which meet selection guidelines are collected if they support the curriculum.

2. Gazetteers

Major gazetteers of both national and international scope are collected, with coverage of both contemporary and historical place names. Works for Virginia are also added to the collection.

3. Maps

Acquisition of maps and travel guides is highly selective.

H. Government Publications

VCU Libraries is a selective Federal Depository Library. A separate document governs collection management for this collection.

I. Handbooks

Handbooks and manuals within the subject scope of the collection are added to reference if they are sufficiently current to be considered authoritative and present their information in an easily accessible manner.

J. Databases, Indexes and Abstracts

The VCU Libraries subscribes to and/or provides access to an extensive collection of general, specialized and interdisciplinary databases, indexes, and abstracts to support the research and teaching needs of students and faculty. Acquisition of these resources is almost exclusively in online format.

Factors considered in determining whether to acquire a new index and/or abstract, and the appropriate format, include:

1. Estimated frequency of use.
2. Subject coverage.
3. Quality and sophistication of the user interface.
4. Support requirements, including customization, plug-ins, etc.
5. Cost.
6. Level of content (e.g., indexing, abstracting, full-text, etc).
7. Vendor characteristics.

K. Legal Materials

Reference collects primary and secondary materials needed to research statutory and common law at the federal, state (Virginia) and regional (Southeastern) levels. Electronic format is highly preferred.

L. Loose-leaf Services

Subscription to loose-leaf services is highly selective, and electronic versions are preferred.

M. Plot Summaries

Critical digests of novels, nonfiction works, plays, films and other types of performing art are acquired selectively. Reference also collects plot summaries (e.g. *Masterplots*, various Magill series). Study aids or alternatives to research such as *Cliff Notes* are not acquired.

N. Quotation Books

Major English-language books of quotations are collected. Quotation books on narrow subjects are selected for the general collection.

O. Religious Texts

The reference collection includes important versions of sacred works significant to major world religions. A limited number of commentaries and concordances are selected for the reference collection.

P. Statistical Sources

An extensive collection of statistical reference materials is maintained in a variety of formats. Electronic format is preferred.

Q. Style Manuals

Current style manuals suited to the needs of the university community are collected. Multiple copies of heavily-used manuals may be acquired.

4. Evaluation and Weeding.

A. Regular Evaluation

Titles are evaluated periodically to ensure that the collection continues to be a working collection of important, frequently consulted publications. Careful and systematic weeding removes older, less desirable works from the collection. Older volumes of many publications, particularly standing orders such as directories and yearbooks, are automatically removed from the reference collection when newer editions are received.

B. Criteria for Evaluation and Weeding

Since each discipline covered by the reference collection requires different types of materials, it is impossible to establish absolute standards for evaluation. For some disciplines, the reference collection should provide current material only, while for others retrospective and historical works are required. However, general criteria which should be considered are:

1. Significance of the publication.
2. Age and currency of the publication.
3. Availability of later editions.
4. Physical condition of the publication.
5. Duplication of the contents in more recent works.
6. Language of the publication.
7. Use.
8. Appropriateness to the demonstrated teaching and research needs of the University community (e.g., mission, curriculum, reference questions).

6. Student Skills Collection.

The reference collection includes a special collection developed to meet the needs of a diverse range of students: first generation college students, at risk students, military veterans, students from underrepresented groups, members of the LGBT community, honors students, transfer students, graduating seniors, and more. The collection includes titles in the following areas:

- orientation to college life
- study skills and time management
- resume writing and careers
- the transition from military service to higher education
- examination guides