

# **Guide to Reference Sources, 12th Edition**

## **Detailed Selection and Entry Formulation Guidelines**

### Introduction

This document provides guidance for contributors to the Guide to Reference Sources, which will be the 12th, and 1st electronic, edition of ALA Editions' long-running publication known to most librarians alive today as Guide to Reference Books. The new edition will be, in effect, the centennial edition and the first to account for resources on the World Wide Web. GRS will include roughly the same number of entries (15,000-16,000) as the 1996 11th edition of Guide to Reference Books. Although contributors have adjusted the internal structure of sections, and the project team have added a new division to cover interdisciplinary areas, the general organization and order of sections in GRS remain those of previous editions.

I would like to express thanks in creating these Guidelines to Bob Balay, my immediate predecessor in the General Editor's office, who generously provided me with the text of his editorial materials. Having his work to draw on means, of course, that I do not have to invent all this myself! In revising Bob's material for a new edition, I am retaining much of it and shamelessly incorporating his vast editing experience, insights, and felicities of expression into my own text.

For further discussion of editorial matters noted here or for discussion of those not covered in this document, see the FAQ on the GRS publishing website as well as notes from contributor meetings at ALA and messages on the contributor mailing list. Editorial and workflow practices for the Guide are evolving as we work on it, and this document lays out only the basics.

### Audience and Purposes

Throughout these guidelines, I use the locutions "work," "title," and "publication" to indicate sources, whether monographic or serial or constantly updated, in all formats printed, microformed, or electronic, whether from a press or a website. I use "collection" with similar inclusiveness to denote whatever a library makes available to its users on shelves or electronically. The following paragraphs employ, as guidelines must, a normative vocabulary, but contributors' knowledge of and judgments about their field will ultimately determine those works that appear in GRS.

### Definition of "reference work"

No definition for "reference work" is entirely satisfactory for GRS's purposes, especially in the Age of the Web, and I will not attempt one beyond saying that "you know one when you see one." Definitions functional (works used for brief or occasional consultation rather than read from beginning to end), ontological (works that exist to lead to other works), bureaucratic (works that are in the reference collection and do not circulate), or formal (works at least 60 percent of whose content is made up of lists, tables, or brief entries in alphabetical array) all suffice, and all have manifest shortcomings. Aware that almost any item in a library's collections is capable of being used to answer an inquiry and could therefore conceivably be considered a reference work, contributors will use their judgment and the "commonsense" range of works described by the definitions suggested above to select those titles that have proved their utility in the research environment.

This question arises particularly with full text databases. Clearly the Reader's Guide with full text added is a reference source and as such should be included in GRS. But what about LexisNexis

and JSTOR, or what about an e-book collection? They can indeed be used as indexes, as reference works, because of their keyword searching capability. In other words, you might enter such archival collections because they serve as their own indexes. After vigorous discussion among contributors, GRS will observe the following guideline: ask first whether the source in question was designed as a reference tool or as a collection/archive? If the source was designed and is sold as a collection but can secondarily be used as a reference tool, then you may not want to enter it; instead you may want to note its utility as appropriate in an annotation to another entry or in a headnote. That said, the tendency to search the web by keyword argues for the inclusion, for example, of JSTOR among the periodical indexes. The front matter to the new edition will have to discuss this question, and how and whether to include such sources is the contributor's prerogative.

## Imprint date

The new edition, like its predecessors, may list works from the beginning of printing through the cutoff date for publication. In practical terms, since the volume of reference publishing continues to increase, especially on the Web, and recent works often push older ones into obsolescence, GRS will emphasize titles recently published and currently in use. Although publishing and research patterns in particular fields will determine precisely what “recently published” and “currently in use” mean for any given section, previous editions of GRS will have to content researchers for many older works. Titles listed in GRS certainly form a canon, a stable repertory of standards, but, since on the Web GRS will be a dynamic work whose main purpose is to provide the foundation for reference and information services in TODAY's higher education research settings, its canon is always being destabilized by new standards.

Some sections of GRB11 saw heavier revision than others. Since the 11th edition represents publication dates into 1993, contributors should especially be on the look out for works published since then, but contributors are certainly free to go back farther in time in cases where they think an important work was missed.

Once it is published, GRS will have to be constantly updated, which makes the question of imprint date less important. Update frequency has not yet been determined.

## Language

These Guidelines place no restrictions on language-of-publication. However, and although sold internationally, GRS is compiled in North America for use largely in North American libraries, and English-language works published in North America will therefore figure prominently. Works in other languages, particularly European and Asian languages, will be included as sections require them. Non-Roman scripts will be transliterated in publication, although we plan eventually to display all languages in their vernacular scripts.

## Form of publication

In the past, titles in printed form have, of necessity, dominated the pages of GRS's predecessors. The availability of online and other electronic works today challenges that dominance and, in some cases, e.g., indexes to journals, has relegated printed publications to the realm of the dodo bird. Indeed, for many readers and researchers today, a reference work does not exist unless it is online, and “the Web” is assumed to be the compendium of all reference compendia.

GRS is catholic in its view of reference works and will apply the same criteria to titles in all formats whether sold to libraries, given to libraries by government or other non-profit organizations, or made available for free on the Web by individuals and groups. Principles of

catholicity and adherence to high standards will be challenging to apply to Web-based resources, whether commercially or freely available; if nothing else, a printed work, unless damaged, retains its characteristics once it is on the shelf, and the annotation you write today will faithfully describe that work 10 years from now. Not so Web resources, whether in the matter of interface or content.

Remembering again that GRS's main purpose is to provide the foundation for reference and information services in TODAY's higher education research settings, these Guidelines do not presume to prescribe how "new" Web and "traditional" print sources will co-exist in any given section of GRS because publishing and research patterns in individual fields will doubtless suggest sectional balances among the formats of materials listed. That said, please take into account the following general considerations when including Web resources in GRS, which, rightly or wrongly, will confer a sense of monumental permanence on works entered:

- Entries for online and print versions of a source should take into account the other(s). Put another way, contributors should always account for alternative formats of commercially published, paid-for/subscribed-to sources. If you enter Gale's *Literature Resource Center*, the annotation should mention the several synoptic works subsumed in it; if you enter *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, you should cite its availability in the *Literature Resource Center*. Furthermore, even if annotations do not evaluate them, annotations should at least mention the several incarnations of a source, e.g., the availability of H. W. Wilson's *Reader's Guide* from a number of vendors online. If you enter a "traditionally published" source in either its print or Web version and well-known "free" web alternatives exist, please discuss these latter in the annotation; if, by the same token, you enter a free Website, subsume well-known print or commercially available Web equivalents in the annotation. See the section on annotations below for further guidance on this matter.
- Contributors have asked about whether to integrate or segregate electronic and print resources, and among us, as you might well imagine, are both lumpers and spreaders. Your General Editor is among the lumpers and could, for example, categorize an online portal to web resources the same way he would a guide to the literature in print; others would not. One criterion that may help us to decide whether to integrate a web resource with printed ones is how closely it matches the traditions of the printed format. For example, in the case of portals to sources and guides to the literature: how much or how close to the top does a web resource offer guidance in the form of headnotes and annotations? If the web resources is only a hierarchy of lists that arrays sources for the clicking, then it is not much of a guide and should be in the separate category for "Internet Resources." This question may be of the "how many angels can dance on the head of pin" sort, given the variety of takes one can have on the sources themselves and the distinctions among them. In any case, your own conscience, sensibilities, and knowledge of your field will determine how you integrate/segregate e- and p-sources in your section. No general rule prevails, and I would be glad to think with you or advise you what other contributors are doing if you want.
- As has always been the case, contributors will prefer to enter, irrespective of format, sources from governments, professional societies, commercial publishers, or other organizations that have a history of publishing such sources. In terms of "free" Websites or of sites not produced under these traditional auspices, you will have to use your judgment as informed by your knowledge of the field in which you are contributing. On the whole, you should prefer "free" meta-sites, directory sites, or portals that have gained a reputation over the last few years for offering well-designed and well-maintained, growing, current, well-edited access to sources in a given field or set of related fields; for sites specific to a topic, apply the usual selection criteria to those with a demonstrated commitment to maintaining service.

- In the case of library catalogs appearing both in print and online prefer to enter the online version if it is complete, that is, all library holdings are in it, and refer to the printed edition of the catalog in your annotation as superseded or still useful because.... . If the online catalog is not complete, then choose to enter print or online, referring to the other in the annotation, depending on which is most likely to be useful for people working in your field, or which enters the majority of the library's holdings.

Note that you may include works published in periodicals if they are significant for research in the subject and if there is no substitute. Citations to periodicals should give full bibliographic information (author, title, journal, volume, date, pages).

## Breadth of scope

Broad in scope itself, GRS prefers works that themselves are broadly focused. Works on individual persons should be included only for those figures exercising the very greatest influence. Important though works devoted to individuals may be for reference purposes, they can be located easily in libraries, and including them comprehensively would overwhelm GRS. Exclude also works that are narrowly geographical or chronological. It would be appropriate, for example, to list a field guide to flowering plants of North America but not one confined to flowering plants of Oregon, a database on the US colonial period but not a chronology of the reign of Augustus Caesar, etc. Statistical works for states of the United States, provinces of Canada, or census reports for provincial jurisdictions of India should be omitted, but bibliographies that provide access to those materials might well be listed. Note that you can combine under a series entry sources narrow in scope when a publisher issues many like volumes, for example, the individual titles in Scarecrow's *Native American Bibliography* series.

## Qualitative criteria

The reputation and experience of the editor/compiler/publisher, the accuracy and completeness of the work, its currency, and how well it carries out its stated intention are factors that may determine 1) whether you should list a title in GRS or 2) whether the annotation needs to account for certain aspects of the work. Presumably you will not enter a work of dubious quality unless it is the only game in town; by the same token, encomia and such designations as "standard" should be reserved, so as not to waste words in your annotation, only for these works that stand out among similar titles listed. See "Usefulness" below for related comments.

## Usefulness

Utility has always been the chief criterion for inclusion in the *Guide*. Because this concept has many aspects—the content of the work, the frequency with which the work is consulted, the circumstances under which it is consulted, and the means by which the work gives access to its content—it is a slippery one to apply in that any attempt to make sense of it quickly devolves into circumstantial meat/poison, fat/lean kinds of arguments. This difficulty acknowledged, and considering GRS's primary audience and the uses to which they put it, contributors will include works that can best, most "usefully," satisfy the vast majority of demands made on a reference service, while not necessarily excluding "exotic" or little-known works that will be just the thing for the occasional, the rare or peculiar, purpose. If you have found a source useful in reference work and you think others might find it so as well, other criteria for inclusion become, in effect, less important.

Many users regard the *Guide* as a "core" or a "best reference books" list. To such users "core" and "best" imply not only high-quality writing/design/editing but also the usefulness of the work in the senses noted above. To an extent this common understanding is correct, for GRS is, of

necessity, selectively rather than exhaustively inclusive. Since a work of its size cannot hope to list for any subject all the reference works available, inclusion of a title in GRS results from a value judgment, and value judgments of necessity exclude the “less good” to leave only the “best.”

Nevertheless, in such sections as Statistics and Demography, Language Dictionaries, Geography, National and Trade Bibliographies, and History, GRS has attempted to be very generously selective, comprehensive if not exhaustive, with regard to countries, regions, or languages. GRS has also been comprehensive in the sense that it tries to give a balanced presentation of reference sources for all the disciplines served by academic research libraries. Finally, it is worth remembering that the *Guide's* selectivity has varied from section to section, since in some disciplines an abundance of resources makes winnowing necessary, while in others paucity of resources requires listing most titles that exist. Indeed, some titles may well find their way into GRS despite their shortcomings; they are useful because nothing else is available.

## Sources of Candidates for Entry

You will compile your section beginning with a review of the entries in the *Guide's* 11th edition. You will consider for addition titles published since the cutoff date for the 11th (1993 imprint year) and titles, regardless of publication date, that you think should not have been omitted from previous editions. Assume, at least for working purposes, that you have roughly the same number of entries in your section of the new edition as your predecessor had in the 11th. If you feel that your section needs to grow by more than 10%, please make an argument for that growth.

Some titles from the 11th will have been superseded by newer editions, and some will have been supplanted by works that are more skillfully compiled or that take advantage of more recent scholarship. Some titles will move into GRS almost automatically because they are still essential to reference service, but others will require careful scrutiny, especially as you decide on new works to include. Subject all titles, previously included or new to GRS, to the same careful examination, and measure them against the same criteria. Your choice of entries and the text of annotations should reflect your own use of and familiarity with the sources you have decided to list. You should submit for inclusion only titles you have personally examined, whether you carry them over from the 11th edition or they are titles new to GRS.

Be especially alert to works on the fringes of your section, and do not let LC's classification scheme, the 11th edition's organizing principles, or the titles included in the 11th edition limit which works you want to include. Do take the broadest possible view of your section and keep the neighboring sections in mind; be alert to works that might fall through the cracks because they do not conveniently fit the mold of your particular section.

You should rely on the acquisitions procedures of your library to turn up new reference titles of potential interest to GRS. Since contributors typically have a hand in selecting titles for their library's collections, you will routinely see the bibliographies, scholarly and trade journals, alert services and reviewing media, websites, and publishers' announcements that enable you to keep abreast of new publications.

In addition to the discipline-based sources you routinely use to stay current with your field, articles published occasionally in *College and Research Libraries* by Sarah Witte and colleagues at Columbia, the topical column on Internet resources in *College and Research Libraries News*, the reviews section in *RUSQ*, *Choice's* monthly reference section as well as its annual Web review issue (August supplement), and the “best” lists published annually by such groups as RUSA/CODES and MARS may be helpful as double checks on your local collection.

Since the collections of any given library may not be comprehensive enough to permit you to examine all titles you might want to consider for GRS, you will want to have access to the collections of other research libraries and will want to take advantage of the knowledge of colleagues in the field. In this regard, previous contributors have found that libraries may be willing to lend reference works through interlibrary loan if the requester invokes the GRS name. You should also feel free to ask publishers for access to or copies of sources you want to examine.

## Annotations

GRS is a working bibliography, not a reviewing medium. As such, it annotates titles primarily to enable readers to see quickly what sources are available and what each contains. From the annotation, readers who have not previously examined a given work or who only dimly remember it should be able to visualize its scale and arrangement and, from among similar works, be able to choose the one to use first.

Looking to its roots as an educational text for reference librarians and to its role in canon-formation, however, GRS's annotations will depart somewhat from its predecessors' in being more conscious, as a review is conscious, of the need to compare, contrast, and otherwise relate or evaluate sources as well as describe them, especially in cases when a number of similar works are entered. If entering dictionaries of literary theory and criticism, for example, annotations should note how they compare and which is better for what purposes. If two or more works are similar in content or are closely related, enter the one you think is superior or central; then mention inferior or complementary titles in the annotation. You might also choose to list with little or no annotation a number of similar works and then use a headnote or group annotation to compare them.

As did previous editions, GRS will favor clear, concise annotations of usually no more than 100-125 words. Be careful in your annotations to put the most salient information first. Annotations should sketch the essential features of a work, discussing as necessary ("necessity" will vary with both the work in question and the design of the entire section) the work's intention, coverage (subjects, dates, formats), content (kinds of materials listed, subtopics), arrangement, features that facilitate use, or the presence and quality of such linking and mapping elements as indexes, appendixes, and bibliographies. Your readers will often find it useful for you to estimate the number of entries in a work (although a mere number of entries will not go far to establish its utility) and their approximate length, to mention the quality of the writing, and to comment on such user guidance as help screens, introductions, headnotes, etc. If you want to note special features, indicate their location: "Endpaper charts correlate some 40 population characteristics with the Dubester numbers." If illustrations, portraits, charts, maps, etc. are important to the reference uses of the work, mention them in the annotation only if the bibliographic description does not.

Beyond such desiderata, these Guidelines specify no formula for annotations, and you should feel free to vary those you write. You will be able to describe some works in few words, while others may require you to elaborate on specific features or mention omissions. Keep in mind however, that the pattern of searching by keyword is a prominent feature of search strategies used by both librarians and civilians, so enrich your annotations with language that describes the various dimensions of the work's content.

These Guidelines also do not specify a particular prose style, although to save words you should prefer active voice to passive and use telegraphic, incomplete sentences as appropriate ("400 entries. 30 statistical tables. Well-written introduction to the field. Useful particularly to inexperienced researchers."). Take care, again in the interest of verbal thrift, not to repeat information that the reader can find in the entry itself or in the section head under which you list the work (e.g., to annotate a dictionary of advertising terms listed under "Advertising and Public

Relations - Dictionaries and Encyclopedias" as "A dictionary of terms used in advertising" is pointless.)

You can usually describe the arrangement or interface of a work briefly in combination with an indication of scope or content ("Lists by city magazines and newspapers published in the province of Quebec"; "Arranged by name of literary author"; "Lists books and periodical articles organized by country or geographic areas"). For some kinds of sources, the arrangement can be assumed and need be noted only if it departs from the usual pattern. Therefore, instead of "A bibliography whose entries are listed alphabetically by author," say "An author list"; however, do specify arrangement in such a case as "Author list in chronological order by birth date." Language dictionaries, for example, may be assumed to list entries in alphabetic order, but for polyglot dictionaries one might say, "Base list in English; indexes in other languages." If the work is in a classified order, it will be enough to say, "Classified arrangement" unless the scheme is not peculiar to the work, in which case it should be specified: "Arranged by Universal Decimal Classification."

When annotating a source issued in different formats, spend time discussing only content differences, if any, between/among them. Likewise, in the cases of sources offered by different vendors with different interfaces, consider for the most part any differences in content; do not spend precious annotation space dwelling on interface differences and what the F5 key does. However, do describe an online source's interface, navigational functions, or system requirements if they are unusual, require a good deal of learning by the user, or if they have important consequences for the way users can interact with the content. Include URLs for free resources that have a single source; in the case of a resources available from multiple vendors your annotation should simply note "available from multiple vendors" and cite a URL for the publisher website.

Do evaluate, but don't waste words in issuing merit badges. Such evaluations as "arranged clearly to give access to XYZ..." are not very useful, for readers should be able to assume that, because of a work's inclusion in GRS, it is adequate to its purposes unless you note otherwise. Evaluative comment can be brief: "the authoritative handbook for X," "indispensable work," "a very useful work even though readers must occasionally double check its facts."

Use an annotation from an earlier edition of GRS without change if it accords with your own assessment of the source and you have decided it accurately describes the source. Read every 11th edition annotation carefully, and do not hesitate to rewrite. Repeatedly reread your annotations during compilation if only because doing so will reveal ways to cut words while retaining content.

If you think that citing a review in your annotation would be helpful, do so unless the citation would overburden the annotation. Reviews will sometimes perceive features or shortcomings you will want to consider in deciding whether to include a title, and they will sometimes cite special features, potential uses, errata, or bibliographic additions that readers of GRS will find useful. If citing a review, avoid lengthy quotation, cite in full its source, and do not cite it as a surrogate for your own assessment of the work.

## Headnotes

As the bibliographic content of the *Guide* grew over recent editions, various other kinds of content were pushed out in order to keep the volume to a manageable size. Relieved of some space constraints by online publication and hoping as we do to raise the profile of the *Guide* in teaching and training venues, write headnotes to your section and subsections to discuss the general shape or content norms of the literature in order to speed users to the title they need or to inform them about those aspects of the literature which you cannot conveniently address in annotations. Since this is the first edition of the *Guide* to appear after the

advent of the Web, headnotes that discuss changes to publishing or research patterns occasioned by the move from an all-print to a hybrid environment of print and electronic sources will be especially helpful. With this new edition, we want to pay particular attention to instructing our users about groups of sources, about the kinds of reference questions they answer, and about the relationships between the reference literatures of various fields; well-written headnotes will be of great value in achieving this goal.