

## All About Reference Books

### Tracy Derrell

In the days before Google and the Internet, students had to use books to find information. Today, we can find most information we need quickly and easily by going online. However, it is still helpful to know about the major types of reference books and what they are used for. Since all of these have their online equivalents, you may find it useful to begin with one of these reference books when you need specific information, instead of going straight to Google.

**Atlas:** A collection of maps. Atlases may contain other information, such as geographic features, and social, religious, and economic data. Atlases are created for several purposes. Before GPS devices, people often kept road atlases in their cars to help them if they got lost.

**Almanac:** A book of data, updated annually. Almanacs contain mostly scientific information, including, but not limited to, weather forecasts, tide tables, moon phases, sunrise and sunset times, and information on planting crops.

**Dictionary:** A book, organized alphabetically, that has words, their definitions, pronunciations, and parts of speech. Dictionaries may include information about word origin, also known as etymology. An unabridged dictionary does not omit any words or definitions. Most of the dictionaries people use at home and in school are abridged, which means they have been shortened to contain only the most commonly used words.

**Encyclopedia:** A general reference, often containing many volumes that are organized alphabetically. Encyclopedias are often good starting points for research, because they give detailed overviews of topics. Like dictionaries, encyclopedias are organized alphabetically. Their content is organized into articles or entries. Wikipedia is a modern, online equivalent of the original encyclopedia, but it is important to know that Wikipedia often contains inaccuracies.

**Thesaurus:** Similar to a dictionary, a reference book about words. Unlike a dictionary, a thesaurus won't help you if you don't know a word's meaning. A thesaurus provides synonyms and antonyms for words. A writer who finds himself using the same word too often will find alternative words with the same meaning in a thesaurus.