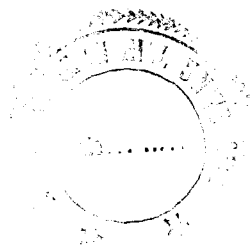


HOME  
REFERENCE  
BOOKS  
IN PRINT



# HOME REFERENCE BOOKS IN PRINT



A Comparative Analysis compiled by S. Padraig Walsh  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES IN PRINT  
GENERAL WORLD ATLASES IN PRINT  
SUBSCRIPTION BOOKS IN PRINT

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## BUILDING A HOME REFERENCE LIBRARY

Since opinion will differ widely on what constitutes a good, basic home library, no hard and fast rules can be applied on the way in which it should be built up. Too many qualifications are involved, among the most vital being the needs and interests of the purchaser; whether it will be for adults or a growing family; what ages the children are at the time of purchase and their needs in later years; the occupation of the parents and the intended careers of older children; the religious beliefs of the household, and last, but not least, the amount of money available to begin and afterwards to build up a collection of useful home reference works.

The suggestions which follow are then, of necessity, the opinions of the writer, working on the hypothesis that the parents are in their thirties or forties, that the breadwinner is employed in the middle income group, and that they have two children aged about 8 and 12, which is just about typical of the average American family. A purchaser, in making his selections should, of course, deviate where necessary to meet his or her own special needs and interests. What may be a natural first choice in one instance could well be quite inappropriate in another. Generally speaking, however, the writer has based his suggested order of acquisition on long library experience with the type of books most frequently consulted for general and specific information, as well as for leisure reading, and the type of books on which publishers concentrate most of their efforts in selling to homes.

For convenience, and opinion will vary on the order, the writer has divided his suggestions for the purchase of home reference books into four arbitrary groups: (1) Those which he considers basic to all types of homes, and for all ages, with or without children; (2) Those which he considers to be highly desirable, but not a first choice, in the average home; (3) Those which he considers desirable where funds permit, but which are not regarded as really essential, with rare exceptions; and (4) Those which he considers to be of a non-essential nature, useful and desirable though they might be in certain circumstances.

As to which specific titles to buy in each category, this is something which has to be decided by the purchaser himself in the knowledge of his own needs and interests.

### BASIC

#### AN ENCYCLOPEDIA

There is little question that a good general encyclopedia should form the base of a good home reference library and there are, fortunately, several good works available. Some of these are designed specifically for elementary grade children while others, conversely, are of an advanced nature suitable only to well-read adults. In between these are the home and school or intermediate encyclopedias which serve to a more limited extent, the reference needs of the entire family. Undoubtedly, however, a good encyclopedia contains a wide variety of information on all important subjects and dispenses, to some extent, with the need for specialized works in some areas. An examination of *General Encyclopedias in Print*, by the same author and publisher should be considered before a set is bought.

ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE  
DICTIONARIES  
IN PRINT



## FOREWORD

It is not generally appreciated that more than ten million dictionaries are sold in the United States each year, ranging in price from a modest 25¢ vest pocket edition to the gigantic 13-volume, \$300, *Oxford English Dictionary*, and in size from less than 1,000 entries to almost half a million. At the present time there are more than 70 titles in print, and although several of these are condensed and abridged versions of larger works, the variations in size, cost, method of presentation and range of contents is bewildering to those readers who are not, and cannot be expected to be, conversant with the finer professional points of reference book evaluation. This confused situation is further compounded by the often extravagant and sometimes blatantly untrue claims from some publishers that their particular products are the most authoritative, the most complete, the most up-to-date, and so on.

Unhappily, despite these confident claims and the grandiloquent titles and lavishly worded and illustrated dust jackets which usually accompany them, not all dictionaries are good ones. All, of course, supply a certain amount of information and it is not unreasonable to state that there is no such thing as a really bad dictionary, but only a handful can be regarded as really top quality productions. Of the others, some are hack reprints from old and badly dated plates, inaccurate for the most part, poorly edited and printed, and deficient in quality in other ways. Others, while originally good and acceptable compilations, have become out-of-date either because of an inadequate revision policy, or because revisions have been made on each page in such a way that the space for new entries could be gained only by eliminating other desirable or even vital information, a policy which can function efficiently only for a limited period of time.

This evaluation has been compiled to provide the average reader with a practical guide for choosing an appropriate English-language dictionary, either for academic and scholarly use, for school use, or quite simply for home and office use. For this purpose, the information on and statistical data presented for each title is as accurate and as up-to-date as it has been possible to compile, and has been assembled from a wide range of professional evaluation media; checked and verified against basic statistical data and special information provided by the publishers who, almost without exception, promptly complied with the request for specified information on all of their titles.

Resulting from this assembled information, an analytic description has been compiled for all major titles, and a rating accorded to each, which fairly represents an impartial cross section of professional opinion culled from the collected findings and evaluations of the most competent reviewing authorities. Where a title is so recent that no such evaluations are available, and also where the previous findings are obviously inaccurate and invalidated because of subsequent rectification and improvement by the publishers, the compiler has implemented such necessary corrections, omissions or additions, and an interim rating has been applied, based on standard professional evaluative procedures.

The survey, in the main, has been restricted, for practical purposes, to those English-language dictionaries which (a) are currently in print, (b) are published in the United States, with the notable exception of the well-known series of

dictionaries published by the Oxford University Press, and (c) retail at more than \$2.50 in their least expensive regular hardcover editions. Inexpensive hardcover and paperback dictionaries which, as a general rule, provide only brief definitions and spellings for quick reference use, and which retail at less than \$2.50 are described more briefly in an appendix, as also are a number of the more important dictionaries which have gone out of print in recent years.

The prices quoted are those supplied directly by the publishers in their replies to a detailed questionnaire, and have been verified as correct at the time of going to press but are, of course, subject to change at any time. Where more than one edition of a title is available, the quoted prices include the full range known to be available in plain, thumb-indexed, special paper, specially bound and encyclopedic editions. It should be noted, however, that in a few instances, the actual cost may be lower than the prices quoted herein, as it is not an uncommon practice for some titles to be offered at a quite substantial discount in combination offers or package deals with other reference works (usually encyclopedias). Discount stores may also offer titles at a cost lower than the publisher's list price. More rarely, a title may be offered at an extraordinarily low price through a book club, but since this would entail subscribing for a specified number of other titles, it is open to question whether this really amounts to a price reduction.

Purchasers should also note that several titles are available in both "trade" and "text" editions. The trade edition is always available through regular retail outlets, but the text edition is normally available only to educational institutions at a discount, and sometimes with slightly different additional material.

## CHOOSING A DICTIONARY

### 1 COST

Reference books, especially those for which there is a wide and continuing market, vary considerably both in quality and quantity, and dictionaries, because of their highly adaptable nature and tremendous sales, are subject to an even wider variation. To properly compile and manufacture a good dictionary is an exceedingly expensive undertaking, which can and has run into several millions of dollars in recent years. Conversely, however, an old work with little or no revision can be reproduced from its original plates at a very low cost. Because of this there are, unfortunately, a not inconsiderable number of less scrupulous publishers and distributors who are taking unfair advantage of today's enormous market by producing works of inferior quality by devious means. The most common of these is to reprint an old work, which may well have been a good one many years ago, with little or no change from the original text, and dress it up under a grandiose title and in a handsome, and proportionately expensive, format to provide an external impression of integrity and quality. Yet another method of breaking into the market is to produce a new work in fact, and thus avoid the possible legal entanglements of misrepresenting the work as a new one. But, to keep the heavy initial costs down, such new, but still inferior publications, are produced by poorly qualified, inadequately equipped and low salaried editorial staffs. If a dictionary is to be really good, it has to be priced accordingly, and yet while it is true that all the top quality dictionaries are relatively expensive, it does not automatically follow that the terms "price" and "quality" are synonymous. In fact, there are some works available in the higher price brackets which do not even nearly match their competitors in the quality of

GENERAL  
WORLD ATLASES  
IN PRINT





## FOREWORD

Basically, an atlas is a collection of maps representing different regions of the surface of the earth on a fairly uniform scale, preferably preceded by an adequately detailed table of contents (including the scales for each map), and followed by an equally adequate index-gazetteer which should facilitate the location of places on the maps. Essentially, therefore, it is a combination of graphic and verbal geographic information; the collection of maps representing the graphic medium, and the table of contents and index the verbal medium. Most of today's atlases, and certainly all the best ones, adhere to this basic format, but the majority will also contain varying amounts of additional information in the form of thematic, special purpose, and historical maps, guidebook and touristic information, tables of social, economic and political data, forms of government, major products, population statistics, illustrations and text on places of interest, material on space activities, studies in map projection methods, instructions on how to read and use maps, business forecasts, and so on. Some of this additional material will be of great geographic value, especially pertinent being the new science of space exploration and the use of artificial satellites, which have opened up whole new avenues of geographical information by revealing hitherto unrealized inaccuracies in the mapping of the earth. Their importance lies also in the fields of weather forecasting and control, and methods of communication. On the other hand, supplementary miscellaneous information, such as the list of United States colleges which appears in at least one atlas, has no place in an atlas.

That a good, well produced, accurate and up-to-date atlas is becoming more and more a principal work of reference is evidenced by the speed at which the world is changing. Apart from the physical corrections which are being made by extra-terrestrial satellites, there have been many changes in recent years in the political structure of the world. New states have emerged and others are scheduled to emerge in the years ahead. New towns have been built, old towns have changed their names or the spelling of their names. Nowhere is this more true than in Britain, where radical changes in local government boundaries have altered the shape of counties and even, in one or two instances, eliminated them completely. Previously independent towns have been swallowed up by larger neighbouring authorities to create new administrative units, and even in tiny little Wales, there are instances of towns changing the spelling of their names. Populations have shifted, and will continue to shift; communications have changed even more radically, and will continue to do so. The world of today is really very different than what it was ten years ago, and so are the atlases of ten years before. The most conservative estimate reveals that an atlas ten years old is at least 40% inaccurate, and this is reflected in the contents of this booklet, which is substantially different than its predecessor of only two years ago.

This publication is primarily concerned with providing the average American user with a practical guide in the choice of a general world atlas for everyday home, school and office use. For this reason, this survey has been restricted in the main to those general world atlases which are (a) published in the United States, and this includes those which have been imported, and adapted or translated to meet the map reference needs of North American users, and (b) which retail at

\$5.50 or more in their cheapest available trade edition. Three notable exceptions have been made, however, for three particularly important atlases which will be widely sold in the United States and Canada. These are *The Times Atlas of the World*; the *Oxford Atlas*, and the very new *Pergamon World Atlas*, the last named being originally produced in Poland and re-edited for the English speaking countries by the Pergamon Press of Oxford and New York. As a general rule, although this is by no means as true or as valid as it once was, the workmanship of European atlases has been considered superior to that of American cartographers and libraries, at least, should be cognizant of this in developing a well rounded collection of atlases. For those, however, who require less expensive atlases, or who need additional information on smaller British atlases and large recently out of print works, three appendices list (a) those British world atlases which are available in the United States (b) United States produced atlases which retail at less than \$5.50, and (c) the most important world atlases which have gone out of print in recent years.

The prices quoted here have been verified as correct by the publishers in practically every instance, and the few exceptions have been extracted from the latest available trade catalogs and, as such, can be taken as substantially correct, although they are all, of course, subject to change at any time. Where an atlas is available in more than one edition or binding, the full range of prices and the differences between the editions have been noted in detail. These prices may not, however, be applicable to titles which are sometimes offered as premiums or in combination offers with other works of reference, such as encyclopedias and sets of classics, in which they are likely to be offered at a "reduced" rate; nor do they normally apply to libraries, schools and other educational institutions, to whom a liberal discount is usually granted, or to whom special editions are available.

The information and statistical data presented for each individual title has been compiled from the information supplied by the publishers in response to a detailed questionnaire, and is therefore as accurate and current as it has been possible to assemble. The detailed analytic descriptions resulting from these questionnaires has been augmented by a physical examination of each atlas, and by reference to professional reviews and evaluations. From this assembled data, a rating has been allocated to each title, which is intended to represent an impartial cross section of professional opinion, culled from the findings and evaluations of the most competent reviewing authorities. Obviously, however, it takes some considerable time for new atlases to be evaluated and included in the most accepted listings of reference books and, therefore, where no such listings and evaluations were available, or where the previous findings were invalidated by later rectifications and improvements, the compiler has applied an interim rating, meticulously based on standard evaluative procedures.

## CHOOSING AN ATLAS

### 1 COST

It is true, of course, that very low cost atlases are available, in some cases, which do provide useful information, but obviously, the less the cost, the less likely the atlas is to provide adequate data. Most of the smaller and cheaper atlases are abridged from much larger works by the same publisher, or map maker; this abridgement usually taking one of two forms, (a) an actual reduction in the physical size, while retaining all or most of the original information, or (b) a

SUBSCRIPTION  
BOOKS  
IN PRINT



## FOREWORD

What is a subscription book? In its most exact definition, it is a book or set of books under one comprehensive title, for which orders (subscriptions) are solicited in advance of publication. In earlier times this was in fact the method of selling such works, and we still observe the practice in the solicitation of magazine subscriptions, for example. The term "subscription book" in modern day parlance has, however, been interpreted in a much broader sense, and the term could now be more accurately defined as being a work which is sold directly from publisher to consumer, either in advance of, or subsequent to actual publication. The term is now also interpreted to mean titles which are in the main designed for home purchase, rather than the more scholarly works which are sold to libraries and institutions of learning.

The most commonly encountered method of selling today's subscription book is by a representative from door to door, who will either work haphazardly from neighborhood to neighborhood or, as is now the more prevalent practice, on an organized plan which follows up leads gained in one way or another. But, while this is still the most used method, other means of obtaining sales are also vigorously pursued. It is now common, for example, to see works of reference for home use sold through supermarkets on the "book-a-week" plan, and other widely used methods are advertising in local newspapers, television advertising (directly and indirectly through quiz programs), and direct mailing.

This by no means ends today's definition of a subscription book, however. For the most part, current titles are sold directly by the original publisher to the purchaser, but in some instances, special editions are sold as a subscription item, occasionally under a different title, while being sold simultaneously as a regular item through normal retail bookstores and other outlets, usually at a lower cost, although in a cheaper format.

The most usual type of subscription book is a general encyclopedia, followed closely by dictionaries, atlases and various versions of the Bible. But there is no clear line of demarcation. A subscription book can be, and often is, on just about every subject. Anthologies of literature are common, as also are family medical guides, child development programs, histories of the United States, and a number of special subject encyclopedias, dictionaries and handbooks. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the best or only works on any given subject are sold on a subscription basis. On the contrary, some of the reference works most suitable for home use are not available through any subscription book distributor and may only be obtained through regular book store outlets. For this reason, this survey, although primarily concerned with both good and bad subscription books, does also include a number of titles which are available only through retail stores, and particularly those which are of outstanding value.

For the convenience of users, the compiler has included some advice on the buying of subscription books and non-subscription home reference books, and some further information on the methods of selling employed by door-to-door salesmen; suggestions on building a home reference library; a comprehensive listing of long out-of-print subscription books and several in-print works which might warrant consideration under exceptional circumstances; and a directory of

those publishers and distributors, and the various titles under which they operate, who are directly concerned with either the publishing or the selling, or both, of subscription and non-subscription home reference works.

## CHOOSING A SUBSCRIPTION BOOK

Subscription book publishing in the United States is a vast and booming industry which is expanding along with the present population and knowledge explosions. For this reason it is by no means unlikely that new titles from new publishers will come on to the scene in ever increasing numbers. Some of these will be good and useful additions, but many others are likely to be cheaply produced hack works, designed to make a quick profit before their deficiencies are brought to light. Because of this, and because of the multiplicity of titles presently available, it becomes more and more difficult for those unversed in the finer methods of reference book evaluation to discriminate between the excellent, the mediocre and the inferior publications. The suggestions which follow are therefore offered to prospective purchasers as general guide lines towards the choice of home reference books. These are based on the standard evaluative procedures adopted by professional librarians and educators in assessing the quality and usefulness of expensive reference books, but abridged and simplified for the general public.

### 1 COST

More often than not, and especially in the case of books purchased for home use, this is a determining factor. It is an unfortunate fact that some people reason that the more expensive a work is, the better it should be, but this is a very dangerous assumption. Many subscription books are hiked in price by being bound in an expensive luxury, leather binding with ornate gold tooling, but this in no way improves the actual content. Not infrequently, a work in a regular binding will be much more useful than a similar, but different, work in an expensive binding. No matter how good a book is, however, and no matter how fancy a book may be, its cost should be reasonable in proportion to its content. There is no absolute rule of thumb for this, but, for lay purchasers, one very rough method of assessment is to compare two similar works on the same subject by dividing the number of pages by the price. This is by no means an infallible method of assessment, but it does show up, with surprising frequency, works which are grossly overpriced. There are other factors to be considered also, such as page size, and the obvious inequality between pages which are heavily illustrated and those which contain only straightforward print. When considering cost, also bear in mind that combination deals often work out to the advantage of the purchaser. A package deal from one publisher or distributor is usually much less expensive than purchasing the same or similar works from different outlets.

### 2 SUITABILITY

There is no purpose whatsoever in buying books just because they are books, which are quite unsuited to their purpose. An anthology of classic literature for adults, for example, would have little appeal for children, excellent though they might be for their intended audience. Similarly, religious groups and others interested in Roman Catholicism, or Judaism, would have little use or, at the best,