

Reading Scholarly Sources Effectively: Books

Books

Scholarly books or **monographs** focus on specific, academic subjects, make original contributions to their field of study and, unlike journals or other serial publications, have a fixed number of volumes. Published by university presses or other academic publishers, books are important forms of scholarly communication, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Though not all scholarly books go through peer review, you can use book reviews to confirm whether a book has been recognized as a useful contribution to its field.

There are many sources of book reviews available at UNB Libraries, including:

- Academic Search Premier (on main search page, select Book Review from Document Type),
- JSTOR (on main search page, select Reviews under Item Type), and
- London Review of Books.

A typical structure of a scholarly book includes:

- **frontmatter** (title page, table of contents, list of figures and/or tables, forward, preface, and introduction),
- **body** (chapters and conclusion), and
- **backmatter** (appendix, glossary, bibliography, and index).

How to Read a Book

Effective scanning of sources is an important part of the research process. Scanning is superficial reading that allows you to gather relevant materials for deeper investigation. Scan content by taking a broad view of the book:

- Browse the chapter titles in the **table of contents** and the **index** for keywords relevant to your topic;
- Skim the **frontmatter sections**, and the **conclusion**;
- Review any figures, diagrams or statistics; and
- Review references for titles and authors relevant to your research question and to expand your source list.

Reading to understand requires a much greater time commitment and several passes over the text. In-depth reading requires that you think critically about the content and its context.

- How does the book or chapter contribute to its field of study?
- Does the evidence effectively support the book's arguments?
- How does the book's theoretical "lens" compare with other scholars' approaches to this topic?
- How does the book help you answer your research question?
- Make note of and follow up on relevant references.

Reading Scholarly Sources Effectively: Reference Works

Reference Works

Reference works provide a variety of information including facts, relevant vocabulary, definitions, topic overviews, and additional sources. This is why reference works serve as an effective starting point for your research. Reference works can be put together alphabetically, chronologically or by topic. Listed in our Research Guides, you will find both print and online reference works at UNB Libraries. Choose the right reference work for your research needs.

Examples of reference works include encyclopedias, dictionaries, chronologies, bibliographies, digests, biographical sources, handbooks, and manuals.

How to Use Reference Works

Encyclopedias

Encyclopedias can provide broad or specific information about your discipline. They include overviews of topics, facts about places and individuals, and may include lists of key resources on a given topic. Examples of online encyclopedias at UNB Libraries are *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management* and *Encyclopedia of Nursing Research*. Examples of print encyclopedias at UNB Libraries are *Sage Encyclopedia of Political Behavior* and *Encyclopedia of Human Biology*. Follow the alphabetical, chronological or topical order of the volumes or use the index to locate keywords, names, or places.

Bibliographies

In the humanities and social sciences, **bibliographies** are useful for locating more resources on your topic. They are organized by topic or author and may include additional notes with the entries. Examples of online bibliographies at UNB Libraries include *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, and *Elder Abuse and Neglect: Annotated Bibliographies*. Examples of print bibliographies at UNB Libraries include *Serial Bibliographies for Medieval Studies* and *Bibliographies of Twelve Victorian Authors*. Use the index of a bibliography to locate keywords, names, or places.

Handbooks

In the STEM disciplines, **handbooks** provide procedures, policies, processes, formulas, and technical documentation relevant to a field of study. In the humanities and social sciences, handbooks and companions provide the latest approaches to the advanced study of a topic, with value-added content, such as annotated bibliographies and glossaries. Examples of online handbooks at UNB Libraries include *Standard Handbook for Civil Engineers* and *Handbook of Medical-Surgical Nursing*. Examples of print handbooks at UNB Libraries include *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* and *A Handbook of American Military History: From the Revolutionary War to the Present*. Use the table of context and index to navigate handbooks.