

BLIS semester II
(paper – 5)
Reference Sources & Services
Topic – CRITERIA OF EVALUATION
e-content

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CRITERIA OF EVALUATION

Past Record

Reference books in most cases are very costly publications. For example, the library price of The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010 edition is around Rs.70,000.00 Moreover, abstracting and indexing services are periodicals for which one year subscription is to be paid in advance before the expiry of the subscription, the library loses some money. If a reference book does not provide authentic, detailed and up-to-date information, the users' purpose will not be served.

If the past record of a publisher is found to be good, then it becomes easy to decide about the procurement of the book. On the other hand, if the publisher is new, little known or unknown, then it becomes essential to read the reviews about the book before taking a final decision. It is to be remembered that past record of the publisher is an important element in the selection of a reference book.

Authority

The authoritativeness of a reference book is usually judged on the basis of the qualifications, reputation, and experience of the author, compiler, and the editor responsible for the book, and the reputation, experience, and the past record of the publisher/corporate body. For example, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. is publishing The Encyclopaedia Britannica since 1768. The publisher is in existence for about 250 years. During this period it has brought out 15 official editions of the Britannica and various versions of Britannica such as Children's Britannica and Encyclopaedia Britannica India. The 15th edition of the Britannica brought out under the title The New Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1974 was in 30 volumes. All encyclopaedias brought out by this publisher are considered to be top grade encyclopaedias. Whenever a new encyclopaedia or any other reference book is brought out by this publisher, the librarians all over the world will naturally consider it a standard publication and would like to go for it. For the publication of standard reference books, the well-known publishers employ knowledgeable compilers, experienced editors and reputed authors.

Scope

When we talk of scope, we generally take into account the subject, geographical area, time span, forms of documents, language, target user, etc. Indian National Bibliography (INB) This bibliography covers publications on all subjects, published from India. It includes mainly books published during a particular period in major Indian languages.

Treatment

The term 'treatment' implies thoroughness, completeness, reliability, bias, style, illustrations, etc. Let us take two dictionaries – The Concise Oxford Dictionary and Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language. COD contains 240,000 words, phrases and definitions, and Webster's Third International contains 450,000 entries. From the data we find that Webster's Third International is more thorough and complete compared to COD.

The aforesaid two dictionaries include only words. On the other hand The Random House Dictionary of the English Language includes not only words but also important personages, place names, important biblical and other characters as well as illustrations.

Arrangement

Variety of arrangements are noticed in reference books. Alphabetical arrangement is quite common. You should know that there are two types of alphabetical arrangement: letter-by-letter, and word-by-word. Let us take the following terms — back bench, backbone, backdate, backdoor, back focus, backpack, and back pass and arrange them in both the ways. On arranging they will be in the following order:

Letter-by-letter arrangement

back bench
backbone
backdate
backdoor
back focus
backpack
back pass

Word-by-word arrangement

back bench
back focus
back pass
backbone
backdate
backdoor
backpack

Special Features

Many reference books have some unique features which others do not have. For example, The Random House Dictionary of the English Language includes a directory of colleges and universities of the United States and Canada, and a basic style manual which other English language dictionaries do not provide. Some reference books are updated at regular intervals, others irregularly. There are some which are not updated at all. For example, Newman's Indian Bradshaw is updated monthly. Yearbooks and almanacs are updated annually. Some directories are updated annually, but many are updated at irregular intervals. For example, Directory of Scientific Periodicals (New Delhi: INSDOC (now NISCAIR), 1964-.) was first brought out in 1964. Thereafter, it is being updated at irregular intervals. Apart from unique features and mode of updation, presence of bibliographies, supplements, appendices, etc. are also considered as special features.

Format

Format takes into account binding, quality of paper, font, page makeup, and illustrations. We shall consider all these points one by one.

Book Reviews

Book reviews are published in newspapers, journals, magazines, etc. There are even book review periodicals which publish only book reviews. Book reviews are written by scholars and many people of eminence. Hence, book reviews must be given due importance while evaluating a book.

Limitations

All reference books have some limitations however comprehensive they may be. Take for example, Webster's Third International. This dictionary is one of the most comprehensive English language dictionaries currently available. Yet this dictionary does not contain any phrase or idiom. Moreover a dictionary cannot cover all the words that have come into use very recently. Encyclopaedias are also not free from limitations. The comprehensive encyclopaedias that are published in many volumes cannot be updated at short intervals. The 14th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica was brought out in 1929, and the 15th edition in 1974. The gap between the two editions is 45 years.

Conclusion

The overall judgment on a reference source is to be reflected in the conclusion whereby the authorities concerned will be able to take a decision about its procurement. The conclusion may be written point-wise.