

reference book, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'rɛf(ə)rəns bʊk/ , /'rɛf(ə)rɪŋs bʊk/ , U.S. /'rɛf(ə)rəns ,bʊk/

1. A book containing comprehensive information about a subject or range of subjects, esp. one intended for research or consultation on specific matters rather than continuous reading.

1771 A. Burns [*Geodæsia Improved*](#) x. 215 In that Case get a Reference Book with as many Leaves therein, as the Size of the Estate shall require.

1808 [*Edinb. Weekly Jrnl.*](#) 6 Jan. 1/1 The Literary Annual Register, or Records of Literature..is the most useful Reference Book which a Man of Letters can possess.

1849 [*Rep. Commissioners Brit. Museum*](#) (1850) 265 Do you remember any instance of your missing reference-books out of the reading room?

1869 Dickens [*Let.*](#) 30 Mar. (2002) XII. 321, I have had a great burning of papers in your room—have destroyed everything not wanted—and have laid in a stock of Dictionaries and reference-books.

1904 [*St. Nicholas*](#) Sept. 1052/2 This department wishes to commend the use of reference-books by young people.

1954 [*Grove's Dict. Music*](#) (ed. 5) VI. 1037/1 The name drifted into reference books where it was misapplied to the perfectly normal treble and *par-dessus* French viols of the mid-16th century, which often have only five strings.

1972 [*Physics Bull.*](#) Apr. 225/2 For a reference book the index is inadequate.

2000 [*Church Times*](#) 12 May 11/1 But finding out what they looked like was not so easy. Reference books and chance-met gardeners provided no answers.

Source: OED: Oxford English Dictionary

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