**reference book, n.**

**Pronunciation:**  Brit. /ˈrɛf(ə)rəns bʊk/ , /ˈrɛf(ə)rəns bʊk/ , U.S. /ˈrɛf(ə)rəns ˌbʊk/

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 Jrnlt.* 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.


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*