



## All About Topics

### Finding Background Information

Once you have identified the main topic and keywords for your research, find one or more sources of background information to read. These sources will help you understand the broader context of your research and tell you in general terms what is known about your topic. The most common background sources are encyclopedias and dictionaries from the reference collection. Textbooks also provide background information.

### Encyclopedias And Dictionaries

You can find encyclopedias and dictionaries for specific topics by using the VALCAT, by consulting a reference bibliography [an annotated bibliography of selected reference sources on a specific subject, for example: **How to Find Information About AIDS** (Ref. RC607.A26 H9)] or by asking a reference librarian to suggest appropriate titles.

### Exploit Bibliographies

Read the background information and note any useful sources (books, journals, magazines, etc.) listed in the bibliography at the end of the encyclopedia article or dictionary entry. The sources cited in the bibliography are good starting points for further research.

Look up these sources in the [ValCat](#) and periodical indexes. Check the subject headings listed in the subject field of the record for these books and articles. Then do subject searches using those subject headings to locate additional titles.

Remember that many of the books and articles you find in the VALCAT and periodical indexes will themselves have bibliographies. Check these bibliographies for additional relevant resources for your research.

By using this technique of routinely following up on sources cited in bibliographies, you can generate a surprisingly large number of books and articles on your topic in a relatively short time.