

Sources About People and their Lives

Biographical Sources: Indexes, Dictionaries,
Current, Historical, Subject & Specialized;
Genealogy

sources about people

biography, and more and less

a fascination about people, the cold hard facts, the
biographical sources

and more: biographies (books, found like books; we even
catalog them differently in public libraries), provide
context, interpretation, reinterpretation, revisionism, etc
and less: people who don't have biographies written about
them or in the biographical sources

why not the Web?

why choose one of these over a general-purpose search
engine?

- coverage
- functionality, access (indexes in *DAB*)
- historical interests
- authority, depth
- durability

why the Web?

why choose a general-purpose search engine?

- ease of use, accessibility
- personal, official, fan sites
- email addresses (tho careful about timeliness)
- nobodies

nowhere to hide

phone books, reverse directories, skip tracers, Pls

questions

1. Who was Myrtle Edwards?
2. Can you find me a good biography of Henry M. Jackson?
3. Who was the driver of Diana's car that night?
4. I want a list of notable American librarians over the last century or so.
5. Do you have any general bio information on Alexander McCall Smith?
6. What's a good place to start in researching my family tree?

questions

1. Who was Myrtle Edwards?

HistoryLink (prob via Google for orientation)

local history

of interest only to local residents (present, past, possibly
future)

perhaps, though, of intense interest

questions

6. What's a good place to start in researching my family tree?

genealogy

a number of specialized sources, starting with the family (family Bible, memories, etc), local sources (newspapers, cemetery & municipal records), then broader (census, Social Security, web sites, LDS church)

an opportunity for libraries—depth of resources and interests

What kinds of pitfalls or complications might be raised in genealogical or family-history research?

questions

3. Who was the driver of Diana's car that night?

the biographical sources

easy (and fun!) categorizations

ways of figuring out where to go

status

dead

historical sources *Dict of Amer Biog, Dict of Nat'l Biog, Who Was Who*

alive

current sources *Who's Who in X*

recently dead

Google, Who's Alive and Who's Dead, newspapers, obituaries

famous for dying

Google, newspapers, magazines, web sites, obituaries of the past

nationality

US

Who's Who in America, Dict of Amer Biog, Amer Nat'l Biog

UK

Who's Who, Dict of Nat'l Biog/Oxford Nat'l Biog

other/international

International Who's Who

geography, professional, characteristic

*Who's Who in X, American Men & Women of Science,
National Faculty Directory, blah blah blah*

depth

biographical dictionaries (?), Web indexes *BAGMI*, *Biography Index*
general sources
specialized sources
biographies, autobiographies

questions

3. **Who was the driver of Diana's car that night?**
Google, Lexis/Nexis, newspapers
famous for dying
of interest only briefly, and for the time and manner of death
newspapers, magazines, obituaries; use those specialized sources (*Obituary Index*)

questions

5. **Do you have any general bio information on Alexander McCall Smith?**
Biography and Genealogy Master Index, *Who's Who*
alive, UK, facts
or his publisher's web site, or his web site, or fan sites (via Google)
standard sources might not quite have caught up with him yet

questions

4. **I want a list of notable American librarians over the last century or so.**
Dictionary of American Biography
US/by profession
indexes

questions

2. **Can you find me a good biography of Henry M. Jackson?**
UW library catalog, Amazon, book review sources, etc
biography
lots of other places, for the dead, US, political, Northwest, etc

selection

by authority
by scope, range, selection, coverage
by treatment
by availability
by features of searching, format, etc

etc

beware vanity sources
autobiographies—you get what you pay for
not to mention memoirs (remember James Frey)

the story

*Why is this a separate category? Why so many resources
and kinds of resources devoted to people?*

life and death and who matters/ed

“Who's Who”

an implication that certain people are more important than
others, their lives are worth memorializing, remembering,
remarking on, emulating (or avoiding)

others of interest

Who's Alive and Who's Dead, Find A Grave
Current Biography
Burke's Peerage