

# Britannica 3: A Critique

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**Encyclopaedia Britannica. 15th edition.**  
*Warren E. Preece, editor. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1974. 30 volumes.*

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* has introduced a revolutionary concept in encyclopedia construction with its Fifteenth Edition. Aptly referred to as *Britannica 3*, this three-in-one encyclopedia is not merely a revised edition. According to the publishers, it is completely reconstructed. The 30 volumes of *Britannica 3* are divided into three parts: the Micropaedia, the Macropaedia, and the Propaedia, each of which can be used independently or together. This unprecedented format, predicated upon a circle of learning or outline of human knowledge, provides topical as well as alphabetical access to information. It also responds to three different types of encyclopedia users: those seeking simple facts; those requesting detailed, explanatory information; and those desiring a systematic approach to continuous learning.

The Micropaedia, which consists of 10 volumes with over 102,000 entries, is the Ready Reference and Index. Its concise alphabetical articles, none of which exceeds 750 words, are copiously illustrated. Many of the illustrations are new; others are colored versions of the same pictures, as was noted for the John F. Kennedy International Airport, Borgund Stave Church, and the Seagram Building. The articles are also accompanied by a plethora of cross references to more

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detailed information or related topics in the Macropaedia. Even with the profuse cross references, however, there are instances in which the Micropaedia has incomplete as well as minimal indexing of articles that are found in the Macropaedia. Among those delineated was the extensive article on the Arts of the American Indian Peoples, the major treatise for information on the North American Indian. The article is virtually inaccessible, however, if one uses the familiar index entry, Indian. Because neither this terminology, nor a cross reference from it, is used in the Micropaedia, maximum usage of this article may not be made by young adults or those engaged in curriculum study, target audiences for *Britannica 3*. Since Indian is the term used in curriculum studies, it would perhaps make the article on American Indian peoples more easily retrieved, if so indexed.

Although the Micropaedia is the key to the entire set, it is really a short entry encyclopedia within itself. An examination of

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several entries supports the fact that it spans every field of knowledge and can be read and understood by a broad spectrum of readers. The Micropaedia responds to needs of users seeking a brief statement or limited information on a given subject.

The editors note that Macropaedia consists of over 4,000 comprehensive and profusely illustrated articles alphabetically arranged in 19 volumes. Many of these in-depth articles exceed the average five page length, but none is shorter than 1,000 words. Although the articles are written by internationally known experts and reflect the reputation of *Britannica* for authority, they are not directed primarily to experts and scholars; supposedly, they are addressed to students and laymen. Thus, the educator who seeks information on his or her specialty should not be overly surprised to find a limited discussion of the topic. After examining several educational terms, this reviewer concluded that there are many areas of concern, even for the layman. Either there are omissions or very limited discussion in these areas. Citing only a few, one notes the treatment of nursery schools, day care centers,

and early childhood education, which are omitted in the Micropaedia but included in the Macropaedia, though minimally. The limited definition of nursery schools is of tremendous concern.

The Macropaedia is enhanced further by the extensive bibliographies that are appended to each article. The expansion and updating of the annotated bibliographies are commendable, but as to be expected, not all of the entries are sufficiently current to be useful. This is especially true of those items that parallel or would be used in conjunction with given subjects of the curriculum. Perforce, the annotations are extremely brief, and often the bibliographical information incomplete, yet they are noteworthy additions.

### Circle of Learning

Perhaps the most significant feature of the Macropaedia is that which distinguishes it from the traditionally arranged encyclopedia—the long new major articles that combine specific topics and related subjects rather than isolate them with the alphabetic arrangement. A cursory examination of sev-

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eral major articles in the Macropaedia suggests that careful attention be given to the editor's statement that most, but not all of the longer signed articles are entirely new, for several articles are the same ones that appeared in the 14th edition, or with little, if any revision. Others are indeed completely rewritten or new. An example is the article, "Architecture," which is basically unchanged; while the article on North American Indians has been reorganized, retitled, rewritten, and relocated to parallel the categorical position of this topic in the Circle of Learning.

Unlike the Micropaedia, the Macropaedia, complemented by the Micropaedia as the index, responds to the needs of the user who requests knowledge in depth or a lengthy interpretation of the facts found in the Micropaedia.

The Propaedia, a one-volume systematic outline of human knowledge, is the comprehensive guide to the *Britannica*. It is also the revolutionary structure upon which *Britannica 3* is predicated. This outline, referred to as the Circle of Learning, divides knowledge into 10 major categories: Branches of Knowledge, Matter and Energy, the Earth, Life on Earth, Human Life, Human Society, Art, Technology, Religion, and History of Mankind. Each category is introduced with an essay written by an authority of the discipline and gives an overview of the field. Complementing this overview is a summary of the major topics and decisions, specific references to articles, sections of articles, and other references.

Although all references to any subject a reader may wish to pursue throughout the Macropaedia are assembled in the Propaedia, the accessibility of specific facts depends upon the utilization of the Micropaedia. There is no substitute for the use of the Propaedia, however, if users—the curriculum workers, teachers, students, laymen, and scholars—are interested in pursuing an in-depth, independent, coherent study of a major discipline or of a category in the Circle of Learning. Supposedly, the detailed, specific references to the major articles in the Macropaedia reinforce the editor's thrust that the Propaedia provides for self-education,

ENCYCLOPÆDIA  
BRITANNICA



"Let knowledge grow from more to more  
and thus be human life enriched."

individualized instruction, or is "a university without walls."

The ultimate value of the Propaedia to teachers and curriculum specialists as well as lay users remains somewhat questionable. Each will need time to become oriented to the outline of knowledge, to study its components intensely, and to effect a plan for its use that will correspond to the needs of the students. Users may concur, however, with the editor, Warren Preece, who with his staff readily admits that knowledge can be organized in more ways than one and that the outline that evolved for *Britannica 3* does not necessarily constitute the best outline.

There is little skepticism, if any, that *Britannica 3* will retain the prominent position which *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has held among the English language general encyclopedias. Its sustained authoritativeness is reflected in the expertness of its contributors. Its readable, straightforward style and its comprehensive coverage are evident in its effort toward consolidation of related topics into major comprehensive articles rather than a proliferation of minute unrelated alphabetically arranged entries. And its continuous revision policy will ensure up-to-date, current information.

The Propaedia, together with the Micropaedia and the Macropaedia, could be adapted to and utilized with practically any school curriculum. Curriculum workers, including teachers and librarians, may find *Britannica 3* to be an indispensable tool in developing an innovative curriculum. □

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