

Preface to Random House Encyclopedia

James Mitchell, Editor in Chief

"...our object has been to provide knowledge for everyman."

"All encyclopedias are, therefore, the result of a compromise of one sort or another: an attempt to satisfy several conflicting requirements, with varying degrees of success, or an attempt to satisfy just one requirement in an acceptable way."

"The history of these works has shown that there are two principal concepts of an encyclopedia. The first is that of a comprehensive fact-book for easy quick reference use. The second is the complete library -- a collection of treatises on all subjects....The solution we reached-- which was to take the two traditions and marry them-- was made primarily with the user in mind."

"The level for which we have created the RHE is intended to be almost a universal one. Some aspects of knowledge are more complicated than others, and so readers will find the level varies in different parts of the encyclopedia. This is quite deliberate. It is an encyclopedia for all the family. Some younger people should be able to enjoy and to absorb the pages on the animal world, for example, from as young as ten or eleven--but the level has been set primarily for teenagers and adults."

"For a new generation brought up with television, words alone are no longer enough, and so in our Colorpedia section we have tried to make a new type of compact pictorial encyclopedia for a visually oriented age."

"And there are, of course, always dangers in compression and selection. But there are also advantages in being able to see the forest for the trees. And of what use is knowledge if it has forever to be out of reach of ordinary people."