

Monograph published by American Library Association Scientists' Approaches to Information

July 12, 1961

In spite of the fact that scientific publications are doubling in number every few years, research scientists still depend mostly on word of mouth to learn what is going on in their field of interest, says Melvin J. Voigt, University Librarian, University of California, San Diego.

In a monograph Scientists' Approaches to Information, recently published by the American Library Association, Voigt emphasizes the importance of personal contact in keeping scientists informed. His conclusions are drawn from interviews with 225 Scandinavian scientists and librarians which he conducted while visiting Denmark on a Fulbright Research Grant at the University of Copenhagen. He believes that his results would apply equally well to scientists of other nations.

Voigt was interested in three aspects of scientists' approaches to information: 1) how they kept up with what was going on in their fields; 2) how they located specific items of information needed daily in their research; and 3) how they found out what other scientists had accomplished in a specific research area. He found that conversation with colleagues played a large part in the keeping up with new material and in satisfying day-to-day requirements, and that the printed literature became of primary importance when they were starting a new research project or preparing a paper for publication.

He emphasizes that his results do not mean that printed literature and libraries are unimportant or ignored. He does believe that his results might profitably be considered in planning of the great information retrieval machines now being developed.