

The Art of the Reference Interview

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The Library as Information Center

- People search for information in context of situations
- People prefer personal rather than institutional resources to get information
- Libraries are confusing and intimidating!
- Information seeking – Immediate need
- Information gathering – Deferred need

Librarians Wear Many Hats

- Navigator
- Negotiator
- Doctor
- Lawyer
- Accountant
- Teacher
- Baby-Sitter
- Social Worker
- Bartender

Things You Should Know

1. It is impossible to know EVERYTHING, despite what your patrons might think.
2. It's ok to take your time.
3. Note: The first part of Reference is "Refer"

What is Reference?

- ❑ Reference is the creation, management and assessment of information resources in order to develop services that meet people's information needs.
- ❑ Ready Reference is provision of quick answers to factual questions.
- ❑ Controlled Vocabulary is a specified list of terms developed to ensure precise and comprehensive searching also known as subject headings and descriptors.

Other Reference Functions

- Research consists of answering questions that require multiple sources of information. This may also involve term paper counseling, fact checking assisting with citations
- Reader's Advisory consists of providing suggestions and guidance in finding interesting materials for readers in the library by finding common threads in people's reading interests.
- Technology Assistance
- Bibliographic Instruction is the development and presentation of instructional programs designed to teach library users how to locate the information they need quickly and effectively.

Customer Service and Ethics

- ❑ Be approachable, relaxed, and show an interest in your patrons.
- ❑ Be aware of physical and communication barriers.
- ❑ Don't point. It's rude.
- ❑ Remember the ALA Code of Ethics and the Library Bill of Rights

ALA Code of Ethics

- We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources.
- We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.
- We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.

Code of Ethics & Bill of Rights

- We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
- We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.
- A person's right to use a library should not be denied or bridged because of origin, age, background or views.
- Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

The Reference Interview

What is the real need behind the patron's first question?

"I need information on Ohio."

1. Listen. Do not interrupt.
2. Paraphrase. Do not add interpretation or rely on assumptions.
3. Clarify. Use open-ended questions.
4. Verify. Repeat the information the patron has given you.
5. Keep the patron informed. Let them know what you're doing.
6. Follow-up.

Open Ended Questions

- What have you looked at so far?
- Where would you like to begin?
- How did you hear about X?
- What did your professor/boss/friend tell you about this topic?
- What else can you tell me about X?
- Can you give me an example?

Open Ended Questions, continued

- We have a lot of information about X. If you could tell me more about how you need to use the information, that would be great.
- What sort of material did you have in mind?
- What kind of help would you like?
- What specifically were you hoping that the book would include?

Closed Questions

- Do you want X or Y?
- Is this for a class?
- Do you know if the article was written recently?
- Is this for a paper?
- Have you checked with any other libraries?
- Do you want research articles?

Why can't people say what they mean?

- Lack of Collection Knowledge
- Lack of vocabulary knowledge
- Lack of patience
- Comfort Level
- Not knowing what is needed
- Location
- Barriers: Physical, Language, Emotional, Mental

Searching Process

- Determine the scope of the question
- Select appropriate search terms
- Verify factual information in the original query.
- Identify sources of information that are appropriate for the user within the library's print and electronic resources.
- Write down information while searching/browsing

Example searches

- I need information about Ohio
- I need biographical information about Joseph Henry Reason (librarian)
- I need information about internships in international law

Categorizing the Search

- Time consuming or quick
- Simple or complex
- Current or retrospective
- Single source or multiple source
- User Appropriate

Where will you find it?

- Print / Internet / Database
- Textual / Graphical / Statistical
- Reference / Circulating / Children's
- Other :)

Thoughts on Searching

- Imposed Queries – Questions asked on another's behalf
- Precision – Getting ONLY relevant information
- Recall – Getting ALL the relevant information
- Searching vs. Browsing
- Database elements are invisible but small variations, hyphenation, lack of punctuation, etc. can make a huge difference in results
- Serendipitous Information – finding information without seeking it

Boolean Searching

- AND
- OR
- NOT
- “Phrase searching”
- Truncation / wildcards *
- (nesting)

Evaluating Sources

- ❑ Accuracy: Is the material current? Unbiased? Distinctions made between fact, theory, and opinion?
- ❑ Scope: the depth and breadth of the material
- ❑ Authority: Who published it? What are their qualifications?
- ❑ Age appropriateness: Vocabulary, density of text, physical attributes
- ❑ Additional Resources: Glossary, index, table of contents, bibliographies, etc.

My Personal Reference Philosophy

- Be a human thesaurus.
- Don't give up after your first try.
- Don't ever knock the library catalog, even if it's wording doesn't seem to make sense.
- Familiarize yourself with a variety of databases. Most databases have a similar search pattern even if the interface is different.
- Be aware of recommended websites
- Don't ever knock Google, even if you are sick of it. Browsing through things is important.
- Don't worry about asking other people for help. They like it. Makes them feel smart.

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