Reference Review

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Report 1: Public Library Review

The Public Library is an established library dating back to the late 1800’s. When I first walked in I was impressed with the architecture and the amount of computers all around the library. I roamed the library a bit looking at different types of books, to see if any librarian would ask if I needed any help. After a while, I made my way towards the reference desk. The reference desk is located on the second floor of the library and it is the first thing you see when you come up the stairs. According to RUSA, having signs and services easily locatable encourages patrons to communicate with librarians (Ross, Nielson and Radford 2009, 40). The location of the reference desk is extremely important because if patrons cannot easily find it, they might not bother to look for it and interact with librarians.

I make my way towards the desk and as I am walking towards him, the librarian immediately looks up from his computer, smiles and then asks me how he can help me. This first moment of contact is important, because it either encourages or deters patrons from asking questions. If the librarian didn’t look up, I could have easily assumed he was busy and turned right or left towards the shelves of books once I was up the stairs. In this moment, he acknowledges my presence from the moment I got off the stairs. He showed typical body language as Ross, Nielson and Radford (2009) described, such as, looking up, smiling, leaning in my direction (48). His body language encouraged me as a user to feel comfortable enough to ask my question. According to Ross, Nielson and Radford 2009, most users want to make initial contact before they feel comfortable about their inquiry (47). Below is a sample of our conversation:

*Librarian: Hello, How can I help you?*

*Me: Hi, I’m looking for books on tattoos.*

*Librarian: Well, let me see what I can pull up for you.*

*Ah here we go, let me write down these call numbers.*

*These first four numbers will lead you in the general direction of where books like this are located. It will help get you started. This section is located on the right side towards the back (points in that general direction)*

*Me: Thank you.*

While the librarian answered my reference question, the librarian failed to ask me additional questions about my search. It is important to further question the patron because the patron might be holding back or is unsure what to look for. It is also important because it helps to narrow the topic to sources that are better suited for the inquiry. I actually wanted to find information about women with tattoos and I knew there were some books about it from a pervious search. The area he pointed to was helpful for general information about tattoos, but there were more specific books on my particular topic in mind elsewhere. Had he conducted the reference interview further, he would have steered me somewhere else. Another area that was not addressed is that the librarian did not encourage me to come back if my resources weren’t satisfactory and there was no exit interview. Not conducting a reference interview or encouraging a patron to come back is a problem if the patron is still not finding the information they seek. The patron can become frustrated and assume there is no information on their inquiry, when in fact there might be more information elsewhere.

Sheldrick Ross, C., Nilsen, K. & Radford, M. (2009). Setting the stage for the reference interview: The first thirty seconds. In *Conducting the reference interview: A how-to-do-it manual* (2nd ed.) New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Report 2: Email Reference

My email reference interview was conducted at the Public library. At first glance on their homage, there reference contact information is not prominently displayed on their website. In order to find a contact email for reference services I had to look for it in their Contact Us tab. While not difficult to find, a user might not think to email a librarian if they have a question. I have seen some libraries make their email and chat information available on most pages just in case a question arises. For example, the University of South Carolina library (http://library.sc.edu/p/TCL ) makes a “Ask a Librarian” button available with bold lettering and font on all pages. Just like Library Reference signs should be displayed prominently, Contact information should be easily viewable. According to Ross, Nielson and Radford (2009), this establishes a reference presence that makes a library webpage approachable (40).

I then proceed to email the librarian. The following is my email:

Hello,

I need to research my family history and I don't know where to start. Do you have any recommendations?

Thank you,

Ashley Luna

I emailed the library after hours, but received a response at 10:24 am the next day. This is pretty impressive given that the library opens at 10:00 am. It reassured me that my email was probably one of the first things the reference librarian handled. If I where to evaluate their response time I think they meet standard 1.3.2 of Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers, which states “Responds in a timely fashion to remote queries.”

The following is the email response I received:

Hello: To assist you in using library resources it would be helpful to know a few more details.

1) Did your family live in the area for a long period of time? Do you know approximate time spans when your family lived here?

2) Do you live in currently?

3) Do you know the names of specific individuals in your family history and their birth and death dates?

4) Do you have access to the internet?

If your answers are yes to all or some of these questions you should have reasonable starting points for some research.

Here at Central Library we have the following resources:

- Microfilm archives of the News-Press and other local newspapers dating from the late 1800's. If you have names and death dates for individuals (see below for means to find death dates) you may access the microfilm directly and search for obituaries at no cost except printing fees for copies. The library will conduct specific searches if you provide names and death dates, but there is a $15 charge for each search.

- Central library also maintains biography files with newspaper clippings about prominent local figures. If your family members were influential or famous locally there is a chance we have information in these files.

- Central library also has an extensive collection of local history books. If you have specific names and time periods you are welcome to examine these works here in the library.

If you have specific names of ancestors who passed away in California between 1940-1997, you can find death dates at the following website:

<http://vitals.rootsweb.ancestry.com/ca/death/search.cgi>

You might also find death dates at the local cemetery databases at:

<http://www.sbgen.org/cpage.php?pt=44>

The best general search for ancestors online is [Ancestry.Com](http://Ancestry.Com/). Unfortunately it is a fee-based site but they usually offer a 2-week free trial (just be sure to opt out before the 2-weeks pass so they do not charge your credit card!)

Other local resources would be the Genealogical Society: <http://www.sbgen.org/>

And the Historical Museum Gledhill Library: <http://www.santabarbaramuseum.com/>

If you want more information or direction please visit the Reference Desk at Central Library or contact us by phone at (805) 564-5604.

Thanks for your inquiry and good luck with your research.

The opening response starts with a simple hello, and asks me some more questions to gain more knowledge about my situation. Although they are not open-ended questions, in this situation I think the list of questions with yes or no answers are helpful. They narrow down what types of services and information they provide later in the email that will be needed. According to Cassell and Hiremath (2011) clarifying questions can be a combination of open and closed-ended questions (19).

They continue with a list of local services and resources. Unfortunately my family is not from the area, otherwise these would have been extremely useful! They also provide resources from California and of course a link to [Ancestry.Com](http://Ancestry.Com/). I think it was important that they stated that [Ancestry.Com](http://Ancestry.Com/) is not a free service; otherwise I could have been frustrated if I found out later. The librarian then ends with a closing statement that invites me to respond or come to the library if I need more help. They also end with a good luck statement. It is important to follow up as explained in 5.3.1 of Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers, which states”  Encourages the patron to contact the library again if he/she has further questions by making a statement such as “If you need additional information, please contact us again and we’ll try something else." The Good luck at the end is a nice personal touch and Cassell and Hiremath explain that it allows a user to feel like the librarian is interested in their question (2011,18).

My experience in email reference differed from my face-to-face interaction. My face-to-face was not a very successful, while I felt my email was. I think because the librarian had enough time to ask questions and find resources they where able to send me a detailed email. Also because asking follow up questions with a response from a user in an email is difficult and time consuming, the librarian just provided as much information possible.

Cassell, K.A., & Hiremath, U. (2011). *Reference and information services in the 21st Century: An Introduction*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.

Reference and User Services Association. (2013). *Guidelines for behavioral performance of reference and information service providers*. Retrieved from<http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>

Report 3: Chat Reference

For the past reference interviews I was looking at the Public Library. Unfortunately they do not provide chat reference, so I will be looking at the Library Chat Reference. They provide a 24/7 chat reference service to students, staff and a limited service to members of the community. The chat reference is a cooperative service between University of California Libraries. This means that a librarian from might not be the librarian in contact. This is great because it allows libraries to share librarians, and share the cost for the service. The downside to this is that librarian might not be as familiar with the resources available, but can definitely recommend resources based on their experience.

When looking for help, the Library provides an ask a Librarian button/link on their homepage, navigation menu, and catalog. It is not too difficult for a patron to find the Chat reference page. Ross, Nilsen and Radford (2009) explain that putting this information in prominent places on the library website conveys approachability (60). On the Chat reference page, patrons input their information such as, name, email, student/non student, question, connection type, and firewall information. Once I imputed my information I was connected to a chat dialog box that sent me an automotive message that a librarian would be with me. It was a full 6 minutes before a librarian sent me an introduction message. For some patrons 5 minutes of unresponsiveness might be to long. A patron might assume that there is no one available and disconnect. Ross, Nilsen and Radford (2009) explain that users pay attention to the amount of time it takes for a response so it is important to answer quickly (62). Later in the conversation the librarian explained that she was helping other patrons and that it was a busy night. It is important to explain to patrons of any delays so they do not feel ignored. Since they cannot see what you are doing as a chat reference librarian, they can only assume you are ignoring them.

Here is chat reference conversation:

Chat Transcript: I am looking for information about a painting entitled artemisia by Rembrant? I am having trouble finding information. Can you help me find places to look at?

[Librarian 18:39:59]: Librarian 'Sharyl (24/7 Librarian)' has joined the session.

[Librarian 18:40:34]: Hello, Ashley!  Sorry for your wait tonight!

[Librarian 18:40:38]: I'm Sharyl, a librarian helping to answer questions for your library.  I'm reading your question now to see how I can help you.

[Librarian 18:40:43]: Sure!

[Librarian 18:41:01]: Are you wanting scholalry journal articles?

[Ashley 18:41:39]: yes and maybe some books

[Librarian 18:41:48]: Okay, sure!

[Librarian 18:42:09]: I'll start looking to see what your library might have to help on this.

[Librarian 18:42:15]: I'm sorry for any delays.  I'm working with several people at one time.  I'll be back with you in just a moment.

[Ashley 18:42:36]: ok thanks! no worries

[Librarian 18:45:51]: Thank you so much!

[Librarian 18:46:51]: <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/research/resources/databases/filter?tid_s=16>

[Librarian 18:47:06]: You might begin by checking the first two databases in this list.

[Librarian 18:47:21]: I'll be back with you very soon to see if you have questions,  Ashley.

[Librarian 18:55:42]: Were you able to search those and find anything, Ashley?

[Librarian 18:55:59]: If not we'll try something different.

[Ashley 18:58:16]: yes I found some pictures on artstor  that are useful! but I am having trouble finding some articles on Jstor

[Librarian 18:59:13]: What about in Oxford.  Anything there?   That's more like a specialized encylopedia for art, but very good if there is any info there.

[Ashley 19:00:08]: ok brb

let me take a look

[Librarian 19:00:19]: Sure!

[Librarian 19:00:35]: I'll see if there are other databases, or any books.

[Librarian 19:04:39]: Not doing well with the books, though I imagine that are books on him that will include something.

[Librarian 19:04:46]: I'll look for other databases.

[Ashley 19:06:29]: yes there is info about rembrandt but not a mention on the painting i am looking for. Yes your prolly right about the books

[Librarian 19:07:30]: <http://guides.library.ucsb.edu/content.php?pid=50929&sid=373973>

[Librarian 19:08:07]: This looks like a good list of databases!

[Librarian 19:08:17]: ArtSource would be good one to try.

[Librarian 19:10:30]: Bibliography of the History of Art (BHA)

[Librarian 19:10:59]: This goes so far, then this one picks up:  International Bibliography of Art

[Ashley 19:11:43]: ok ill take a look at those!

[Librarian 19:11:51]: Project Muse also has currently listings, and rather picks up where JSTOR leaves off.

[Librarian 19:12:11]: I hope you can find something.  If not, please do contact us again.

[Librarian 19:12:40]: Is there anything else I can help you with at this time?

[Ashley 19:13:30]: As of now no, I'll take a look at those and see if i can found anything

[Librarian 19:14:00]: Okay, we are staffed online here 24/7, so please do come back at any time.

[Librarian 19:14:16]: Thank you for using this service tonight, Ashley.  Best wishes! --Sharyl

[Ashley 19:14:40]: ok thanks!

[Librarian 19:15:04]: You are most welcome!   Thanks again for your patience when it was so busy earlier!  Much appreciated!

[Librarian 19:15:12]: Librarian ended chat session.

Once she entered the conversation, she introduced herself and let me know she was reading the question. Cassell and Hiremath (2011) explain that it lets patrons know what the librarian is doing since we cannot see them in action during virtual reference (26). She proceeds and builds rapport with me by using my first name throughout the conversation. She also shows deference when she thanks me for my patience and apologies for delays. According to Ross, Nilsen and Raford (2009) these are example of relational facilitators that help enhance communication (14).

She then proceeds to ask me if I want to look at scholarly journals. I say yes and some books. In a reference interview it is necessary to ask these types of questions because it allows librarians to look at the right types of resources. I let her know I was looking for information about a Rembrandt painting but she never asked further questions about the topic or why I needed this information. There were no open-ended questions to find out more information. For example, she could have asked me what information I knew about the painting or Rembrandt or if I have already found sources. The information I knew could have provided other types of recommendations. For example, I know that Rembrandt is a Dutch 17th century painter. Cassell and Hiremath (2011) explain that the librarian must ask probing open-ended questions to find out more information on the topic (19).

She provided me with a link to the subject guide on Art History and made recommendations on which databases I should explore. The link to the subject guide provided me information to resources that I might have not been aware of. Cassell and Hiremath explain, that this provides librarians the opportunity to teach patrons about resources and services that are available (2011, 325). She didn’t make any recommendations on books but assumed I would be able to find information if I look through books exploring Rembrandt. Some of the sources she recommended such as Oxford and Bibliography of the History of Art (BHA) only provide general information about the artist, but didn’t contain any information about the painting I was looking for. She recommended JSTOR and Project Muse, which are great databases for articles in the humanities. As a pervious Art History student, those usually were my go to databases, so those were great recommendations for subjects in the humanities.

After giving me a starting point to work with, she conducted the exit interview and invited me to contact chat reference if I needed more help. Cassell and Hiremath (2011) explain that the nature of chat reference going back and forth can become tiresome for a user, so it important to respond with small amounts of information at a time (26). Although she only gave me a starting point, she encouraged me to come back for more help. This is extremely important because if her recommendation were not satisfactory, I am encouraged to come back again and let the next librarian available know that I already tried these. If not encouraged to come back, a patron might assume that that is all the service can offer and they might not use the service again if the first set of recommendations are not satisfactory.

At the end of the chat reference a new window immediately opened with survey questions about my experience. Unlike other types of reference services, immediate information about a patron’s experience can be collected. This is useful in providing information about areas a chat reference service can improve.

Resources

Cassell, K.A., & Hiremath, U. (2011). *Reference and information services in the 21st Century: An Introduction*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.

Sheldrick Ross, C., Nilsen, K. & Radford, M. (2009). *Conducting the reference interview: A how-to-do-it manual* (2nd ed.) New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.