What is Reference in 2024 and Beyond?

Before we begin…

- This is our first conference using Microsoft Teams. Please be patient as we work through any kinks.

- If you were placed in this session in error, please hit the return button and let Cindy know which session you are meant to be in.

- Let's go learn stuff!

In the beginning…

In the beginning…

▶ Desk Set 1957 starring Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy

Plot: Bunny Watson is in charge of the reference library at the Federal Broadcasting Network in Midtown Manhattan. The reference librarians are responsible for researching facts and answering questions for the general public on all manner of topics, great and small.

Methods engineer and efficiency expert Richard Sumner is the inventor of EMERAC ("Electromagnetic MEmory and Research Arithmetical Calculator"), nicknamed "Emmy," a powerful early generation computer (referred to then as an "electronic brain"). He is brought in to see how the library functions, and size it up for installation of one of his massive machines.

Conclusion...

▶ Reference is dead

▶ Librarians will be replaced by technology

▶ Then again.. maybe not.

▶ Even in 1957, at the beginning of the computer age, there was the acknowledgement that technology would be a tool for improvement, not replacement.

Reference Service History

- 1876 – Samuel Green first introduced the idea of personal interaction between librarians and patrons.

- 1880s – Melvil Dewey created a Reference Department at Columbia University because Reference Services was central to library service.

- 1900s – Reference Services firmly established in American libraries.

- 1930s-1940s – Emphasis on the resources used not on the service.

- 1960s-1970s – Quality of service looked at in detail.

- 1980s – Looking at the evolution of the service while addressing burnout.

- Now...things just keep changing.

- Ford, B. J. (n.d.). *Reference service: Past, present, and future*. College & Research Libraries News. https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/21698/27247

But the more things change…

- Beyond the desk
- Beyond reference books
- Beyond just providing information
- Evolution of the role

The more things stay the same!

- It's all about helping the patron

- The reference interview

- There is still debate on what reference services should look like.

Reference and User Services Association (RUSA)
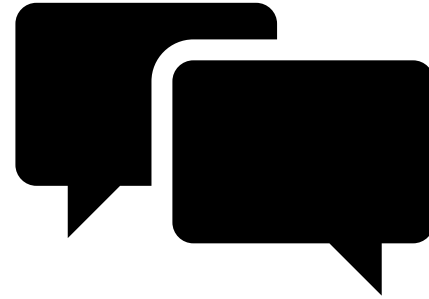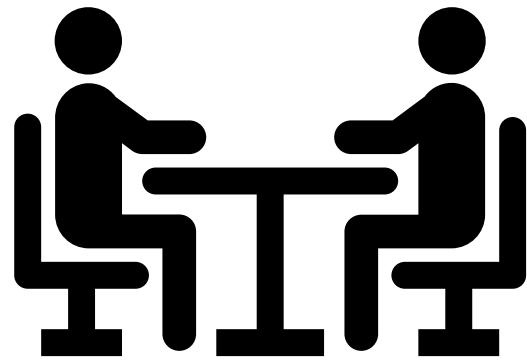
▶ What does good reference service look like?

▶ Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

  ▶ Originally Published 1996

  ▶ Updated 2004

  ▶ Updated 2013

  ▶ Updated 2023

Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

- Approachability
- Interest
- Listening/Inquiring
- Searching
- Follow Up

Changes Reflected

- **2004**
  - Reference isn't just happening at the desk.
- **2013**
  - Reference is going to be evolving. Make the guidelines more general without sacrificing specificity of previous editions.
- **2023**
  - Removal of distinction between in-person and virtual reference; Incorporation of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access; Adding evaluation section.

Reference tools and best practices

- If we don't have "reference books" anymore, what do we use?

- Online databases, curated collections on the internet

- Is Wikipedia a good reference resource?

- Should I cite resources for patrons?

- Yes, is the correct answer

- Where should I start?

- https://www.library.nd.gov/

Reference statistics

▶ What counts as a reference statistic?

▶ PLS Definition: information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs.

▶ How should we count statistics?

▶ Daily transactions or typical week sampling

Questions?
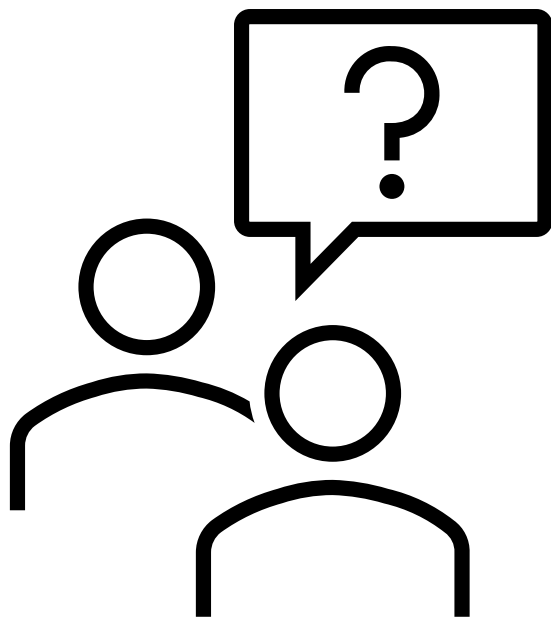
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