

## Questions to Ask in Reference to Help Users Learn to Self-Serve Better

- Strive to use every reference contact to empower the user to self-serve better by showing and explaining how you found the answer.

Restructure the Reference Interview: Try to get a picture of what additional/improved skills would help this particular user.	
Where is this user in the Internet culture?	Questions you might use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet user? Online at home, only in libraries, at friends?</li> <li>• Self-server? Potential self-server?</li> <li>• Proficiency at web searching?</li> <li>• Aware of alternatives to Googling (directories, library pages)?</li> <li>• Aware of types of information (articles, reference, print)?</li> <li>• What has their research consisted of already?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Would you like to learn how to find what you want on your own?</i></li> <li>• <i>What things have you tried?</i></li> <li>• <i>Where have you looked already?</i></li> <li>• <i>Have you tried to contact other people or websites?</i></li> <li>• <i>What search engines have you tried? What keywords did you use?</i></li> <li>• <i>Have you found anything that looks good to you? What looked good about it?</i></li> <li>• <i>Have you tried to find magazine articles or books on this?</i></li> </ul>

Coach and guide the information process as much as possible: Let them show you their skills. Let them learn by DOING.	
Things to do when possible	Questions you might use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn the monitor sideways or however they can see what you see</li> <li>• Try giving them the keyboard</li> <li>• Accompany them to a terminal, watch, and coach as they work</li> <li>• If online with page sharing, ask them where they went, would go, and what keywords they would search</li> <li>• If on the phone, ask them if they are or could be online while you talk; then point things out as you go</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What seems like a good place to begin?</i></li> <li>• <i>What might you type here to find what you're looking for?</i></li> <li>• <i>Where would you go next?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do you think you might get your hands on that article?</i></li> <li>• <i>What seems like a better search to you?</i></li> </ul>

Talk out loud as you work (if you're doing the keying)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbalize your thought processes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ verbalize your reactions to various searches tried</li> <li>○ share how you think about choosing places to look</li> <li>○ provide descriptions as needed of what you are saying if the user is on the phone or chatting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>None of these looks on target. What words might make a better search?</i></li> <li>• <i>I have a hunch there might be something useful in a business-oriented database.</i></li> <li>• <i>You need statistical information for that. Have you tried looking in statistical databases or books?</i></li> <li>• <i>Can you think of a government agency that might have this information?</i></li> <li>• <i>Your topic is about education. Do you know about ERIC?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Plug in whatever discipline or topic is appropriate</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Talk out loud as you work (if you're doing the keying)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muse out loud about where you think to look and why</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who might logically have gathered that information? How can we find them?</i></li> <li>• <i>Google is giving us several different answers for that. Let's see if we can find a documented source in a reference book.</i></li> <li>• <i>Maybe some sociologist has written an article on this</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Suggest whatever type of resource might help (news, business, etc.)</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you find it, explain how you reached it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I used Google because I sensed that there would be a lot of web pages with a pretty reliable answer</i></li> <li>• <i>I thought an online newspaper database would be fastest way to find that</i></li> <li>• <i>We're not using Google news or Yahoo news because they don't go back far enough</i></li> <li>• <i>I tried looking in books because the larger picture a book can give will help you understand what you need to find</i></li> </ul>

Show and build on imperfect approaches	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow the user's suggestions and point out what works and doesn't</li> <li>• Offer to teach skills they do not yet know</li> <li>• Provide or send simple handouts on basic searching skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We can try to search Google to start</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>point out how many sites, hard to choose</i></li> <li>○ <i>how can we focus this search</i></li> <li>○ <i>maybe if we eliminate the .com sites or restrict only to .org or .edu? Do you know how to do that?</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>The Wikipedia might help. Do you know about it?</i></li> <li>• <i>How can we get some help sorting through all this?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Maybe a website that offers guidance (About.com)</i></li> <li>○ <i>Maybe we can find a website on this subject (lii.org)</i></li> <li>○ <i>Maybe there's a book that will give you an orientation</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate narrowing or focusing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Start too general ask if this is what you want</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Add terms one at a time and point out what happens</i></li> <li>○ <i>Ask the user to suggest terms to use</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Write down a list keywords and give it to the user to use</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Encourage them to try it out, show them how to get started</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>