


# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

An  Webinar

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## Agenda

- The Arc of the Reference Interview
- New Technologies for Conducting Reference Interviews
- Tailoring the Reference Interview to Different Ages
- Q & A

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## The Arc of the Reference Interview

- Timeless elements of a successful reference interview
- How it is changing over time

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

55% Accuracy

Q: How do we improve this?  
A: The Reference interview!

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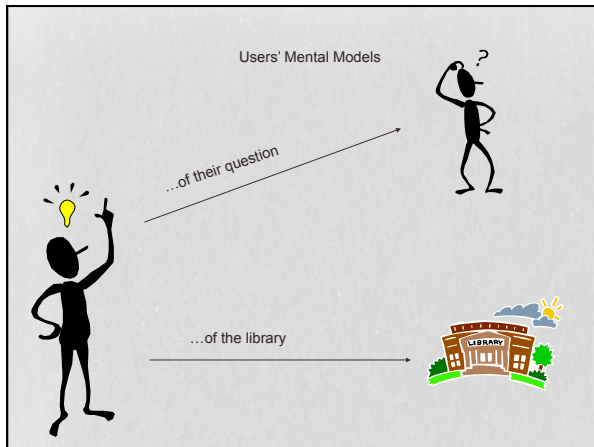
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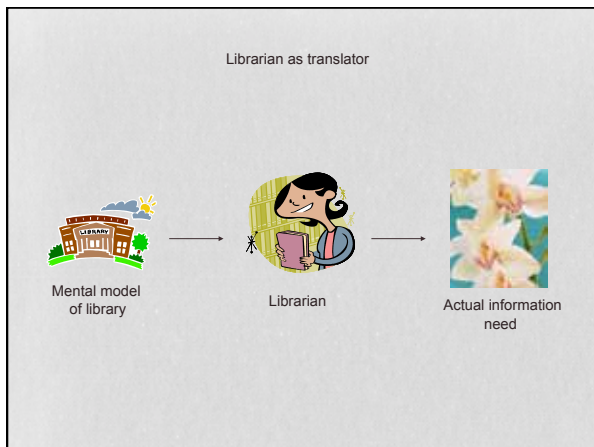
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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

## RUSA Guidelines

Reference and User Services Association

Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

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

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/div/rusa/resources/guidelines/index.cfm>

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## Open Questions

Open questions are questions that do not have an either/or or yes/no answer:

- We have a lot of books and other information on science. What kind of information are you looking for?
- What kind of information on orchids are you looking for?
- Please explain that in more detail / Please be more specific.
- Please tell me more about the sources that you may use for your assignment.
- How did this question arise?

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## Clarifying Questions

- What do you mean by X?
- Please give me an example.
- I don't know much about X. Can you help me to understand?

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

## Verify

You can't be sure that you really understand the question if you don't repeat it back to the user.

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## Readers' Advisory

Some open questions for Readers' Advisors:

- Can you tell me about a book or author you've read and enjoyed?
- What did you enjoy about that book (author/type of book)?
- What are you in the mood for?
- If you found the perfect book today, what would it be like?
- What kind of reading experience would you like to find?

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## Trends in Reference Interviews

- User Instruction
- Roving Reference
- Self-Service

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up



**New Technologies for  
Conducting Reference  
Interviews**

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**New technologies include:**

- E-mail
- Social media such as Facebook and Twitter
- Text
- *And, I suppose telephone...*

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**Challenges**

“After all, virtual communication lacks facial, aural, and environmental cues which are crucial components in the physical reference setting, as well as voice cues that are so crucial to phone reference.”



- RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

Chat reference was more satisfying to the patron when the librarian:

- Used the patron's name during the reference interview
- Communicated more receptively and listened more carefully
- Searched with the patron
- Provided pointers
- Asked the patron whether the question was completely answered
- Asked the patron to come back if they needed further assistance

- RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

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**Follow-up questions are extremely important.**

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## Other Considerations

- Different language conventions are more appropriate for different media
- Some patrons are more likely to use certain technologies
- Certain technologies are better-suited to some types of libraries



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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

Social Media



Facebook Twitter

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*These services shouldn't be a secret...*



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Tailoring the Reference Interview to Different Ages



- Common aspects of excellence in reference interviews: approachability, respect, communication
- One size does not fit all
- Hence the concept of tailoring – modify your behavior to best serve different populations

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

## Dealing with children



- Special challenges: recall memory not developed, vocabulary limited, difficulty asking for help
- Make the child's experience of reference positive
- Don't assume any knowledge – explain!
- Accompany kids in search; make it fun

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## Homework Reference



- “Imposed query” – identified and defined by Melissa Gross (2000); information request not generated by child
- If possible, look at the actual assignment
- Ask open questions; e.g., “How will this information be used?”
- If child is accompanied, establish eye contact with her and address her directly
- Get the child to talk about what he knows, not what he doesn't

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## Reference Interviews with Teens



- Special challenges: imposed queries, self-consciousness, feelings about asking for help
- What to call teens? Young adults, youth, adolescents, teenagers?
- Reference interviews important as first impression, gateway to library and staff
- Get out from behind the reference desk

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

## Specifics for Teen Reference

- Curb your impatience and be aware of judgmental comments. Be positive! “If we have more lead time on the next assignment...”
- If patrons seem embarrassed about titles, topics etc., put them at ease: “Oh, that’s a popular series...”
- Even if asked for print resources, promote databases
- Help students narrow topics, learn how to research: narrate your process

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## Special Needs Adult Reference



- Patrons with special needs include ESL learners; developmentally disabled people; physically-impaired patrons
- These interviews require extra skill, patience, empathy and thoughtfulness
- Be respectful and aware of patrons' limitations and cultural difference

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## Special Needs Strategies

- Language issues: Restate the question; ask the patron to write it down; frame difficulties as “I’m sorry, I’m having a problem understanding people today...”
- Visual impairment: Ask how best you can help; make your voice express welcome; speak directly to patron if accompanied
- Hearing problems: Face the patron; ask how the patron would like to communicate; write if necessary

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# The Reference Interview: Time for a Tune-up

## Reference Interviews with Seniors

- Special challenges include visual and auditory impairment; memory issues; discomfort with technology
- But don't assume anything!
- Try to be conscious of biases you might have about older people



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## Suggestions for Senior Reference

- Ask if the patron would like to learn how to use the online catalog
- Apply patience and understanding in liberal quantities
- Observe the niceties; use last name when in doubt

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## Q & A

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