Reference Transaction Assessment
Report

Out of the three reference transactions, chat reference was the most successful. While all three methods have their advantages and disadvantages, my experience with this assignment was that through chat my interview was most informative, most interactive, most encouraging, and overall most successful according to the RUSA guidelines. The major observation that I came away with is that because our society is so fond of texting and instant messaging, I found that chat services are most familiar and intuitive. What is odd is that in-person interactions with the information professionals felt forced and uncomfortable.

The Reference Desk

I expected to have a very interactive and informative in-person reference transaction, but I found that not to be the case at first. I encountered two librarians at my local library; both assisted with my reference interview. The first librarian failed at interacting with me on a level of more than just searching for some books to hand off to me. She did not delve deeper into my information need to find out what exactly I wanted. She also failed at instructing me on how to find the resources myself, and she failed to provide me with research options. The first librarian was impersonal, rote, and did not use her direct person-to-person platform in a way that would benefit me and further my understanding of my research question or the resources available to me. On the other hand, librarian #2 was attentive, he approached me with intent to help, he was personable, polite, interested, and knowledgeable. Librarian #2 used his direct person-to-person platform wisely by allowing me to interact with him and the computer while he instructed on how to navigate the online databases that were available. I treated this second transaction as a follow up; I felt that he perceived I was not satisfied with the service librarian #1 provided. In person-to-person reference transactions librarians should take full advantage of the opportunity to make a personal connection with library patrons, otherwise librarians run the risk of creating very unsatisfied and even offended patrons who conclude they are better off without the library.

Reference Email

There are several disadvantages that I found with reference email: limited opportunity for interaction or making a personal connection, and instruction; lack of a platform to conduct an effective/productive reference interview (something that is eluded to in the Janes/Hill (2002) article, i.e., "instruction [is] limited, if not impossible, through digital reference services because of the lack of a traditional interview." (p. 59); and limited ability to follow-up with patrons. Due to the asynchronous nature of the service, information professionals run the risk of leaving patrons with more questions than answers. One factor that contributes to this would be time. If patrons have to wait too long for a response they are likely to discontinue the service depending on their research deadlines. Information professionals have less of a window to make a personal connection. For me, there was a one-line greeting immediately followed by the information I needed to satisfy my query. With email reference, while the information provided is usually relevant, to the point, and very thorough, this media does not offer the opportunity for ongoing community interaction (which might be besides the point here but is a vital component of a reference librarian's job).

Reference Chat

Chat reference was by far the most interactive and fulfilling. Factors that contributed to this were the information professional's ability to appear approachable and friendly by sending positive messages throughout the interview. The information professional was able to conduct an effective reference interview due to the synchronous nature of the media. While we were not able to evaluate the sources together, the information professional was able to provide search tips and strategies for me to try on my own. Because the information professional was not linked to my local library resources she was unable to provide me with in-depth instruction on how to manipulate the resources she found. Most importantly, we interacted with each other comfortably and effectively. I left the transaction feeling confident in my ability to conduct research on my own.