

I went to a public library since it was closest to my house. It was a small branch library and had only one desk. There was no signage to denote that the desk was anything in particular, but the desk was very large and circular, situated right next to the entrance. The desk had work stations for four and doubled as the checkout desk; monitors at work stations were hidden behind small signage and did not rotate or allow for rotation to include patron. Two of the workstations were situated right next to the check out kiosks. At this library most of the check out process is automated and done by the patrons by using a large flat device that will read your library card and read the books you place upon it.

Today, two librarians were working the desk and both were sitting at the work stations opposite the check out kiosks. Before attempting to approach the desk, I decided to observe reference interactions briefly: both librarians were female; they did not even acknowledge what was going on at the checkout kiosks; one librarian actually used a reference interview¹ and gave a monitored referral by walking the patron to the stacks and locating the book with them; neither librarian used a 'follow up' question² even though the library was pretty slow and they had time to chit-chat, however when a patron approached the desk both librarians seemed to try to help the patron.

I decided I would like to be helped by the librarian who actually walked the patron to the stacks, but I could not figure out a way to make it happen. Instead, I waited for the desk to be empty and approached to see who would come first. Of course, I got the other librarian. She was shelving the 'express holds' and saw me waiting at the desk. She walked over into the inside of the desk, as she did so she made eye contact with me and smiled;³ she remained standing and asked how she could help me.

I told her that I was looking for a list of books published by an author. She asked one clarifying closed question⁴ in return: Do you mean a list of books we have by the author in the library? That could be found by looking in our catalog. Or do you mean books written by an author?

I replied that I would like a list of books written by an author. She then suggested that the best place to look would be Google, Fantastic Fiction,..or even Novlist...--basically someplace else.⁵ She sort of trailed off at the end when mentioning Novlist (I found out later that it was because they did not have access to it.) At this point I grabbed a piece of paper and started writing the sites down, nothing was mentioned of .coms or other end tags to use.⁶ Then she mentioned that databases would have the information and that the databases are better than the web because they are 'absolutely accurate.' She sat down in front of her computer and talked me through to a database (I could not see the screen). () She said I would have to use their computers to access the data base because it is a pay service only available through the library web site. So first I should go to their website, then find the area that says 'research and homework,' then choose 'databases' and then choose 'gale literature resource center'.

She acted like that was it,⁷ so I asked "How do I access the computers?" She asked if I had a library card and I said yes. Then she told me to find an 'available' computer and sign in. If none of the computers were 'available' I would have to register for one over there; and she pointed somewhere to the left behind me.⁸ And that was it; I said 'thank you' and went to the nearest computer terminal that was about 4 feet from the desk and the reference librarian.

I didn't have to log in because the terminal was already logged in and had a remainder of 20 minutes time left on it. The computer opened to the library web site and I found the 'research & homework' tab easy enough. Same with getting all the way into the database 'gale literature resource center.' Once there I deliberately typed in the name of my author 'Neil Gaiman' first name first. In this database name order did not matter. I got 4 pages worth of entries for my author, however most of the entries were articles and interviews and a few listing about individual books. I scanned through the entries and could not find one that mentioned a book list of his works.⁹

At this point I backed out of the search and looked at the other databases to see if anything else would have worked and didn't see anything better suited. So then I tried the web site she mentioned "fantastic fiction" except that I couldn't remember it very well and typed in 'fanfiction.com' and got something really weird. I saw the error and corrected it to 'fantastic fiction' since that is what I wrote down. This time it worked and I found a familiar website that I had since forgotten the exact name, hence the 'fanfiction' error. I am familiar with this web site and it is a great source to find out everything an author has written, I think it also recommends other books for interested readers.

Overall, I am not sure how to judge this interview, the librarian did get me some information that helped me find what I was looking for; but she used closed questions, she did not ask me who my author was, she did not offer to search herself to see if the information was even available, she gave me an unmonitored referral (which I had to write out myself) and she did not use any 'follow up' questions.¹⁰ Even as I was leaving, this librarian avoided eye contact as we passed and missed a second opportunity for a 'follow up.'¹¹ I would probably not return to this librarian and I would strongly suggest a review of the RUSA guidelines--all of them for this particular librarian—and an introduction to the Nilsen article.¹²

It just so happens that I had a meeting later on that night at the central public library downtown, I arrived early for my meeting and decided to try out the reference services. Earlier I had been told that my previous question to the librarian was too easy, so I switched it up with a tougher one. This library is large and takes up 8 floors. I went to the third floor since I had been on that floor before; as the elevator doors opened, the first thing I saw was the reference desk. It was small and had two work stations. I didn't see any signage, but noticed that other floors had signage over the desk in the same spot.

No one was at the desk, so I waited. A male librarian (name tagged as a librarian) came up to the desk, looked me in the eyes and smiled.¹³ He sat down at the computer terminal and said: how can I help you? I told him I was looking for information on interpersonal communication. He said 'ah' and started typing.¹⁴ Then he picked up a piece of paper and wrote down three call numbers, one of which had an author next to it. Then he said that one of the books may not be on the shelf but I might browse that area.¹⁵ He recommended the book with the author name. I asked him where these books could be found and he pointed out the areas to look. Before I left he used a follow-up question and told me to come back if I did not find anything.¹⁶

I found the recommended book to be a perfect example of the information I was looking for, the only problem with it was that it was from 1972 and I was looking for something a bit more current. I decided to check the other books on the list. One of the books was not to be found but the neighboring books all pertained to library studies (025's) which I thought strange (does he suspect I am doing an interview?). The third book on the list was vague as there were several with that call number. I browsed and found a book that was current and helpful.

I decided to go back to the desk and try to narrow the search.¹⁷ I brought both books with me. I told him that I couldn't find the 025 book and he said it was a long shot since it was actually a library book about interviewing skills but also dealt with interpersonal communication. (Still think he was on to me.) I showed him the 'perfect' book and let him know that this book was great but asked: is there anything more current out there? We joked about the 70's as he typed away at his computer. He did not look very hard at the two books I brought up, and after about 5 minutes or so he finally said that he was searching the 'communication' section to see if anything was relevant.¹⁸ He mentioned books on 'spiritual communication' and 'communicating with dolphins', and I said that was not what I was looking for.¹⁹ Finally he grabbed a piece of paper and wrote down two numbers that might help. This time he pointed out where the area would be and did not ask me to come back.²⁰

The books on the list dealt with communication between male and female couples and did not meet my information needs; but I did notice a book called 'Communication Professionals' by our favorite authors: Dewdney and Ross, a few books down. On my way out, I noticed that this librarian was no longer at the desk.

So in conclusion, I would say that the second interview was more successful than the first since the librarian actually provided the information for me²¹ instead of saying to look in the catalog and he used a follow up question in the first meeting and included me in the search process in the second. As the reading material noted, this was actually one of the classic cases of 'typing and scribbling' on a piece of paper, but the results were very good.²² The down side is that he did not use any clarifying questions or open questions to find out my information needs;²³ and I really wanted to know about interpersonal communication in the work environment. I would go back to this librarian in the future and can only suggest the addition of using more open ended questioning.²⁴

Now for the chat (at the end of this paper is the chat interview for your reference): I was very disappointed with the chat experience and I will not use it again. I am tired of librarians telling me to go check the catalog.²⁵ I feel like that is all they do. This chat reference was from our own Odum Library and I am sharing this information because I feel a library school should have better library services for some reason. The chat window did not require a log in, nor did it have any sort of information form to fill out. In addition to the chat window three buttons allowed the user to upload a file to the chat, email the chat and open the chat in a new window. At some point in the chat I tried to email it and this did function did not work. Also, as noted in the chat transcripts, the software says it will only work in Internet Explorer 6, even though it did work for Internet Explorer 7.

The chat librarian responded quickly to my initial query and said hello but did not offer any further encouragement.²⁶ I had to ask for help; I did so using the same search query posed at the central library. The only question this 'librarian' asked me during the entire chat was, as noted in the reading material, "Are you looking for articles?"²⁷ I told her (yes, I am sure it is a her) that I wanted a book and she immediately told me to use the catalog and further proceeded in instructing me how to use it.²⁸ She told me to type in "interpersonal communication" in quotes and I would get lots of options. When I asked if any of the options were current, she instructed me in how to search by date. At no point did she use any type of open ended question to help me, nor did she provide any concrete answers.²⁹

I decide to cut my losses on the book and see if she would be more helpful searching for articles. At this point she has assumed I am a student; but I restate my initial query and ask for good sources of articles on interpersonal communication. Then she tells me they have a subject page for communication arts. When I suggest that this is not the direction I am looking for, she pushes that it must be because that is the subject department area at the school.³⁰

I am getting the feeling that this person is a student worker. So I volunteer some information hoping to get the interview back on track.³¹ I mention that I am interested in how to get along with coworkers and she says they most "certainly" have information on that topic but does not offer up any help. So I ask for terms that would be used in searching for this topic and she comes back with "communication" and "workplace" or "coworker" or "conflict resolution". When I ask for what terms would give the best results, she suggests "interpersonal conflict" and workplace; and says that a search in Academic Search Complete brings up almost 100 results and "that sometimes links in those results can lead you to other useful terms." Where she got the idea about 'conflict resolution' I have no idea.³²

At this point I gave up and thanked her for her time. Like the readings point out a 'please let us know if we can help further!' and 'good luck' closing statements popped up.³³ I would not use this service again, basically because I can find the information faster using a Google or Amazon search. There was no evidence of reference interview techniques, only initial patron search terms were used,³⁴ no relevant search results were provided, and the 'librarian' did not ask for my input in the search to see if it was on the right track. Suggestions for this 'librarian' would be to review the RUSA guidelines and the Nilsen article for both in-person and remote reference services.³⁵ Special attention to the part about asking open ended questions³⁶ to help clarify the search and the part about actually searching for the information for the patron should be stressed.³⁷

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Chat reference transcript with Odum Library, Oct 15, 2008, 1:34pm

1:34 me i am using IE 7 and testing to see if it works. does it?

1:34 VSU Librarian hello

1:35 VSU Librarian yes, your message came through.

1:35 me thank you. i was not sure it would since the text say only to use IE 6

1:35 VSU Librarian we need to update that; thanks!

1:36 me no problem. i am looking for information about interpersonal communication.

1:36 VSU Librarian are you looking for articles?

1:37 me not really, a book would be best

1:38 VSU Librarian OK, to find books in the library, use the Books tab under Quicksearch on the Odum Library Homepage

1:39 VSU Librarian In the text box there, if you type in "interpersonal communication" in quotation marks, you'll come up with a number of possibilities.

1:40 me are any of the possibilities current? I found one book that was great but it was from 1972, something from the last few years would be better.

1:40 VSU Librarian there's a great way to sort out the most current books:

1:41 VSU Librarian there's a drop down box beside " Sort Keyword/Exact Results by:" at the top of your results page.

1:41 VSU Librarian Choose "publish date (newest first)" to sort the books by most recent date.

1:42 me sounds easy enough. you mentioned articles earlier. do you think i would find better information using them?

1:43 VSU Librarian It depends on what your teacher suggests for this assignment. Often the information in articles is more current because they're published more often than books.

- 1:44 me ok that makes sense, what would be a good source of articles on interpersonal communication?
- 1:44 VSU Librarian we have a subject page for "Communication Arts" at <http://www.valdosta.edu/library/learn/guides/commarts.shtml>
- 1:45 VSU Librarian There you'll see some names of databases in GALILEO
- 1:46 VSU Librarian Communication & Mass Media Complete is good for that subject, plus Academic Search Complete offers articles on many subjects
- 1:46 VSU Librarian subjects 😊
- 1:46 me i thought 'communication arts' was an art and design magazine. what does that have to do with interpersonal communication.
- 1:47 VSU Librarian That's the name of the department that teaches speech and communication here at VSU
- 1:47 VSU Librarian We have a number of subject pages that we try to name after departments here--English, Biology, Communication Arts, etc.
- 1:48 me are there any subjects for how to get along with your coworkers?
- 1:48 VSU Librarian Certainly.
- 1:49 VSU Librarian That is, in the different databases there are books and articles on that topic.
- 1:49 me what would be the wording for that topic?
- 1:49 me in a search
- 1:50 VSU Librarian You could try terms like "communication" and "workplace" or "coworker" or "conflict resolution"
- 1:52 me what do you think would give me the best results?
- 1:53 VSU Librarian I usually try several possibilities, as suggested. For instance,
- 1:53 VSU Librarian "interpersonal conflict" and workplace
- 1:54 VSU Librarian That search in Academic Search Complete brings up almost 100 results, and sometimes links in those results can lead you to other useful terms.
- 1:55 me well, it looks like i should get searching. thank you for your help.
- 1:55 VSU Librarian please let us know if we can help further!
- 1:56 VSU Librarian good luck!