

## Model Behaviors for Reference Interviews with Teens

**Sources:**

Table 23.3. "Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Public Library Training Procedure, Job Breakdown Sheet—Position: PSL I Young Adult; Operation: Reference Interview." Nichols, Mary Anne and C. Allen Nichols, eds. *Young Adults and Public Libraries: A Handbook of Materials and Services*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998. p. 244.

*Wilson Library Bulletin*, January 1996, p. 27

Steps in the Reference Interview Process	Behaviors and Questions	Additional Questions and Fine Points
<b>Approaching &amp; Approachability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>greet</b> teens as they enter</li> <li>✓ <b>smile</b> and establish <b>eye contact</b></li> <li>✓ <b>look up frequently</b> to check for teens needing help</li> <li>✓ canvass area regularly for teens looking for materials and <b>approach them in a friendly manner</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>"Are you finding what you need?"</i> (NOT "May I help you?")</p>
<b>Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ demonstrate a willingness to help</li> <li>✓ <b>exhibit supportive, helpful behavior</b> with all patrons and other teens</li> <li>✓ <b>speak in a relaxed tone</b> of voice</li> <li>✓ serve in-person patrons before telephone patrons, unless you are on the phone first</li> </ul>	<p>If teen is accompanied by parent who is speaking <u>for</u> the teen, try to <b>engage the student</b> in the interview process:</p> <p><i>"What did your teacher tell you about ___?"</i>  <i>"Can you tell me about the types of books you like to read? Who's your favorite author? I could make suggestions if you tell me more about what you like or what interests you."</i></p>
<b>Showing Interest &amp; Listening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>maintain eye contact</b></li> <li>✓ make <b>attentive comments</b></li> <li>✓ give <b>full attention</b></li> <li>✓ <b>listen actively</b> to patron's question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>do not interrupt</b></li> <li>✓ <b>paraphrase</b> the response to your questions</li> <li>✓ <b>clarify</b> with additional questions</li> <li>✓ <b>be nonjudgmental</b></li> </ul>

<p><b>Inquiring</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>determine actual information needs</b></li> <li>✓ <b>ask probing questions</b> concerning the <b>purpose</b> of the question, the <b>deadline</b> for the information (“<i>When do you need this by?</i>”), the <b>format</b> needed (“<i>Do you need a complete book or just some information on that person?</i>”), and the <b>amount of materials</b> needed (“<i>How many sources do you need?</i>”)</li> <li>✓ <b>draw out monosyllabic responses:</b> ask what prompted the question; use what, where, when, why, how, in what manner questions</li> <li>✓ <b>bring in another librarian</b> if you find it impossible to understand the request</li> </ul>	<p>“<i>What do you already know about ___?</i>”  “<i>What would you like to know about this topic?</i>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Avoid questions that can be answered with a nod or grunt.</li> </ul> <p>“<i>Where did you see this book: on TV, in a bookstore, on a web site?</i>”  “<i>Did you bring your assignment sheet? May I see it please?</i>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Inform other staff and make a copy of the assignment. Set aside materials for ready reference if large group assignment.</li> <li>✓ Focus on the <b>key words</b> the teen uses.</li> <li>✓ <b>Be patient.</b></li> <li>✓ Telephone interviews should be conducted with same procedure: “<i>Where have you looked so far? What have you done so far to answer this question?</i>”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Verifying</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Repeat patron’s basic query</b> to make sure you both agree on what the question really is. e.g., “Where are the dog books?” may lead to “I want to train my puppy” OR “I need information about Pavlov’s work with dogs for my science fair project.”</li> </ul> <p>“<i>If you could have the perfect material, would it be a photo, sketch, magazine article?</i>”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>be clear and unambiguous; avoid jargon:</b> “citations,” “bibliography,” “interlibrary loan,” “circulation desk,” “online sources.”</li> <li>✓ When teacher has said “no encyclopedias,” gently <b>explain the difference between a general encyclopedia and a specialized one.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Searching</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>keep teen informed</b> as to where you are in the process of finding the information needed</li> <li>✓ find answer in first source</li> <li>✓ <b>share</b> with teen</li> <li>✓ search other sources</li> <li>✓ <b>be honest about the time it may take</b> to locate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ tell teen <b>where you are going</b> before you begin to walk away from desk</li> <li>✓ tell teen <b>why you are placing them on hold</b></li> <li>✓ <b>accompany teen to source</b> or location of materials</li> </ul>

	information or use the source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>let teen know what you are doing</b></li> <li>✓ <b>demonstrate</b> how the source is used (print or electronic)</li> <li>✓ <b>redirect parent</b> if necessary: <i>“Why don’t you look in this source while I help Tracy look at...”</i></li> <li>✓ <b>be understanding about time constraints</b>, both personal and of assignment deadline</li> </ul>
<b>Informing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>speak clearly</b></li> <li>✓ <b>check if answer is understood</b></li> <li>✓ <b>offer choices and suggest other formats</b> if appropriate (online, video, CD-ROM, audiobook)</li> <li>✓ <b>cite the source</b> and/or inform the student to note for the report’s bibliography</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ remind teen to <b>ask if more help is needed</b>—where to find you or who else to ask</li> <li>✓ citing the source is <b>especially important for telephone or electronic reference</b>, when teen cannot see your source</li> </ul>
<b>Following-up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>try not to let the teen leave empty-handed:</b> ask <b>another librarian</b> for input if you are stumped</li> <li>✓ <b>ask other follow-up questions</b> as needed</li> <li>✓ <b>offer referral</b> to another department, library, agency, or information source when appropriate: write down the phone number to call and hours to reach them; print off one page of the Internet site so student has URL; offer interlibrary loan services when time</li> <li>✓ <b>provide closure:</b> <i>“Good luck with your term paper (oral report, book report, etc.)!”</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ basic sources (e.g., encyclopedias, almanacs) may work best to identify key terms</li> <li><i>“Does this answer your question <u>completely</u>?”</i></li> <li>✓ Return to teen and ask <i>“Did you find what you were looking for?”</i></li> <li><i>“Do you need help finding anything else?”</i></li> <li>✓ <b>do not discriminate due to age</b> when offering interlibrary loan services</li> </ul>

Presented by Kimberly Bolan, Library Consultant & author of *Teen Spaces: The Step-by-Step Library Makeover* (ALA Editions, 2003) 2006

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