

Appendix E

Sample Librarian and User Interview Transcripts

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A. Sample Librarian Preinteraction Interview

Interview with L-04

I. Let's just start off with kind of a textbook question. What, for you, is the *purpose* of the reference interview?

L-04. To understand what the question is exactly, not the initial question that you get, but what the patron is *really* after and you're also trying to do two other things at the same time, understand the general background of the patron so that the question can be placed in perspective and with that understanding you can recommend further . . . research that the patron may not have thought of as, um, possible . . . expansion areas for the research. So you're, first of all, you're trying to establish the, ah, . . . the level at which you're expected to work with him or her and then the general context of the question, is it for a course, what is the course, and so on, and what is the major of the student, that type of background, general background information, and then how can I suggest things that may not have even occurred to him or her that would further inform the process.

I. Okay. If you could think back and recall a reference interview, either it could have been today or some other occasion, that you considered particularly successful

L-04. Hummm.

I. . . . and describe it for me.

L-04. Well, let's see hummm Well, one thing that comes to mind is . . . I can't think of anything specific, but I've had many . . . many instances where the patron comes and says this is what I'm looking for

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . and by the time we're done with the reference interview, the goal is clarified and it's *substantially* different from the initial question. In other words, one of the things I've noticed consistently, or one thing that happens quite often, is that the patron comes with a vague question.

I. Um hum

L-04. Sometimes the patron has difficulty . . . formulating the question, so part of the reference librarian's responsibility is to clarify the *real* research goal with the patron. So you ask probing questions. I think it *really* helps if you also know the subject¹ . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . area. I think I perform much better, for example, in the case of questions in the field of education.

I. Um hum.

L-04. There are a lot of students here doing master's theses in education. If they if they come to me with research questions on that, I think I'm *far* more effective than, let's say, if it's a law . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . question of law.

I. Um hum. Could you recall any specific time?

L-04. Specifics something. No, I just can't remember something right now that . . .

I. Well, maybe it will come to you as we're talking . . .

L-04. Okay.

I. . . . about other things. My next question might be a little bit easier, I hope. If you can think back and recall a reference interaction which you would consider particularly *unsuccessful* . . .

L-04. Unsuccessful . . .

I. . . . and describe it for me I find that most librarians kind of have their story about {laugh from L} either a problem patron . . .

L-04. That's terrible.

I. . . . or something that happened that they remember.

L-04. Hum. Again, I can't think of anything specific but I remember patterns, which is this is actually true of the way I think and remember. I'm not very good when it comes to remembering particulars, but what I'm very good [at is] in remembering patterns . . .

I. Okay.

L-04. . . . and this is just a natural product of, I think, my training in philosophy. What I'm looking for [is] the overall truth rather than specifics. So the pattern of bad things that happen that I remember is a patron that comes to you with very strong preconceptions of what a librarian is, and they're usually bad ideas about who a librarian is and a, you can sense this in how abrupt they are, and they're almost *expecting* you not to care or *expecting* you not to be responsive or *expecting* you to be unprofessional or even dumb, so they're kind of impatient . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . with you because even though they're asking you the question, they expect to be frustrated so those are the *most* difficult, ah, patrons. I have to spend the first part of the reference interview in a way demonstrating to them that they're dealing with some one else, you know. I try to somehow catch their attention or impress them *somehow* so that they will be shocked into to saying, Wait a minute, this is not, this is not the, this is going to be different."

I. Why do you think they have those preconceived . . .

L-04. Well . . .

I. . . . preconceived ideas?

L-04. Sadly, in many cases it is because a lot of librarians are ill prepared *and are* unprofessional.

I. Um hum.

L-04. I mean I am not. There are good reasons why they have this impression but . . . it is also true that the field has been growing and changing in the past decade or two so that . . . I am very hopeful that in the 21st century with the advent of information technology, the status and prestige of the profession will rise and people will really see information professionals with a different

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . it's happening already.

I. Um hum.

L-04. I'm already seeing this. I'm *clearly* seeing it in the corporate world, corporate libraries. I'm also seeing it in good academic libraries, but it, ah, you know, these types of stereotypes change very very slowly.

I. Okay. I was just curious to ask that even though it wasn't one of my . . .

L-04. Okay.

I. . . . prepared questions. Do you vary your, you were talking before about different levels of users in your in your... goal of the reference interview, you were saying that one of the things you have to do is determine the level. Do you vary your technique among users? Could you talk about that a little bit?

L-04. Oh yes, depending on what my perceived level is.

I. Yes, yes.

L-04. *Ob*, naturally, I mean especially, let's say in the state libraries or public libraries when anyone can walk in. In academic libraries, it's a more select group, essentially faculty member and graduate students, or college students

I. Um hum.

L-04. But in public libraries in [site C] anyone can walk in and use it. The first thing you have to determine is are they high school students, freshman, sophomores, or upper classmen, junior seniors, that makes a difference. What's their major? What is this particular course? Is it the term paper, one term paper for the entire semester? Or just a short three-page paper. Those are the kinds of things that are going to give me an idea about level. I'm also always paying attention to how bright they are.

I. Um hum.

L-04. I have an assessment of how intelligent this person is, how much can I challenge him? How motivated is he or she? I try to, sometimes by asking direct questions, figure out how much time do they intend to spend on this . . . you know . . . I try to get a sense of how much time do they plan to stay in the library *today* you know, and then you know based on that, well, I say, well, maybe we can do part of the work now and we can do this first. We can then go do some reading and then come back and follow up with someone else or

with me if I'm here next, two sundays from now. *That* kind of thing so that level understood in the broadest sense, I mean level and the general context of the reference question.

I. Um hum, and so you make that assessment by actually asking questions.

L-04. I ask them, oh yes, I ask them questions. A lot of times, they're not gonna know enough to give that information to you. In other words they're not professionals after all.

I. Right.

L-04. They're *lay* people, if you will, when it comes to information, so it is your job actually to ferret out those issues that *you know* are important for the reference interview.

I. Um hum.

L-04. That's your job.

I. Okay. Now I'm going to ask you in your mind, in reference interviews what kind of qualities does a good library *user* have. We'll talk about the user *first*.

L-04. Hummm . . . I guess number one would have to be their genuine desire to find the answer to the question, their level of motivation and interest... that's certainly the best desirable quality.

I. Genuine as opposed to?

L-04. As opposed to because the teacher wants me to do it. You know, it's an assignment. I just want to get it over with or, you know, . . .

I. . . . the easiest way.

L-04. . . . something like that. Yeah, what's the easiest way of getting this done and going out and playing hookey or something. You see, then that's kind of . . .

I. Un huh.

L-04. . . . demoralizing to me, . . .

I. Yeah.

L-04. . . . you know.

I. Are there other qualities? Other than that genuine desire?

L-04. Well, certainly I always enjoy working with someone who has broad knowledge.

I. Um hum.

L-04. Renaissance men and women are always fun to work with because then it becomes I learn from them, too, as we're doing the research together, you know. They tell me things that people who are *excited* about learning and knowing as an end in itself.

I. Um hum.

L-04. You can feel that very quickly and easily, and then, you know, I become like, we become, like a little team working on this thing together, a sense of solving the puzzle or discovering the answer, figuring it out . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. That type of *fun*.

I. Um hum.

L-04. It becomes fun. I love those types. That's a very positive thing in a user, too. Another one is someone who communicates well. I mean, after all, that's a very distinct skill, not, that not many people have. Someone who has good language skills, good communication skills, so

that when I ask something, they answer the question rather than missing the point or they are simply effective in defining their need . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . and assertive, not apologizing profusely and being timid and insecure about their knowledge threatened by the library. Those are weaknesses. You have to work with them because the majority of patrons, unfortunately, will be like that.

I. Um hum. Well, that's what I want to ask about next, so we're getting right into it. What kind of qualities, then, does a poor user have? You mentioned some of them were somewhat like that. Yeah, uh huh.

L-04. In a way, I ended up mentioning them inadvertently, so, yeah, the person who's not genuinely interested in doing the research, the motivation is from without . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . and a dull person, a dull intellect or just lack of knowledge about the world in general.

I. Okay, we don't have to . . .

L-04. In a way, it's like the reverse almost, isn't it? like . . .

I. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

L-04. Yeah.

I. You were kind of talking around and about it. Okay, let's talk about librarians then. What would you say would be the qualities that a good or even *ideal* reference librarian would have?

L-04. Okay, *the* thing that helps the most is broad liberal arts foundation. I mean, I have noticed this very clearly. The *good* librarians are the ones who

are curious about everything. They have read widely, they have a good liberal arts education, the bachelor's is not in a very, you know, let's say engineering.

I. Um hum. Um hum.

L-04. . . it's more liberal arts. That works better and then, *and then*, the ones that have gone on and gotten a subject master's and they are doing reference work *in that subject*.² That's a *very* good librarian, and then they have an MLS . . . MLS and a subject master's beyond that they are people who enjoy helping others. There is this in this sense it is similar to teaching. It's a calling. The good librarians are ones that are *genuinely* interested in working with people, helping them, you know, teaching them. There is a component of teaching involved, that feeling of being the teacher, the guide.

I. Um hum.

L-04. If you enjoy that, then you'll be a good librarian. People who have good people skills, who are able to communicate smoothly and understand others. Are they good listeners, they catch social clues easily, if they have a multicultural background,³ it's a *major* plus because so often an American librarian will misunderstand, *really* misunderstand, a Japanese freshman.

I. Um hum.

L-04. *Really*, because the body language and so on, the values, they are *significantly* different. See, that helps a lot.

I. I think, just personally, think that's been really overlooked in training of librarians, the intercultural . . .

L-04. Yeah, cross-cultural.

I. . . . communication processes.

L-04. Yeah, that's very true.

I. It's not in the curriculum *yet*.

L-04. There is no course like that.

I. Maybe soon as we go, maybe we'll see. {laugh} I didn't want to interrupt you.

L-04. They have to make it into two years, the MLS [one year is just, it's impossible

I. Well, I don't know. {laugh}

L-04. There is no time to do that.

I. Yeah, yeah.

L-04. If you're really going to do that kind of thing the MLS *must* be two years.

I. Yeah. You mentioned really kind of three qualities, the broad, liberal arts type knowledge of, and a subject knowledge, the teacher kind of skills, and the people kind of skills. If you had to rank them as to or talk about the relationship of which one would be more important, could you do that?

L-04. Ummmm.

I. Could, do you think they are in the order that you mentioned them in? of importance?

L-04. Yeah, but they're very close, aren't they? I mean, if someone is a very well educated, but he's a misanthrope, it's just not going to do any good. It's very similar to the idea of these professors who are masters of their fields, very knowledgeable, but they are terrible teachers.

I. Um hum.

L-04. So one becomes useless without the other, so they're in that sense I must say it's equally important that the person have the knowledge and have the desire and the ability to then share it. Otherwise the knowledge is not gonna help . . .

I. Okay.

L-04. . . . the reference process.

I. Okay, very good. Okay, then I guess the flip side of that. What would be the qualities that a *poor* librarian would have? Poor reference librarian would have, so you already mentioned a misanthrope or a . . .

L-04. Yeah, some kind of a, some, there are quite a few librarians I have met who have gone into the field just to hide in the library.

I. Um hum.

L-04. You get the sense somehow that this person is somehow, loves books, you know, loves learning and so on and reading but is a shy, private person and chose this profession just so he could go in the library and hide in the corner and not do much, that type of thing. And maybe they tried to get into technical services, but they didn't really like it and then they ended up in the reference department just like the other choice, if you will, and . . . but they're not *really* interested in dealing with people. And sometimes they're eccentric and insecure because of this negative stereotype of the profession. They see themselves as kind of a subprofession so they don't have a high, good self esteem.

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . and that personal security other professional has, you know, really, ah, providing a valuable service there.

I. That's interesting.

L-04. So those librarians who fall into that trap and start kind of deprecating themselves, and they were not really interested in librarianship as a science but they chose it as, “Well, this is something I can handle.” In other words, they became librarians for the wrong reasons.

I. Um hum.

L-04. It’s a one-year program, it’s a profession, that type of thing, as one of professors at [site X] once said, “You know, it’s clean, it’s indoors, {shared laughter}, the pay is decent.” You know *those* kinds of reasons. I think to really be a good librarian you have to go into the profession because you are fascinated by information technology and information science⁴ and you believe in the value of this field . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . to the twenty-first century. I’m talking about the people who are going into it now. But even, you know, you could say the same thing for two generations, librarians of two generations ago. In other words, are you *really* interested, so the bad ones are the ones that . . . took it just as a profession . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . something, something to do and it shows, it shows. Other things, well, I’ve already mentioned them—communication skills, people skills—these are partly learned and some of it is just a gift,⁵ you know, and some people are talented, you know. Even in children, you see some children who are more sensitive to others, better able to communicate and so on and so forth. Maybe it’s just the upbringing, the family, and so on, the quality of their education, elementary and secondary school, and so on and so forth. So . . .

I. Okay. That’s a pretty, ah, good picture. Just one more question, um, and we, again you started to talk about this a little bit, when you consider these important qualities of interaction that you’ve been talking about, do you personally feel that the new information technologies have had an impact on *your* work?

L-04. Yes.

I. And how?

L-04. Yes, they've certainly enhanced, ah, my ability to provide information more efficiently, and just the breadth and the depth of the information has increased.

I. Do you think that the interaction, when you're using the information technologies with a patron who's come with a question, do you think that the quality of the interaction is changed by those technologies?

L-04. Um, not particularly, not the reference interview per se. No they do seem to be rather independent. It's a tool.

I. Um hum.

L-04. What's happening, *really*. I guess the crux of what's happening is, instead of using the paper sources, . . .

I. Right.

L-04. . . . you're using the online or the CD-Rom sources . . .

I. Right.

L-04. . . . and so on and so forth. Now there are some minor areas where it is impacting some patrons have computer phobia . . .

I. Um hum.

L-04. . . . so the, sometimes if you always have been threatened by it, feeling intimidated by it, . . .

I. Right.

L-04. . . . so that does make a difference. But it's minor, minor factor because

it's fairly easy to set them at ease, and if you feel that this is what's happening you just spend a little more time with them at the computer and so on.

I. Do you think that it does? I was going to ask about that, the variable of time. Do you think that you spend more time with them because of the new technologies, or less time . . .

L-04. Ummmmmm.

I. . . . or is it about the same?

L-04. It's more an issue of how much you're getting for your time, you know. The efficiency is really what you should, what sometimes what's happening is because of the, there is this access to *more* information. The patron who is genuinely interested gets really excited and starts digging in much more than he or she might have if it was paper sources, you know. There is this just the patron may only have an hour . . .

I. Right.

L-04. . . . you know, they *work*, a lot of these students here, they work full-time and are doing the master's part time . . .

I. Right.

L-04. . . . and so on. I mean it is *real*. They have children, they have families, and so on, so when they come it's not like they're a graduate student just engaged in the pursuit.

I. Yeah, unfortunately. {laugh}

L-04. Unfortunately, this is the reality, two career families and so on. So what is happening is that you're still spending the hour, but you're getting a lot more out of it because the technology is giving it to you faster.

I. But you feel that the actual quality of the interaction hasn't really changed?

L-04. Fundamentally? No.

I. Okay, we'll stop this.

B. Sample User Postinteraction Interview

U07 about L07

I. A few minutes ago, you spoke to the reference librarian. Could you please just describe to me what happened?

U07. I was looking for, like, just a piece of literature that we could discuss in a writing class so she suggested, like, looking in the literature section here and so we looked up Hemingway just as, like, an example, and it listed books of Hemingway and then poems and we like narrowed it down to short stories. And they were, like, readings of Hemingway or whatever, and it's pretty nice here. They have, like, it prints out for ya. Like my school we have that but it, it's a little less a specific.

I. Uh huh, so could you take a book out of here if you found one that . . .

U07. I don't have a card. I lost my card at [another college], but I think that it, we could use them and [a different college] too.

I. Oh, that's good, that's good. So how do you think this interaction went?

U07. It was good. She was very helpful, it didn't bother her to spend extra time. I found what I needed.

I. Okay, actually, that was my next question. Did you get the help you needed?

U07. Yes.

I. Okay, if you needed help again, would you go back to the same person?

U07. Yes

I. And why?

U07. Just because, um, she took me right where I had to go and it wasn't, like, help yourself or whatever. She demonstrated how to work the machine.

I. Um hum. Okay, just talking in general for a minute about when you use a library. Could you tell me what are your goals or aims are when you ask a librarian for help?

U07. Just direction. There's a lot of times that I'm researching things and no idea where to find them in the library 'cause I have a communications paper coming up and it's on, like, verbal communication in an office and I'm definitely gonna ask for help.

I. In an office?

U07. Yeah.

I. Yeah.

U07. So, and there's not, like, specific authors I can think of or a subject even maybe like business so I'd say, like, I know in our library they're definitely overworked. Like, they're always running around trying to help people. ⁶ I don't know what else to say.

I. So you might come here, you mean? Because here there's . . .

U07. Yeah, well, it's, I think they're about the same.

I. Uh huh. They're overworked here too? {laugh}

U07. Yeah, exactly. Librarians, in general, there's, there's just so many students. So few.

I. Yeah. Do you think they're nice? Do you think that the librarians are nicer here or are they nicer where you are or about the same?

U07. About the same, I think.

I. So even though they're overworked, they still . . .

U07. Yeah.

I. . . . they give you . . .

U07. Yeah, they're polite.

I. They're polite.

U07. Helpful.

I. And they give you, that's good. I want to ask you to think back over other times when you asked a librarian for help and recall a situation in which you were very pleased? Thought it really went well. Can you do that and describe it for me?

U07. I did an honor's project on judicial activism and something else, it was like the opposite, and I had to go through old cases, like Supreme Court cases, and the librarian went through them with me, directed me to, like, the law books and what would be helpful because it was a very, like, difficult subject to research and I found what I needed. They then, they had like other suggestions, like maybe a periodical or whatever.

I. Um hum. Could you just put your finger, 'cause you thought of that real quick, could you put your finger on exactly why you thought that was such a good interaction?

U07. 'Cause, like, *I* felt like I was in a lot of trouble because I knew little about this, so it was good that, like, they directed me {laugh} where I should go.

I. Right, right. Okay, good. And now, I want you to think back on past times and see if you can recall a time when you asked a librarian for help and you were displeased or it was not a good interaction and describe it for me?

U07. Um ... I'm trying to think ah ... most of the time it's been a good experience. Um, sometimes they have trouble with the computers. I don't know if they, I think they're getting better, but, ah, sometimes just even the mechanical part of it with the [changing the paper or something ...

I. Um hum. Have you ever had a time when a librarian um . . . you not, you know, that you had trouble personally, using the stuff, but that you had trouble when you asked for help?

U07. No.

I. No, okay, that's *good* actually

U07. Yeah, yeah.

I. You're a lucky person. So that's the end of my questions. Let me turn this off.

Notes

1. Informant talks about subject (content) continually during this interview. It is a critical dimension for this person, librarian needs subject information, subject master's, in-depth knowledge, etc., very classic librarian viewpoint, mentions communication or "people skills" as do other librarians but never really gives up on subject as being primary.

2. Subject, subject, subject.

3. New point, I don't think anyone else has mentioned multicultural concerns, also this is a minority librarian, so from a multicultural background.

4. Classic content statement, go into the field because you are fascinated by information.

5. I get this from more than one librarian, that much of these skills are inherent and cannot be taught, you either have it or you don't. Although L says partly, the way he talks about it sounds like fully.

6. Interesting observation that librarians are overworked, always running around helping people.