



Reference and User Services Association

Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians

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Introduction

As the professional organization for reference and user services, the Reference and Users Services Association (RUSA) has developed and updated a model statement of competencies essential for successful reference and user services librarians. This statement builds upon *ALA's Core Competencies of Librarianship; Section 5. Reference and User Services* <http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/sites/ala.org.educationcareers/files/content/careers/corecomp/corecompetences/finalcorecompstat09.pdf>, which defines the basic knowledge to be possessed by all graduates of ALA accredited master's programs. For each of the areas in Section 5 (A-G), a reference and user services librarian should know and be able to employ the concepts, principles, and techniques of reference and user services to individuals of all ages, cultures, and groups.

The RUSA competencies are critical to excellent reference and user services. Thus, they identify the underlying behaviors that lead to successful performance in organizations providing reference and user services to patrons. The competencies assume a basic infrastructure of competencies required by all professionals, such as skills related to communication, information technologies, digital literacy, reading, writing, and mathematics. Therefore, the RUSA competencies focus on the abilities, skills, and knowledge that make reference and user services librarians unique from other professionals. The *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers* <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral> are incorporated through specific reference into the *Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians*.

In addition to the competencies detailed below, reference and user services librarians are responsible for affirming the importance of diversity issues within the broader information community; possessing awareness of their own historical, cultural, racial, gendered, and religious worldviews; and identifying where those views exclude other human experiences.

Competencies must be relevant to the particular job requirements or type of information organization. Individual organizations developing competencies need to take into consideration reference staffing models that may include collection specialists, paraprofessionals, students, and others. Individuals and organizations applying the RUSA essential competencies may wish to identify additional competency statements by consulting resources, including technology and management competencies, such as:

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WebJunction's *Competency Index for the Library Field 2014*, www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/Competency_Index_for_the_Library_Field.html, The Library Leadership and Management Association's (LLAMA) *Leadership and Management Competencies* <http://www.ala.org/llama/leadership-and-management-competencies>, and the Association of College and Research Libraries' *Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians* <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/teachinglibrarians>

Definitions:

Reference and User Services Librarians: Librarians who assist, advise, and instruct users in accessing all forms of recorded knowledge. The assistance, advice, and instruction include both direct and indirect service to patrons.

Competencies: Behaviors that excellent performers exhibit consistently and effectively. A behavioral basis is necessary because effective assessment of competencies depends on observed behavior.

5A. Accesses relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information

Offers services responsive to individual expressed user needs

1. Applies *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers* <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>
2. Recognizes, honors, and responds appropriately to diversity and cultural differences
3. Determines situational context of individual information needs
4. Engages in discussion and expresses interest in individual experiences related to information needs
5. Understands and applies laws and policies governing confidentiality and rights to privacy
6. Consults with the user to identify the most appropriate resources in the context of accuracy, authority, interest, and content level
7. Respects the right of individuals to pursue their research preferences
8. Assists the user in evaluating, managing, formatting, storing, using, or displaying information
9. Consults with the user to select appropriate technology for providing answers, balancing the nature of the information being provided with user preferences
10. Applies knowledge of state of the art information retrieval technologies and systems to assist the user in identifying and obtaining information
11. Identifies opportunities for instruction that empowers users to improve their own information-seeking abilities

Organizes and designs services to meet the needs of the primary community

1. Creates physical and virtual environments that encourage use of all available services
2. Designs services that reflect the demographics, cultural diversity, and special needs of the community



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5B. Evaluates, collects, retrieves, and synthesizes information from diverse sources

Identifies and presents highly recommended sources

1. Connects users to tools that can help them identify diverse sources of information
2. Connects users to highly recommended, carefully selected sources in many formats
3. Evaluates reference tools and sources for quality, relevance, authenticity, authority, and inclusiveness
4. Identifies any bias or point of view in an information resource
5. Creates useful research guides, web pages, bibliographies, finding aids, and other appropriate tools in areas of expertise
6. Compiles and maintains information about community resources
7. Develops programming, displays, tutorials, and other specialized instructional materials reflective of the cultural diversity of the primary community

5C. Interacts with colleagues and others to provide consultation, mediation, and guidance in the use of knowledge and information

Collaborates and partners with the user in the information seeking process

1. Engages the user in the process and in making decisions
2. Determines the user's prior knowledge and expertise
3. Consults appropriate internal and external resources

Collaborates with colleagues to provide service to users

1. Establishes shared goals and values for excellent user services
2. Facilitates team development with colleagues to improve user services
3. Shares knowledge and expertise with colleagues
4. Recognizes the unique knowledge, skills, and strengths of colleagues that can assist in responding to inquiries
5. Elicits assistance from colleagues when appropriate to enhance the user experience

Develops collaborative relationships within the profession to enhance service to users

1. Develops personal networks by actively participating in appropriate local, regional, state, national, and international organizations
2. Identifies and seeks out possible partners in order to expand services
3. Contributes to collaborative efforts that will benefit local users

Develops and maintains partnerships beyond the library profession to strengthen services to users

1. Identifies and reaches out to potential partners who are able to contribute relevant knowledge and expertise
2. Communicates effectively with partners to ensure mutual understanding of goals, objectives, and values



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3. Forms mutually beneficial partnerships to improve existing systems and to develop new products and services

5D. Develops appropriate expertise in information literacy and instruction skills and abilities, including textual, digital, visual, numerical, and spatial literacies

Defines information literacy

1. Creates a personal definition of information literacy
2. Develops a shared understanding with colleagues
3. Collaborates with users and colleagues to help the institution or organization develop its own definition of information literacy

Integrates information literacy concepts into the full range of library services, from classroom instruction to community programs to one-on-one reference and instruction

1. Helps individuals to assess their own information needs, to differentiate among sources of information, and to develop skills to effectively identify, locate, and evaluate sources
2. Adjusts communication style and methods according to learner needs and context
3. Leads or facilitates discussion of controversial or unexpected issues in a skillful, non-judgmental manner that helps individuals to learn
4. Designs interactive presentations and exploratory activities
5. Incorporates communication technologies to provide assistance to learners in and outside the classroom
6. Requests feedback from users and peers on instruction-related communication skills and uses feedback to improve individual skills
7. Develops and implements assessments that encompass the various aspects of learning in order to improve instruction

Designs and implements presentation and communication strategies to foster learning and engagement

1. Makes the best possible use of voice, eye contact, gestures, and active learning methods in order to keep face-to-face instruction lively and learners engaged
2. Seeks to clarify confusing terminology, avoiding excessive jargon, and using vocabulary appropriate for level of learners
3. Presents instructional content in diverse ways (written, oral, visual, online, or using presentation software) and selects appropriate delivery methods according to learners' needs
4. Scales presentation content and learning activities to the users' needs and how people learn, adjusting to time, space, and technology available
5. Practices or refines instruction content as necessary in order to achieve familiarity and confidence with planned presentation



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Creates a learner-centered teaching environment

1. Designs group instruction sessions by defining expectations and desired learning outcomes in order to determine content, sequencing the lessons and incorporating activities that facilitate learning
2. Designs instruction to best meet the common learning characteristics of individuals, including prior knowledge and experience, motivation to learn, cognitive abilities, and circumstances under which they will be learning
3. Implements active, collaborative, and other appropriate learning activities
4. Modifies teaching methods and delivery to address different learning preferences, language abilities, developmental skills, age groups, and the diverse needs of learners
5. Integrates appropriate technology into instruction to support experiential and collaborative learning as well as to improve individual receptiveness, comprehension, and retention of information
6. Designs effective assessments of individual learning and uses the data collected to guide personal teaching and professional development
7. Reflects on practice in order to improve teaching skills and applies new knowledge of teaching methods and learning theories
8. Shares teaching skills and knowledge with other instructional staff

5E. Promotes and demonstrates the value of library services through marketing and advocacy

Understands and applies marketing theory and practices

1. Practices the basic principles of marketing and applies them to library services
2. Conducts research to assess marketing landscape and to determine current position among similar and/or competing businesses and organizations
3. Identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of library services to enhance marketing strategy
4. Identifies, analyzes, and prioritizes target markets and audiences to determine how best to promote library services that can effectively serve them
5. Determines community relationships and develops partnering models of services with groups within the community
6. Conducts periodic reviews of the community for opportunities to align needs with library services

Develops, implements, and evaluates an ongoing marketing plan for library services

1. Sets measurable market goals and objectives, including brand strategy
2. Develops consistent promotion and distribution strategies to meet goals and objectives based on the analysis of target audiences
3. Participates in marketing training
4. Implements marketing efforts, maintaining records and clear communication with staff and stakeholders

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5. Evaluates the effectiveness and impact of the strategies and revises as necessary

Advocates the value of library services to the primary community

1. Engages with target audiences, connecting via the most appropriate tools and sources
2. Communicates with library users, potential users, and other stakeholders through multiple communication formats and channels
3. Maintains current awareness of communication tools and media sources used by target audiences
4. Builds relationships with partners who advocate on behalf of the library
5. Develops and maintains relationships among diverse cultural groups

5F. Assesses and responds to diversity in user needs, user communities, and user preferences

Assesses User Needs

1. Identifies the user population and potential user population
2. Analyzes own cultural background and assumptions, and the racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diversities of the community
3. Collects and analyzes information about users and user interactions with the library and its services, while respecting user privacy and confidentiality
4. Plans and conducts regular assessments of information needs of primary user groups, using various formal and informal methods
5. Translates assessments of user needs into a plan for services that addresses the needs and preferences of diverse user groups

Assesses Information Services

1. Creates an organizational climate of assessment
2. Develops and incorporates measures of evaluation into any new service
3. Develops service standards for new and existing information services
4. Analyzes resources available and distributes resources to service programs most effectively meeting the user needs of a designated community
5. Analyzes demographic and other information about the community to develop a wide variety of services, which meet the needs and interests of diverse communities

Assesses Information Resources

1. Maintains quality of collection resources by evaluating all formats for accuracy and currency
2. Determines authority of resources
3. Identifies any bias or point of view in an information resource
4. Evaluates new information sources appropriate for primary users
5. Consults a wide variety of reviewing sources to identify those best meeting needs of the primary community



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6. Writes and distributes reviews of new information resources to appropriate online and print media

Assesses Service Delivery

1. Determines the appropriate mix of technologies and delivery channels to meet diverse user needs and preferences
2. Experiments with and evaluates changes in services to users
3. Evaluates the allocation of human and fiscal resources to ensure they are supporting priority services and delivery methods

Assesses User Interfaces for Information Resources

1. Identifies factors that impede the use of the resource
2. Evaluates format, access, and presentation aspects of resources
3. Communicates with information resource designers about usability and accessibility concerns
4. Determines if there are alternative resources that have better user interfaces and resources

Assesses Assistance to Users by Information Service Providers

1. Identifies and applies those performance measures that have been developed by the profession, for example, the *RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers* <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>
2. Consults with information service staff to develop a consensus of service standards
3. Develops measures that will be useful in assessing whether or not service standards are being met
4. Promotes a service philosophy that encourages collaboration to improve service behaviors

5G. Investigates, analyzes, and plans in order to develop future services

Leads a Life as a Learner

1. Devises and implements strategies to learn about emerging tools and techniques, and connects with professional communities to seek and share best practices
2. Identifies potential new services and programs through contact in the professional community, readings, and other exploration
3. Seeks opportunities to be informed, gathering news and information about the local, national, and international environment
4. Encourages discussion with colleagues that furthers reflection on services offered and on potential needs
5. Practices self-reflection, including an awareness of personal strengths and limitations
6. Maintains currency with developments in understanding how people learn and with the best ways of facilitating learning in both formal and informal settings



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Develops and implements plans for services and resources

1. Applies knowledge of the information seeking process to structure information services for users
2. Promotes evidence-based decision making and fiscal responsibility
3. Initiates changes based on ongoing analysis of services and resources
4. Retains valued, successful, and cost-effective programs and services
5. Evaluates new technologies to determine if they meet user needs more effectively than current methods
6. Proposes new services and programming to address identified unmet needs, taking advantage of new technologies
7. Plans for the introduction of new services and programming, delineating required support and markers of success
8. Allocates resources to reflect decisions made for service and programming

Plans, implements, and evaluates innovations in services and resources

1. Identifies alternative strategies for proposed improvements
2. Selects for experimentation the options determined by critical examination to be most likely to succeed
3. Employs experimental, small-scale projects designed to improve services and service delivery
4. Evaluates results using clearly established criteria
5. Adopts successful innovations on a larger scale

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Resources Consulted

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Appendix I: Suggested verbs for task statements, pp. 25-27
Appendix II. Verbs to avoid using in task statements, p. 28
Appendix III. Verbs to be used with caution in task statements, pp. 29-30
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<https://alair.ala.org/bitstream/handle/11213/7853/Core%20Competencies%20Cataloging%20Metadata%20Professional.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

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