

**Definitions of Reference Service: A Chronological Bibliography
compiled by Lanell Rabner (Brigham Young University) and Suzanne Lorimer
(Yale University)
[for the RUSA Evaluation of Reference and User Services Committee]**

Introduction

At its January 20, 2002 meeting, the Evaluation of Reference and User Services Committee* (ERUS) was informed of the plan by the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) to revise its current standard on Library Statistics ([ANSI/NISO Z39.7 – 1995](#), posted on their website: <http://www.niso.org/standards/resources/Z39-7.pdf>). Since the Committee had already begun work on developing new guidelines for the collection of reference statistics, the RUSA Board requested that the Committee expand this endeavor to include consideration of the current NISO definition of ‘reference’ and a ‘reference transaction’ with the intention of lobbying NISO, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and others to accept this new definition of reference as the uniform standard.

As part of this work, the Evaluation of Reference and User Services Committee first considered the definitions of reference that had been previously used by libraries and library-related organizations. In order to place these definitions in context and to develop a sense of both the changes and the constants in the definitions of reference over the last century, two members of the Committee, Suzanne Lorimer (Yale University) and Lanell Rabner (Brigham Young University), undertook a comprehensive literature search on this topic. The following bibliography is the culmination of their work. Entries are arranged chronologically with the earliest coming first to give a sense of evolving considerations, controversies, and definitions. Each entry is annotated, some quite extensively.

Information gleaned from this literature search demonstrate that the library profession has grappled with both constructing a definition of reference and creating tools

to measure and evaluate reference services for the past 75 years. Additionally, as the duties of a reference librarian have continued to evolve, especially with the proliferation of technology-based innovations in libraries, fitting these new and expanded duties into traditional definitions of reference has become a challenge. For example, effective ways to represent and measure the reference work that goes on behind the scenes and how the status (professional v. non-professional) of the reference staff may affect definitions of reference are still missing from the literature. Designing multiple measures for longitudinal and cross-institutional analysis also remains a challenge due to the differences in individual institution's definitions and measurement standards.

In addition, the Evaluation of Reference and User Services Committee held Discussion Forums during the ALA Midwinter meetings of 2001 and 2002 entitled *Sex, Lies and Reference Statistics I & II*, with the purpose of brainstorming the following questions: What reference statistics should we collect and why? and What data can we collect to make reference statistics really count in management decisions? Input gathered at these sessions and in subsequent Committee discussions resulted in a comprehensive checklist of activities that represent a new definition of reference work for the 21st century. From October 17-November 17, 2003, a random sample (n=981) of ALA members from academic, public and special libraries were invited to evaluate and comment on the checklist, with 421 librarians responding.

The Definition of Reference survey results will be reported at the 2004 ERUS Annual Conference Program *Developing a New Definition of Reference: Guidelines for Measuring Reference Services in the 21st Century*. This program will also present the Committee's draft guidelines for measuring reference services. An open forum will follow to collect additional feedback and suggestions. The final Guidelines will offer a

new definition of reference and recommendations for measuring a wide range of reference activities.

It is hoped that this bibliography will provide a catalyst for serious discussion and a foundation upon which both a new definition of reference and a standardization of measurement of a reference transaction can be built, one that truly incorporates and represents the activities of a 21st century reference librarian. The Evaluation of Reference and User Services Committee welcomes your feedback on this bibliography and upon the larger project of constructing a new definition of reference.

*Committee members as of 2002:

Lisa Horowitz (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Chair

Jake Carlson (Bucknell University), Vice-Chair

Gordon Aamot (University of Washington)

Chris Coleman (University of California-Los Angeles)

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Leslie Haas (University of Utah)

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Nancy Skipper (Cornell University)

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Susan Ware (Penn State University)

Definitions of Reference Service: a Chronological Bibliography

This list is arranged chronologically to give some idea of the development, waxing, and waning of interest in and concern about the definition and collection of reference statistics.

1. Green, S. S. (1876). *Personal relations between librarian and readers*. *American Library Journal*, 1, 74-81.

Green identifies four components of reference service:

1. Instruct the reader in the ways of the library
2. Assist readers in solving their inquiries
3. Aid the reader in the selection of good works
4. Promote the library within the community

2. Wyer, J. I. (1927). *Reference work; a text-book for librarians and students of library work*. Chicago: American Library Association.

3. Guerrier, E. (1936, July). The measurement of reference service. *Library Journal*, 61, 529-31.

The classification of questions used in the recording of every reference question asked in nine public library systems in the U.S.:

1. Questions about persons and places in the city
 - a. Questions about the library
 - b. Questions about the use of the catalog
2. Fact-finding questions
3. Questions requiring more or less research
4. Questions about what to read

4. Shores, L. (1937). *Basic reference books; an introduction to the evaluation, study, and use of reference materials with special emphasis on some 200 titles*. Chicago: American Library Association.

“Some of the duties a reference librarian may be called upon to perform can be classified under the following headings:

- I. Answer questions
 - a. About the community, whether city, campus, building, or library
 - b. About facts
- II. Locate materials for speeches, papers and hobbies
- III. Research
 - a. Compile bibliographies
 - b. Annotate, abstract, or summarize literature in a given field
 - c. Document or establish assumptions
- IV. Instruction
 - a. Informal
 1. Teach catalog use, or use of any reference tool at the time the question is being answered, or material located, or even research conducted
 - b. Formal
 1. In school and college courses
 2. Chapel, assembly, Freshman week, club lectures
- V. Advisory
 - a. Recreational and cultural reading advice

5. Miles, A., & Martin, L. (1941). *Public administration and the library*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Table 6: Steps in the Measurement of a Library Objective

The Objective: To promote “educational” activity

IV. Services rendered	Possible measures
Book circulation	(d) Portion of patrons using card catalogs, indexes, and bibliographies
Bibliographic aids available	(e) Number of persons instructed in the use of bibliographic aids per thousand patrons
Reference aid provided	(f) Number of reference questions answered, divided by purpose
Readers’ guidance available	(g) Reading courses started and completed per thousand patrons (p.286)

6. American Library Association. Committee on Library Terminology. (1943). *A.L.A. glossary of library terms, with a selection of terms in related fields*. Chicago: American Library Association.

“**Reference work.** 1. That phase of library work which is directly concerned with assistance to readers in securing information and in using the resources of the library in study and research. 2. The work of a reference department.

7. Hutchins, M. (1944). *Introduction to reference work*. Chicago: American Library Association.

“For the purposes of discussion in the chapters immediately following, a reference question is defined as a request from a patron of a library for information of a definite nature which he expects to be found in printed materials and their like or for a certain work or works not readily located in the library.” (p.20)

8. Rothstein, S. (1953). The development of the concept of reference service in American libraries, 1850-1900. *Library Quarterly* 23(1), 1-15. [Reprinted in *Reference Librarian*, 25/26, 7-31 (1989)]

Melvil Dewey and reference work: [p 20]

1. Not a peripheral function of the library
2. Responsible for interpreting the resources for the user
3. Necessary to assign personnel specifically to the task of interpretation
4. Librarian is required to discriminate between the sources of information and adjust them to reader needs
5. To meet reader demands [p 21]
 - a. Introduce sources to users
 - b. Provide direct training

There must be “... an attendant ready and competent to meet the reader’s questions, and that the reader should go directly to such an attendant rather than be sent to the catalog.” [p 23]

Librarian duties at the “information desk””: [p 24]

1. Reference librarian presides
2. Assist readers in the search for information
3. Guide the reading public with a prepared list of references on topics of the day or subjects of general interest

9. Rothstein, S. (1955). *The development of reference services through academic traditions, public library practice, and special librarianship*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries. [Reprinted in *Reference Librarian*, 25/26, 33-135 (1989)]

A.R. Spofford: “It’s enough for the librarian to act as an intelligent guidepost, to point the way; to travel the road is the business of the reader himself.” [Chapter IV- “The Nature of Reference Work in the General Research Libraries 1896-196: Policies and Practices,” p 98]

1. Aid readers in self-development [p 99]
2. Indicate the *means* to gather information
3. ...to supply direct answers instead of guidance – would thus be to deprive patrons of the invaluable benefits derived from the experience of personal investigation
4. Help students help themselves

University librarians “stressed the role of reference service as a form of instruction and equated assistance with guidance.” [p. 99]

Reference work was merely another means of instruction. [p. 99]

Activities engaged in: [p.102]

1. Formal bibliographic instruction
 - i. Lectures
 - ii. Guided tours
 - iii. Courses
2. Information bureau [p 103]
 - i. Handling factual questions
 - ii. Answered questions with reference books
3. Preparation of bibliographies and indexes [p 104]

10. American Library Association. Library Organization and Management Section. Library Administration Division. (1961). *Definitions for library statistics; a preliminary draft*. Chicago: American Library Association, Library Organization and Management Section, Library Administration Division.

No mention of reference statistics.

11. American Library Association. Reference Service Division. Committee on Standards. (1961, June). Reference standards. *RQ, 1*, 1-2.

See Shores (1968).

12. Wheeler, J.L., & Goldhor, G. (1962). *Practical administration of public libraries*. New York: Harper & Row.

“The reference function is the help which libraries give readers in finding the information they need. (p.313)

They quote Mary Barton’s definitions:

“Reference service may be defined as the librarian’s aid in bringing together the inquirer and the printed materials he needs for whatever purpose ... in other words, the librarian’s skilled guidance in choosing or tracking down the best book or books for a specific piece of information or for a specific purpose. ... This excludes directional work ... but includes all inquiries where the librarian actually assists the reader by recommending the best sources for certain types of material, or the best titles, by guiding and aiding him in the use of reference books, by finding a specific fact for him, and by gathering suitable material on a certain topic or for a certain purpose. In other words, headwork not footwork. The attempt to separate advisory and selective service from informational leads to endless difficulties ... (p.315)

In summary, the reference function includes in addition to information searching (a) the bibliographic aspect, i.e. the use ... and preparation of indexes and bibliographies, including selected lists; (b) the teaching aspect, i.e. instruction given by librarians to persons of all ages, in the use of books and libraries ... ; (c) the promotional aspect; and (d) the internal development and improvement aspect. (p.317)

It does seem useful that if the total number of reference questions is divided into the total of expenditure for salaries in the reference services, then we get at least a rough cost figure per unit. We do not suggest including costs of materials... (p.331)

... [there is an] A.L.A. standard of “1/2 to 1 reference question per capita” [from the Post-War Standards for Public Libraries, ALA, 1943, p.27]. ... there seems to be present justification for raising the standard to “3/4 to 1 reference and advisory question per capita”. (p.332)

... the reference department may record some of the following: attendance, directional questions, reference questions, unanswered questions, bibliographies prepared, reference volumes used, telephone questions and questions by mail. Some of these almost defy definition ... (p.333)

13. American Library Association. Statistics Coordinating Project. (1966) *Library statistics: a handbook of concepts, definitions, and terminology*. Chicago: American Library Association.

From Chapter II, “Statistics of College and University Libraries,” section on “Reference Statistics”
National data are not feasible at this time.

Services rendered by the reference departments of college and university libraries consist of much more than answering informational questions. Such services include building and keeping the reference collection up to date and compiling bibliographies. Until the main variables (such as time, education and training of the reference librarian, quality of available reference tools, and heterogeneity and level of clientele) are measured and combined into an index, reference service can be measured only in crude terms.

Reference questions, as such, can be measured in terms of the number of contacts, time consumed per question, or number of questions handled. The number of contacts or people asking questions does not reveal the number of questions asked. Time spent may be dependent upon the resources of the library and their accessibility, and upon the resources of the librarian and his familiarity with the subject and the collection. While all of these are valid criteria, none individually provides a true picture. (p.24)

From Chapter III, "Statistics of Public Libraries," section on "Reference Statistics"

Despite considerable inquiry in the past plus continuing interest and efforts in this area, the profession has not come to any agreement that present methods of counting can either apply to a significant number of libraries or differentiate succinctly the varying levels of service rendered.

At present, the problem of measuring reference service is approached from three viewpoints:

1. Number and type of inquiries:
Tabulation as to reference questions answered and unanswered; categorization into levels of difficulty (e.g. "quick information", "search", "research"; or requiring less than one hour, over one hour); identification of the manner in which the question was received (in person, by telephone, by mail); simple total of reference transactions
2. Record sources used:
Number of books reshelfed; number of sources consulted by reference assistants; categorization of reference sources consulted by broad subject area
3. Count of clientele:
Regular or occasional counts of readers entering the reference department or coming to the reference desk; spot checks on number of readers at particular times of day (p.47)

All of these methods and various combinations of them have been used, but rarely has confidence been placed in the accuracy of the resulting figures. That any one of them can be applied by all types and sizes of public libraries is highly doubtful; that the statistics so gathered are truly meaningful to the public or even to the profession can be questioned.

The reporting of the number of reference transactions (excluding internal directional questions) is recommended as a recurring statistic, but only as an indication of the size of the operation. Additional special study of the problem must take place before any attempt is made to coordinate findings. (p.48)

From the Glossary (for which the principal source was the *A.L.A. glossary of library terms*)

Reference question. Any request for information or aid which requires the use of one or more sources to determine the answer, or which utilizes the professional judgment of the librarian.

Reference work. A library's activity in seeking to locate and supply specific information requested by library users.(p.140)

14. Rothstein, S. (1964, January). The measurement and evaluation of reference service. *Library Trends*, 12(1), 456-72 (January 1964). (Reprinted in *The reference librarian*, 25/26, 173-190.)

"... the trends in measurement and evaluation of reference service may ... [be] grouped into the following categories:

1. Enumeration of reference questions answered is often attempted. The most common form of quantitative description is the simple tally of reference questions answered. This gross measure is concededly too crude to be meaningful and is almost certain to be incomplete, probably by a good 40 per cent. (p.174)
2. Reference questions classified by type, subject, purpose, or effect have been used in many studies. ... To discriminate between ... levels of service, reference investigators have devised a number of classifications, none wholly satisfactory. Since Guerrier's pioneering effort, a number of investigators have use 'time taken' as a basis of classification, tabulating the number of questions into anywhere from four to eight groups according to the number of minutes required by reference staff to find the answer. The method is admittedly deficient A variant on this method, now more commonly employed than the original, is the grouping of questions by *type*. The favorite classification of this kind divides queries into: *directional questions* – calling merely for the location of a specific book or library facility; *ready*

reference questions – calling for simple, factual answers readily ascertainable by the use of one or two standard reference books; *search* questions, sometimes more grandiosely called ‘research’ questions – calling for more extended effort and the wider use of sources of information; and *readers’ advisory* questions – assistance in the choice of books or the gathering of data. ...

A great number of other groupings have been tried: classification by subject – inquiries arranged by the major D.C. classes; by purpose served – for business and industry, school assignments, personal (p.175) use, etc.; by source – in person, by telephone, by mail; by materials used – reference books, the stack collection, pamphlets, government publications, the card catalog, etc.; by effect – the percentage of questions answered. None of these methods has been as yet sufficiently standardized to allow for reliable comparison of findings... (p.176)

7. ... Evaluation presupposes measurement against a specific standard or yardstick or goal, and no area of library service has been more deficient in such standards than reference service. ... A handful of useful exceptions may be cited. The *A.L.A. post-wars Standards* [Committee on Post-War Planning, 1943, p.36] specified a standard for public libraries of one-half to one reference question to be answered per capita of community served. ... Hutchins, citing a study by Joseph Wheeler, thought that a ratio of one reference question answered to every ten volumes circulated would be ‘high’. (p.177)

While the work of answering questions has received the lion’s share of attention in the studies under consideration, it does not, seemingly, account for the major share of the reference librarian’s time. Budington found that only 37 per cent of the reference librarians’ time at the John Crerar Library went into ‘direct public service,’ the remainder going to such duties as book selection and administration, photocopying and clerical operations (p.181).

The A.L.A. Reference Service Division’s Committee on Standards has drafted a plan to evaluate reference services on a scale of ‘index numbers’. Under this plan, correlation would be sought between ranking of libraries in respect of a given measure or ‘indicator’, such as the number of reference questions answered per man hour of reference time, and the ranking of the same libraries on an overall reference rating derived from the pooled judgment of experts. If certain ‘indicators’ are found to obtain a high degree of correlation, they may then provide a convenient ‘index’ of reference performance. (p.183)

This is not to say that the search for convenient and reliable measures should not go on. Quite a number of these have, in fact, been adumbrated in the literature, and one wonders why they have not been taken up. Miles and Martin, for example, suggested the following: ‘... number of persons instructed in the use of bibliographic aids per thousand patrons ...’ and ‘... reading courses started and completed per thousand patrons.’

Still other potentially useful approaches come to mind. ... The number of reference man hours per capita of population served, and more particularly of ‘desk’ man hours, would be revealing. ... Much more data on the apportionment of reference librarians’ time to their various duties would be welcome. (p.184)

15. Shores, L. (1964). The measure of reference. In R. Rowland. *Reference services* (pp.135-144). Hamden, CT: Shoestring Press.

“Late last year the Reference Services Division of the A.L.A. activated a Committee on Reference Standards and Statistics. ... The Committee’s first meeting ..., though largely devoted to explanation, produced, nevertheless, a significant redefinition of Reference. Not that the term had lacked attention in our professional literature, but rather that the variations in scope had often been startling. ... (p.137) In consequence, the Committee under the leadership of Samuel Rothstein and Henry Dubester developed this statement [which is a fuller version than that appearing in the July, 1961 issue of *RQ*]:

1. Reference services in a library should be recognized as a central responsibility of library administration, specifically organized to ensure the optimum use of the library’s collections.
2. The distinguishing feature of reference services is in its relationship to the library’s patrons. These services are of two essential types – direct and indirect.
3. Direct reference service consists of personal assistance provided to library patrons in pursuit of information. Direct reference service may take many forms, each of which may consist of a number of activities, of which only the most frequent and representative are cited below:

- a. Instruction in the use of the library and in the use of items in the library's collections. This service may range from demonstration of how to fill out a call slip to explanation of the use of catalogs, bibliographies, and reference works, to assistance in interpreting the contents of materials in the library's collections. The central feature of this instruction, irrespective of its level or its intensity, is to provide guidance and direction in the pursuit of information, rather than providing the information itself.
 - b. Information Service. This service may range from answering an apparently simple question through recourse to an obvious reference source (p.138), to supplying information based on search in the collections of the library, combining competence in bibliothecal techniques with competence in the subject of the inquiry. The character and extent of library information service will vary with the kind of library, with the patron the library is designed to serve, and with the skill, competence, and professional training of the reference librarian providing the information service. Characteristic functions of information service are finding specific data or facts, interpreting the material or information found, translating, abstracting, literature searching, and others. The central feature of information service, irrespective of its level or intensity, is to provide an end product in terms of information sought by the library's patron.
4. Indirect reference service comprises the preparation and development of catalogs, bibliographies, and all other reference aids which help in providing access to the library's collections and which extend the library's services through cooperation with other, or larger, or more specialized libraries.

... The foregoing outline offers a concept of reference service which is broader in scope than many libraries can achieve. It recognizes, however, that the reference functions, as described, are in fact provided by libraries large and small, without necessarily being recognized as such (p.139).
 ... From this preliminary definition, the Committee has next turned its attention to the activities of Reference. What constitutes the reference function in every library type? ... An effort to categorize the various reference activities has resulted in a highly preliminary checklist, far from appealing to the Committee:

Activity

- I. Reference assistance
 1. Fact questions – In library
 2. Fact questions – On phone
 3. Fact questions – By mail
 4. Searching
 5. Reading Guidance
- II. Research assistance
 1. Information retrieving
 2. Abstracting
 3. Translating
 4. Literature Searching
 5. Literature Summarizing
 6. Material Interpreting
- III. Instruction
 1. Informal – Card Catalog
 2. Informal – Library Collection
 3. Formal – Class Unit
 4. Formal – Group
 5. Formal - Course
 6. Writing handbooks, bulletins to aid library use
- IV. Program Planning
 1. Group Meeting
 2. Discussion Group
 3. Reading Club
 4. Film Forum (p.140)
 5. Record Club
 6. TV and Radio

- V. Bibliography Compiling
 - 1. For Groups
 - 2. For Individuals
 - 3. For General Distribution
 - 4. To Support Classroom Instruction
 - 5. To Support Research
- VI. Selection
 - 1. "R" materials
 - 2. Books, Pamphlets, Documents
 - 3. Pictures
 - 4. Films, Filmstrips, Slides
 - 5. Microforms
 - 6. Disk and Tape Recordings (Sound)
 - 7. Other Materials (Realia, Maps, etc.)
- VII. Reference Organization
 - 1. Ordering Books, Documents, Pamphlets
 - 2. Bindery Preparation
 - 3. Weeding Files, Books
 - 4. Clipping Newspapers, Magazines
 - 5. Indexing Local Materials
 - 6. Microfilming and Photocopying
 - 7. Negotiating Inter-Library Loans
 - 8. Organizing Genealogical Sources
 - 9. Supervising and Training Personnel
 - 10. Acquiring and Arranging Equipment
 - 11. Posting Signs, Printing Directions
 - 12. Writing Copy for Newspapers, and Public Relations
 - 13. Community Resources Liaison
 - 14. Preparing Statistics, Records, Reports

Several directions now confront the Committee. Refinement of the preliminary checklist by reference librarians in all types of libraries is necessary if a useful instrument is to result (p.141). ... Which brings us back to the main Committee assignment. How shall we measure? What can we count to give us a quantitative appraisal of reference?

Looking at current common methods of measuring reference service in American libraries, 'perhaps the most common is the keeping of a running tally of questions asked'.

If some of these methods are looked at hard there is both cause for dismay and hope. Certainly the time factor is not reliable. Competence of the staff, richness of the collection, and any number of other factors accent the variables. Classification of questions by type, or by inquirer, or by sources consulted, or by purpose, all present formidable obstacles both as to validity and reliability. ...

Considerably more attention has been given to classifying questions by types. (p.142)

... [the idea of] a 'Reference Service Unit' has recently challenged me (p.143).

For example, direct reference service consisting of personal assistance to library patrons might well be measured in terms of both the educational level of the patron and the type of question.

Both of them might be based on the class of reference library and the predominant character of its patrons. Weighing of these might require the advice of an expert statistician. Success, however, might for the first time provide a common unit of measure for all reference services in every type of library.

The quest for a better measure of reference continues and the Committee earnestly seeks suggestions from their reference colleagues everywhere (p.144)

16. American Library Association. Statistics Coordinating Project. (1966). *Library statistics: a handbook of concepts, definitions, and terminology*. Chicago: American Library Association.

17. *Quantitative methods in librarianship: standards, research, management*; proceedings and papers of an institute held at the Ohio State University, August 3-16, 1969. (1972). Irene Braden Hoadley and Alice S. Clark, editors. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

No mention of reference statistics.

18. Rugh, A. G. (1975). Toward a science of reference work: basic concepts, *RQ*, 14(4), 293-300.

Definition of reference service: (p.295)

1. Direct aid to library users who need a particular book or books (to include all formats), or who need some information embodied in any books
2. Indirect aid to Library users in the form of reference collection building and maintenance

Direct reference service: (p. 296)

1. Personal assistance provided to library patrons
2. Instructional – the aim is to help the user select and use the proper materials

Indirect reference service: (p.296)

1. Evaluating and selecting materials for the collection
2. Maintaining the collection in a form useful to the community served
3. Users are indirectly served

Information service – provide the user directly with all the bibliographic or non-bibliographic information needed, or with sources that embody it. (p.296)

19. American Library Association. RASD Standards Committee. (1975, March) Categories of reference service. In *Reference Guidelines* (Chicago: American Library Association) (p. 297)

1. Reference or information services - personal assistance
2. Formal and informal instruction – explanation of the use of the bibliographic aids, as well as assistance through tours and lectures
3. Indirect reference service – access to a wide range of informational sources through cooperation with other library or information centers

20. Rothstein, S. (1977). Across the Desk: 100 Years of Reference Encounters. *Canadian Library Journal*, 34, 391-399. Reprinted in *Reference Librarian* 25/26 (1989), 235-251.

“...the chief point of the reference encounter is not to find the answer but to identify the question.” (p. 235)

Dr. S.R. Ranganathan: “When the reader comes amidst the library...he will meet a person who with radiant geniality whispers into his ears: Take my hand, for I have passed this way and know the truth...When the reader goes home, his memory should constantly tell him: the bewitching smile of the gentleman at the library is still before my eyes. I love to go to the library as often as possible, even if it be merely to meet him.” (p. 246)

The essential ingredients of the reference encounter: (p. 247)

1. Knowing the truth – or how to find it
2. Spirit of service

21. Rettig, J. (1978). A theoretical model and definition of the reference process. *RQ*, 18(1), 19-29.

“...reference service can and does exist because people need information that they must obtain from a source other than themselves.”

Librarians facilitate the communication process by offering themselves as intermediaries between users and information.

“...reference service can theoretically be defined as the interpersonal communication process.”

The user, not the librarian should judge the end product.

“...the librarian should provide service at the level expected.” (p. 26)

22. National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. (1979). *Library information handbook, a handbook of standard terminology for reporting and recording information about libraries*. [Preliminary ed.] Washington : U. S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Education Division, National Center for Education Statistics.

23. Bunge, C.A. (1980). Reference Services. In *ALA World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services* (486-474). Chicago: American Library Association. [Reprinted in *Reference Librarian*, 66, 185-199.]

Reference service is “characterized by a high degree of personal interaction between library staff members and library users.” (p.185)

1. Individual users
2. Specifically identified small groups of users

Information needs of the user are known at the time of the reference interview. (p.185)

Reference service has been referred to as “reference and information services” or “reader services.” (p.185)

“Personal assistance provided to users in the pursuit of information.” (p.185)

Major service aspects: (pp. 185-191)

1. Information service
 - a. finding needed information for the user
 - b. assisting the user in finding the needed information
2. Library use instruction – assisting users in learning the skills necessary to finding and using library materials
3. Guidance - assisting users in choosing the appropriate materials to meet their educational, informational or recreational needs
 - a. Stimulating reading, identifying and locating appropriate materials
 - b. helping to interpret materials
 - c. learning advisor
 - i. learner and advisor working together to develop a shared understanding of the learner’s goal
 - ii. development of a learning plan

“...users have different needs at different times and reference programs should provide services – including instruction, guidance, and information – as appropriate to the needs of a particular user at a particular time.” (p.188)

The role of the reference librarian is the same for providing assistance with electronic resources as it is for more traditional print resources. Questions still need to be clarified

1. Questions need to be translated into the terms of the information source
2. Sources need to be identified and evaluated
3. A search strategy needs to be formulated
4. Often assistance with conducting search is required (p.196)

The broad function of the reference librarian is to provide “personal assistance to users in overcoming barriers between them and the information they need.” (p. 198)

24. *The ALA glossary of library and information science.* (1983). Chicago: American Library Association.

Directional transaction – An information contact which facilitates the use of the library in which the contact occurs, or its environs, and which may involve the use of sources describing that library, such as schedules, floor plans, handbooks, and policy statements. Compare with *reference transaction*. (p.74)

Information service – Personal assistance provided by members of the reference staff to library users in pursuit of information. Synonymous with reference service. (p.118)

Reference question – Any request by a library user for information or assistance in locating information which involves an encounter in person, by telephone, or by other means between the user and a member of the reference staff. Compare with *reference transaction*. (p.188)

Reference source – Any source used to obtain authoritative information in a reference transaction. Reference sources include printed materials, audiovisual materials, machine-readable databases, library bibliographic records, other libraries and institutions, and persons both inside and outside the library.

Reference staff – All library staff members whose assigned duties include the provision of information service. Synonymous with information staff.

Reference transaction – An information contact which involves the use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more reference sources, or knowledge of such sources, by a reference staff member. Compare with *directional transaction*, from which it is to be distinguished by characteristics other than its duration, and with *reference question*. (p.189)

25. *Library data collection handbook.* (1982). Chicago: American Library Association.

Activity Measures of Library Programs

Code t.7.11.700 INFORMATION SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

.720 Information contacts

- .721 Directional transactions
- .723 Reference transactions
 - Catalog information transaction
 - Fact-finding transaction
 - Literature search transaction
 - Manual search
 - Bibliographic data base search
 - Combined literature search
 - Selective dissemination of information
 - Other literature search
 - Readers or research advisory transaction
 - Referral transaction
 - Community referral
 - Other referral transaction
 - Research and analysis transaction
 - Other reference transaction
- .740 Maintenance of reference collection and services
- .741 Noncirculated volumes reshelfed into reference collection
- .742 Information service hours (p.82)

“From the Glossary (pp.109-221)

Reference transaction: An information contact which involves the use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, or knowledge of such sources, by a member of the reference/information staff. Information sources include: (1) print and nonprint materials; (2) machine-readable DATA BASES including BIBLIOGRAPHIC, FULL TEXT, and NUMERIC; (3) library bibliographic records, excluding circulation records; (4) other libraries and institutions; and (5) persons both inside and outside the library.

A question answered through utilization of information gained from previous consultation of such sources is considered a reference transaction even if the source is not consulted again. A contact which includes both reference and directional service is one reference transaction. Duration should not be an element in determining whether a transaction is reference or directional.

Types of reference transactions include:

- CATALOG INFORMATION TRANSACTION
- FACT-FINDING TRANSACTION
- LITERATURE SEARCH TRANSACTION
- READERS OR RESEARCH ADVISORY TRANSACTION
- REFERRAL TRANSACTION
- RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS TRANSACTION
- OTHER REFERENCE TRANSACTIONS (p.190)

Catalog information transaction: A reference transaction which specifically requires instruction in the use of the library catalog, or requires a search of the library’s catalog, a union catalog, a serials lists, or another library’s catalog for a specific work, or works by a specific author, or works on a particular subject. Includes searching network union catalogs accessed through BIBLIOGRAPIC SERVICE CENTERS or BIBLIOGRAPHIC UTILITIES. Catalog searches resulting from bibliographic searches, FACT-FINDING TRANSACTIONS or other REFERENCE TRANSACTIONS during the course of the INFORMATION CONTACT should be excluded from this category and reported under the appropriate category. (p.129)

Fact-finding transaction: A reference transaction involving a question of a factual nature which can be addressed readily, and often for which a standard reference book, an entry in a reference file, or a staff member’s own knowledge is generally sufficient to provide the answer. Exclude fact-finding when it is part of a LITERATURE SEARCH TRANSACTION, a REFERRAL TRANSACTION, or a RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS TRANSACTION. (P.150)

Literature search transaction: A reference transaction which involves extensive scrutiny of indexes, bibliographies, or BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA BASES as well as the library’s own monographs and serials, in order to locate information on the subject of inquiry. For reporting purposes, count here only the literature search request, not the number of bibliographies, indexes, or data bases searched to satisfy the request. Categories of literature searches are: MANUAL

SEARCH, BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA BASE SEARCH, combined search (entails both manual and machine searching), SELECTIVE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION.(p.166)

Readers or research advisory transaction: A reference transaction which involves consultation about reading or research problems, recommendations of books and a reading or research program, or instruction for an individual in the use of the library and its resources (beyond catalog use). Exclude class instruction in reading, such as right-to-read programs, which specifically address reading and are not primarily intended to upgrade library skills and which should be considered under cultural, recreational, and educational services. (p.188)

Referral transaction: A reference transaction which involves the provision of information about or from groups or organizations. A community referral transaction involves the provision of information about the local community, community activities, community services or agencies, and community calendars. Such a transaction typically requires the determination of the user's need and the appropriate agency-information referral or community information referral to meet this need. Community services, resource referral files, schedules of events, and maps of the community may be consulted.

Other referral transactions reach beyond the local community and involve the provision of information about or from offices, departments, or agencies outside of the library (other than those encompassed by community referral). Such a transaction may require directing the user to persons or organizations external to the library for an answer to a question. (p.191)

Research and analysis transaction: A reference transaction which involves the provision and interpretation of extensive information about a particular topic, or topics. Such a transaction may require the consolidation and analysis of information from a variety of sources; independent research on the part of the library staff; and the synthesis of this information into a single information package for the the user. Such a transaction may also require literature searches, referral to agencies and organizations outside of the library, and other components of other types of reference transactions. However, it is distinguished from these by the interpretation, synthesis, and analysis of the information required by the library staff. (p.192)

26. Vathis, A.C. (1983). Reference transaction and end product as viewed by the patron. *RQ*, 23(1), 60-64.

Reference transaction model:

1. Intellectual component – what the question is and what constitutes a satisfactory answer
2. Interpersonal component—how effective the interview way

27. Vavrek, B. (1983). The meaning of reference service– from the field. *Catholic Library World* 54(8), 261-265.

How librarians working in the field defined reference service:

1. Questions answered by library personnel or material – 34% of the respondents surveyed
2. Helping users locate information – 30% of the respondents surveyed
3. Offering services – 17% of the respondents surveyed
4. Providing materials – 7% of the respondents surveyed
5. Aiding readers in library use – 4% of the respondents surveyed
6. Telephone referral – 2%
7. 100% effort – 2%
8. Facilitate education – 2%
9. No reference service provided – 2% (pp. 262-264)

“...reference service is an art to be applied in any given situation rather than one static entity capable of finite description.” (p.265)

28. Kantor, P.B. (1984). *Objective performance measures for academic and research libraries*. Washington, D.C. : Association of Research Libraries.

No mention of reference statistics.

29. Sable, M. (1984). Substantive factors for a theory of reference service. *International Library Review*, 16, 407.

The provision of information, or assistance in finding information by a librarian or information specialist, when requested by a library patron or customer. Services should be provided promptly in a professional manner, in as ample quantity as possible.

30. Weech, T.L. & Goldhor, H. (1984). Reference clientele and the reference transaction in five Illinois public libraries. *Library and Information Science Research*, 6(21), 21-42.

Reference transaction categories:

1. Reader's advisory
 - a. Location and selection of materials
 - b. Requests for specific authors or titles
2. Ready Reference – simple factual inquiries
3. Search questions - required a more complex answer (p. 26)

About one half of all reference transactions are exploratory in nature and require an interview or negotiation. (p. 37)

Reference question definition for the purpose of this survey: "...any question which requires use of interpretation of, or instruction in, any book or bibliographic tool (such as the card catalog) to try to find the answer. What is meant to be excluded are purely directional questions (such as: "Where is the Readers Guide?")

Exploratory questions for the purpose of this survey seek to ascertain how much and what kind of negotiation was necessary to identify exactly what the user wanted. (p. 39)

31. Bunge, C.A. (1985). Information service in the real world. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 11, 77.

"The proper role and purpose of the reference librarian is to provide personal assistance to library users in their pursuit of information."

32. Kesselman, M. & Watstein, S.B. (1987, March). The measurement of reference and information services [report of the Statistics Task Force of the Bobst Library, New York University]. *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 13, 24-30.

The new measurement system included these significant delineations for reporting data:

1. Desk transactions will be reported in two categories to protect the integrity of the report of transactions, as well as to measure service and workload. Information service to individuals will be reported as either reference or directional transactions, as defined by the *Library Information Handbook: a Handbook for Reporting and Recording Information about Libraries*.
2. Reporting should be based on intellectual, not physical activity.
- ...
5. Reporting may also involve, at each department's discretion, the collection of additional statistics.

The *Library Information Handbook* considers information contacts an activity measure of information services. (p.27)

33. Robinson, B.M. (1989). Reference services: a model of question handling. *RQ*, 29(1), 48-61.

"Question handling is the major function of reference service." p 40

Every question received by a reference librarian is mediated whether it is answered or not.

Reference services include: p 49

1. Question handling
2. Developing specialized resources
 - a. Union Lists
 - b. Bibliographies
3. Collection development
4. Education and training of library staff
5. Quality control of library services

Levels of reference service:

1. Ready reference
 - a. Less than 5 minutes per question
 - b. Use a designated reference collection to provide the answer
 - c. Done while the patron waits
 - d. The result is always an answer
 - e. Simple questions with generally simple answers
 - f. Involves looking up factual information
 - g. Requires quick access to ready reference materials

2. Reference
 - a. From 5 – 30 minutes per question
 - b. May take more than one day
 - c. The result is usually an answer or a referral
 - d. Simple question / simple answer
 - e. Requires more sophisticated resources
 - f. Involves looking up information – not analysis
3. Research
 - a. Labor intensive – consuming anywhere from a day to a week
 - b. Library staff conducting secondary research
 - c. The result is an explanation of research findings rather than a clear-cut answer
 - d. Also may be called extended reference
 - e. Complex question / complex answer
 - f. Requires many sources
 - g. Involves analysis
4. Referral
 - a. Question referral
 - i. One librarian referring a question to another librarian
 - ii. The referral is between librarians or libraries
 - iii. The referring librarian remains in control of the question
 - b. Client referral
 - i. Referring the client to another librarian or to an alternate source of information
 - ii. Once the referral is made, the referring librarian is out of the loop
 - iii. Providing a lead or making a contact (p. 57-58)

34. Association of Research Libraries. (1991). Service measures (interlibrary borrowing, library instruction, reference transactions, circulation) collected as part of main ARL statistics (1991). In *Statistics and measurement program timeline*. [On-line.] Available: <http://www.arl.org/stats/program/timeline.html>

35. Baker, S. L. and Lancaster, F.W. (1991). *The measurement and evaluation of library services*. Second edition. Arlington, VA: Information Resources Press..

The chapter on “Evaluation of Reference Services: Question Answering” (pp.229-71) contains a thorough overview of the literature, and discusses the various ways that reference questions can be categorized. There is no definition of reference or a reference transaction given.

36. Shontz, M.L. (1994). Measuring reference transactions in school library media programs. *Reference Librarian*, 145-160.

A reference transaction or question:

1. Information contact
2. Involves knowledge, use recommendations, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources by a member of the library staff

Transactions not considered reference transactions: (p. 149-150)

1. Directional
2. Maintenance
3. Locating material i.e. reserve, etc.

37. Alafiatayo, B.O, Yau J.Y, & Blunden-Ellis, J.C.P. (1996). Reference transaction and the nature of the process for general reference assistance. *Library & Information Science Research*, 18(4), 357-384.

Categories of reference transactions:

"Directional": inquiries in which the reader asked for the location of collections or specific titles or library facilities or services

Informational: inquires in which the reader asked for information as regards library policies or procedures.

Holdings: inquiries in which the reader asked about the availability (and location) of documents in the library.

Ready-Reference: inquiries in which the reader asked for specific facts or data, or for ascertainable topical information which could be obtained from a reference source.

Instructional: inquiries in which the reader asked to be shown what to do and how to use sources such as the OPAC, CD-ROM, etc.

Search: inquiries in which the reader asked for assistance in getting data or information on a topic. Providing an answer or solution required a systematic search and collation of data or information from several source documents (print or electronic).

Loans: inquiries in which the reader asked for assistance in obtaining documents. These include interlibrary loan and reserve requests, and requests for CD-ROMS and other materials available for use in the library for a short time." (p. 364)

38. Chu, F. T. (1996). Framing reference encounters. *RQ*, 36(1), 93-101.

The librarian serves as a filter or mediator between the user and the multiplicity of information sources available.

"The role of the librarian is to clarify the need or complete the question." [p 93]

39. Katz, W.A. (1997). *Introduction to reference work*. 7th ed. New York : McGraw-Hill.

No mention of reference statistics in this work.

40. Mendelsohn, J. (1997). Perspectives on quality of reference service in an academic library: a qualitative study," *RQ*, 36:(4), 544-557.

Attributes brought by the librarian to the reference encounter: (p.547)

1. Willingness
 - a. Reference librarian is interested in helping
 - b. Takes the question and the questioner serious
 - c. Librarians are warm, friendly, pleasant
 - d. A serious, essential, professional responsibility
 - e. Key to the success of the reference transaction
 - f. Often connected or confused with competence or knowledge
2. Knowledge
 - a. Fundamental to quality service
 - b. A core knowledge of generic strategies on how to access information, as well as generic sources is vital
 - c. Knowing how the knowledge is organized is key to finding information

Quality reference allows for the development of a partnership between the librarian and user. (p.549)

Intent of reference service: (p. 551)

1. To meet an informational need
2. To teach about the research process
3. To facilitate independence in using the library

Quality reference service requires time and morale or job satisfaction. (p. 552)

Reference service is a professional activity involving both knowledge and teaching. (p. 555)

41. Tyckoson, D.A. (1997). What we do: reaffirming the founding principles of reference services. *Reference Librarian*, 59, 3-13.

Instruction is needed more today than ever. (p.10)

Create relationships with users.

Reader's advisory is still sought after by users. (p. 11)

"personal relations between librarians and readers is still at the core or what we do." (p.13)

42. Holmes-Wong, D. (1999). Richness vs reach: using technology to overcome economic impediments to reference service. *Reference Librarian*, 66, 201-211.

Customized, individualized service: (p. 203)

1. Help fewer people
2. Higher likelihood of meeting the needs of the few served – our responses are tailored to their specific requests
- 3.

43. Lipow, A.G. (1999). 'In your face' reference service. *Library Journal*, 24(13), 50-53. [On-line]. Available: EBSCO Academic Search Elite.

Reference librarians "will always serve as an important filter for quality information."

"...we should welcome users' requests for help.

Anthropologist Bonnie Nardi: Much of what we do is “information therapy” – helping information seekers figure out what they really want to know. Information therapy is an example of human intelligence that, when applied to the search problem, cannot be replaced by a computer, yet doesn’t get measured.

Who is remote – the user or the librarian?

Reference service must be as convenient as a search engine.

“In the electronic environment, a point-of-need reference service needs to be built into the infrastructure of the Internet, ideally on the browser...”

44. Rader, H.B. (1999). Information literacy in the reference environment: preparing for the future. *Reference Librarian*, 66, 213-221.

“In the digital environment, reference services and information skills instruction need to become integrated to offer library users and information seekers the most convenient and supportive learning environment.” (p. 210)

“... reference services provide the human touch in guiding information users in the digital environment ...” (p. 218)

45. Richardson, J. (1999). Understanding the reference transaction: a systems analysis perspective. *College and Research Libraries*, 60(3), 211-222.

The author states that the reference transaction is “face to (inter)face process involving an inquirer and a librarian, or surrogate, within an information-seeking environment (i.e. a library-like setting)” (p. 211)

46. Tyckoson, D.A. (1999). What’s right with reference – the failures and successes of reference reform. *American Libraries*, 30(5), 57-62. [On-line]. Available: EBSCO Academic Search Elite.

“...access alone is not service.”

“...we must continue to provide quality service to each new generation of patron.”

47. Ferguson, C. (2000). Shaking the conceptual foundations too: integrating research and technology support for the next generation of information service. *College & Research Libraries*, 61(4), 300-311.

New approaches to reference service:

1. E-mail
2. Videoconferencing
3. Cooperative approaches through the network

Librarians will need to translate the core values of reference service in ways that retain their proximity and relevance for a generation of cyberspace users: (p. 301)

1. equity of service
2. personal service
3. service tailored to individual needs

Integrated information seeking.

New values for a new age – “finding ways to be available for real-time assistance wherever users may go and whenever they may go there – on site or remote.” (p. 303)

Create an integrated service environment. (p. 304)

1. build unified service-delivery models
2. service that relies on common service providers and training programs
3. create a collaborative approach to service – a shared set of service values
4. efficient and effective referral (p. 306)
5. electronic research environment
 - a. information resources
 - b. asynchronous tools and instruction aids
 - c. real-time assistance

New roles for the librarian: (p. 309)

1. integrator – balances current expectations for on-site service with emerging demand for network based services
2. collaborator – works effectively with others from and within other organizational cultures
3. colleague – resides in an academic user community (virtual and physical) and participates in its creation, management and distribution of information and knowledge

4. access engineer – develops gateways, leads research and development projects, designs search engines, and re-purposes intelligent agents
5. leader – facilitates change by bringing people and resources together in innovative and productive ways

48. James, J. (2002). Digital reference: reference librarians' experiences and attitudes. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(7), 549-566

New types of reference services offered: (p. 554)

1. E-mail
2. Web Forms
3. Instant messaging
4. Chat
5. Video-conferencing
6. MOO/MUD

Reference is more accessible, more interesting, more challenging and more fun. (p. 557)

The best question for digital reference: (p. 559-560)

1. Ready Reference
2. Requiring a quick response