

Reference Tips

VLC 2014

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Intro: Libraries have become more than ideas and books, they have become a place where new technology has arrived. These have emerged in the form of eReaders, tablets, computers, smart phones and the World Wide Web as a whole. With all of these technologies, librarians are expected to adapt to these changing plugged in times. Our patrons expect us to help them with their devices, just as they expect us to help them find a book to read. However with these technologies changing so quickly, many folks struggle to stay on top. Windows 8? I just learned windows 7! We are supposed to know how all these devices work and to answer our patrons questions. With all this different technology out there it's impossible for us to know every single one in and out. Fear not, many of these questions about technology can be solved the same way we solve many other questions our patrons have, by conducting the reference interview. Asking questions and knowing where to look goes a long way in helping our patrons and at the same time keeps us sane!

The interview: There are five steps to conducting the reference interview. Notice how I said the reference interview and the tech based one. That's because they are one in the same!

1. Establishing rapport
2. General information gathering or getting the big picture
3. Specific information gathering
4. Intervention such as giving information, advice or instructions
5. Ending, including feedback or summary¹

Step 1: Establishing Rapport: Be cool, be calm, be confident. Even if we don't know much about the subject matter or are having a bad day, we can't let that interfere with helping the patron. How do we start helping? We ask open ended questions!

Step 2: General information gathering or getting the big picture: Here is where we start asking open ended questions. For example, maybe we don't know what kind of device they are asking about, so we ask them. We could also ask them how they are planning on using their device, and maybe they tell us that they want to read eBooks on it. Finding information out like this goes a long way in helping us, help our patrons. Once we feel like we have enough general

information, we'll want to restate or confirm the question to our patron so we are sure we are on the same page.

Step 3: Specific Information Gathering: Now that we have some general information, we should now get some specific info. For instance, now that we know that they want to read eBooks, maybe we should ask them if they would like to read free eBooks or audiobooks through Listen Up! Vermont or if they would like to buy their books for the device. Depending on what their answer is would lead us on where to look for information.

Step 4: Intervention such as giving information, advice or instructions: This step can be as simple as handing the patron a handout that gives them information and instructions on how to use Listen Up! VT with their iPad and telling them to get in touch with you if they have any questions. If you're not too busy, I would suggest walking them through the website as well. Helpful tip: its okay if you don't know much about Listen Up! VT or even the gadget they have in their hands. Why? Because you are a librarian and you know how to search for information! More on this a little bit later.

Step 5: Ending, including feedback or summary: Once we feel like we have answered the question to the best of our abilities, we should ask the patron if that fully answers their question. Sometimes, patrons will say yes even when their question has not been completely answered, or perhaps they think that they understand but when they get home they are as lost as they were when they came in. Since this is the case, we also should ask them something like "Please don't hesitate to contact me with any further questions you might have". By doing so, we are welcoming them to ask more questions as needed without them feeling bothersome.

These steps are ones to follow in the three typical patron encounters: in person, on the phone or via email. In any case you will want to establish what their device is and then dig deeper from there. Sometimes this involves a bit of work on your part based on the clues they give you so that you can figure out their operating system and model number and so on.

Knowing what software they are using is also a big help. Perhaps they don't know what the software is called so you could ask them what it looks like. For example, do they describe it as a Blue W (Microsoft Word) Blue lowercase e (Internet Explorer), or maybe its a compass (Safari) a fox hugging a blue ball (Firefox).

You may want to follow along with them no matter how you are communicating, remember YOU are the expert so things that are clear to you might not be clear to them!

Working with Patron devices:

Use at your own risk!

- 1- Refer to your computer use policy to make sure that you can use their computer or device
- 2- If your policy states that you can't touch a patron device or you don't feel comfortable, perhaps give them a hand out or Google the problem and print out your discoveries.
- 3- In most cases, it is a bad idea to undertake any major work on a patron device if it already has a major issue. Remember, by trying to help you could make things worse!

So Where do I look for and find information? Google is your friend!

Google- Is the place to start. For instance, say a patron comes up to you and tells you about a cryptic error message they received. Say it says: ASCII Filter Options. What we can do is type the error message into Google, because chances they are not the first person to run into this message. Remember, not all resources on Google are created equal so try finding sources that were put together by a library. If you use Listen Up! Vermont, one place to look would be the blog: <http://vtaudiobooks.blogspot.com/>. Sometimes the issue will be on there, other times it won't be, so a couple of other places to look would be: <http://nhdbooks.blogspot.com/> or the one I tend to use the most: <https://sites.google.com/site/ebooks4libs/project-definition>

E Perhaps they are not having an audiobook or eBook problem. In that case, you can start with google, but here are some other Librarian approved sites for other computer issues: answers.microsoft.com, cnet.com, tomshardware.com or even sometimes yahoo

Device websites: Sometimes the best place to turn to for help is the website of the company who manufactures your device. These companies want you to buy their product and not their competitors' so they're here to help.

You have all the the information: how far to take it

once you find clear directions to solve the problem, you need to decide what level you're going to be able to engage in helping fix the issue. print out the directions? encourage the patron to go through the steps in your presence? time to refer them to the "genius bar", staples or their

genius nephew? Find out where they got their device and determine if they have some kind of coverage that will help them.

Big Problems?

Detoxing Problematic Computers:

- delete strange software through Programs and Features, Googling each one before deleting to make sure you don't need it
- Download free Malware Bytes scan
- Use Microsoft Security Essentials or another virus program like Avast for regular virus protection

Conclusion

Don't be afraid of technology that is appearing more and more rapidly at library reference desks- embrace it! Its here to stay and can help us supplement our collections. Libraries are still places full of books and ideas- they just have gadgets there now as well. The information that is provided above, from the interview process, to resources freely available to us, should be able to assist you in answering most tech based reference question and make the process a little less daunting. I like the way that Bobbi Slossar, the Technology Resources Librarian for the New Hampshire State library puts it: "You don't have to "know" technology to rock technology... The key to managing the interview and ultimately answering the question is *confidence*. Have confidence in your reference abilities and trust in your interpersonal skills to obtain a successful conclusion to the question".²

Want to know more about the tech based Reference Interview? Try out these two links!

<http://create.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/use-technology-reference-interview>

<http://www.slideshare.net/bibliotecaria/technologybased-reference-interview-workshop>

Still have questions? Email us!

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² Slossar, Bobbi. "The Technology-Based Reference Interview." New Hampshire Library Association Spring Conference. Manchester, NH. 5 May 2011. Lecture.

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