

LIBR 289 e-Portfolio  
Fall 2008

Evidence for Competency I

LIBR 210 – Reference and Information Services

Reference Interview Analysis Assignment

February 11, 2005

Lately I have developed a new hobby: gardening. My landlord has asked me to maintain the rose bush garden in front of my house. I have thrown myself into the upkeep of this garden but have run into a few problems.

Mainly, the roses seem to have a disease that causes the leaves to develop black spots. The flowers seem not to be affected but the unsightly splotches run down the leaves and stalks and I am worried that this may hinder future growth. Upon close inspection I noticed very small crab-like insects crawling on the infected leaves. I promptly took a picture of the insects and ill plants with my digital camera. I decided to investigate further and headed to the local library, San Bruno Public Library in San Mateo County, CA.

The main questions posed to the reference librarian were:

1. What are these organisms?
2. Could they be causing the disease in the rose bushes?
3. Are there any organic remedies that can be used?

Given the fact that I had pictures and some data on the onset and development of the disease, I expected it would be fairly easy to identify the organisms and determine an organic home remedy that I could easily mix and apply to the plants.

I must have arrived at a bad moment. There was only one clerk manning the help desk. My questions were first met with a blank stare. Then she proceeded to ask me what I was looking for. Again, I explained as simply as possible what I needed. She dismissed my picture of the insects/plants saying that there was no way she could use it in her search. Then she accompanied me to one of the self service desks with internet access, opened a page in

[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and typed in “rose plant diseases.” She then advised me to compare the picture I had taken with the ones found in the search results. And that was the extent of her help!

Needless to say I was very disappointed. I felt I could have done this myself from my house without ever having to visit the library. No reference interview was conducted. The only helpful point about my interaction with this employee was that she encouraged the use of electronic resources when doing searches. However, I did not like her service approach, her unwillingness to help, and the fact that she completely ignored the vast resources found in the Botany/Plant Biology book section in favor of the internet, which many times can have unreliable information that needs to be weeded through. This was without a doubt the least successful reference interaction I have ever had at a library.

As I compared the service I received to the RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Services Professionals (2004), I realized this library was in need of a refresher on patron service.

Although I realize that there could be environmental factors such as budget cuts, so common these days, that prevent the library to be staffed with professional librarians, the employees that are present should be expected to offer a minimum level of service quality to the patrons. For example, the reference employee should be approachable, engaging, helpful, and personable. We must not forget that a reference librarian is a service position and as such should be friendly and communicative. In addition, it is expected that a reference librarian must show a high degree of interest in a reference transaction (RUSA, 2004). The questions I was asked were not probing or intended to refine the search but rather to get me out of her sight. In addition, the

search process was rushed and without strategy which yielded poor results. Finally, the reference clerk never followed up on the results of my search which made feel uncared for.

If I had to resume in one word what the problem was with this reference interaction that word would be **communication**. After all, successful reference service depends not only on exchanging the right information but also on developing a positive personal interaction between the patron and the reference employee (RUSA, 2004).

This was a valuable experience though. It made me realize how much influence a reference librarian has on a patron who is asking for help. I happen to be research savvy but many patrons are not. They put their trust in the library staff with their questions and research. If I was one of those patrons, I would never go back to a library. I felt un-welcomed and helpless. Every behavior the reference clerk exhibited is one I would not adopt in my reference work. Throughout my life I have received great service and help at other libraries, where I have come out fully satisfied and thinking “Wow, that person was of a great help!” That is the kind of experience I would like to offer my patrons.

## Reference

RUSA Reference Guidelines, (2004, June). *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers*. Retrieved Feb. 11, 2005, from the American Library Association Web site:  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/guidelinesbehavioral.htm>.