

Do Patrons Appreciate the Reference Interview?

RUSA Guidelines, Virtual Reference, and Student Satisfaction

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Context

- VR collaboration of twelve Ontario university libraries
- Launched in Sept. 2011
- Staffed and paid for by the participating university libraries
- 55,000+ users served so far



Data

- Responses to mandatory pre-chat survey
- Complete chat transcript
- Responses to optional exit survey

Research Question

Does adherence to the RUSA guidelines lead to more satisfied VR users?

Methodology

- Random sample of 400 chats (100 analyzed so far)
- Removed identifying information (user and operator)
- Matched transcripts to corresponding exit surveys
- Original instrument – rubric based on the RUSA guidelines
- Content Analysis – coded each transcript using rubric

Instrument

	Approaches guidelines	Adheres to guidelines	Exceeds guidelines
Approachability			
1. Greeting [1.1.3]	No greeting or curt greeting	Greets user	Greets user by name with friendly and personalized message
2. Timeliness [1.3.2 and 2.3.1]	Slow to greet (longer than 1 minute)	User greeted within 30-60 seconds.	User greeted in under 30 seconds
Interest			
3. Contact [2.3.2]	Some frequent or prolonged silences	Usually maintains "word contact"	Consistently prompt responses – no silences.
4. Engagement and tone [3.1.1 and 3.1.2]	Disengaged or rude.	Professional and courteous tone. Two or fewer expressions of interest	Multiple expressions of interest in the user's question and feedback
Listening and inquiring			
5. Questioning [3.1.7 and 3.1.8]	Does not ask questions needed to uncover full question or need	Uses questioning to clarify question or need	
6. Listening and confirming [3.1.5]	Answers an ambiguous or high level question without confirming mutual understanding	Repeats or rephrases the user's query to confirm understanding initially	Consistently engages to confirm understanding and user responses applied throughout
Searching			
7. Collaboration [4.1.4 and 4.1.5] SCOPE: applies to research questions only	Does not include the user in topic negotiation, resource selection, or evaluation of results	Evidence of collaboration with the user to refine topic, evaluate results and alternative resources	Fully involves the user in all stages of the search process
8. Instruction [4.1.3] [4.1.7] [4.1.8] SCOPE: applies to questions including a search or process.	Provides incomplete explanations or instructions for the user to follow	Fully explains search strategy or process to the patron	Fully explains search strategy and utilizes teachable moments. The user learns something new
Follow up			
9. Satisfaction check [5.1.1]	Does not perform a satisfaction check	Performs a satisfaction check	
10. Closing [5.3.1]	Does not invite the user to return	Invites the user to return	

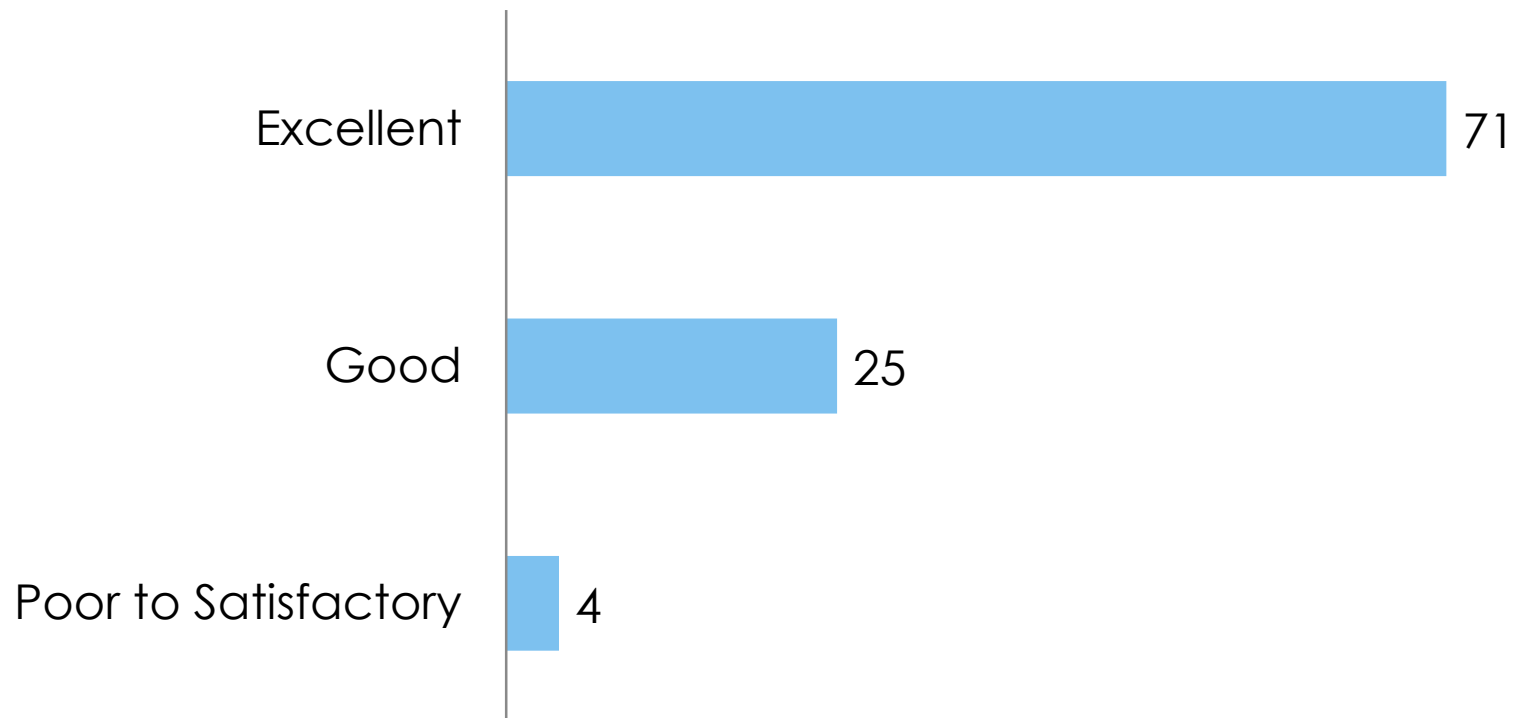


Preliminary Findings

Rubric Item	Exceeds (3)	Adheres (2)	Approaches (1)	N/A
Greeting	43	55	2	
Timeliness	92	7	1	
Contact	30	41	29	
Engagement/Tone	10	87	3	
Questioning	-	66	23	11
Listening	3	12	23	62
Collaboration	1	15	6	78
Instruction	11	24	35	30
Satisfaction Check	-	38	53	9
Closing	-	17	79	4

Frequencies by RUSA Behaviour

User Ratings of Service Quality (n=100)



Service Quality	Timeliness		
	Approaches	Adheres	Exceeds
Poor to Satisfactory	0	0	4
	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%
Good	0	5	20
	0.0%	71.4%	21.7%
Excellent	1	2	68
	100.0%	28.6%	73.9%

Timeliness & Service Quality

Timeliness[1.3.2 & 2.3.1]: Time from request to chat to operator greeting
 Near-significant relationship ($p=0.06$)

Service Quality	Contact		
	Approaches	Adheres	Exceeds
Poor to Satisfactory	0	3	1
	0.0%	7.3%	3.3%
Good	10	13	2
	34.5%	31.7%	6.7%
Excellent	19	25	27
	65.5%	61.0%	90.0%

Contact & Service Quality

Contact [2.3.2]: The number and duration of silences
 Significant relationship ($p=0.035$)

Service Quality	Tone		
	Approaches	Adheres	Exceeds
Poor to Satisfactory	1	3	0
	33.3%	3.4%	0.0%
Good	1	20	4
	33.3%	23.0%	40.0%
Excellent	1	64	6
	33.3%	73.6%	60.0%

Tone & Service Quality

Engagement & Tone [3.1.1 & 3.1.2]: Politeness, interest & enthusiasm
 Near-significant relationship ($p=0.064$)

Conclusions

- Do patrons Appreciate the reference interview?
 - Prompt replies (maintaining contact)
 - Polite tone
 - Quick greeting
 - ??

Limitations

- Qualitative data and subjectivity
- Positively skewed data
- Small sample

Next Steps

- Inter-coder reliability testing
- Code remaining 300 transcripts
- Retest for relationships
- Code only negative exit poll transcripts (census)
- Qualitative analysis of open comments in random sample and negative polls

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