

What Makes for Great Virtual Reference? A Madlibs Method of Discovery

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Sample Best Practices Activity

- To find the practice activity we used during this session, create an account in Socrative, log in, and Import Quiz SOC-883422
- To view the complete transcript this training is based on, see pp. 28-31 in the Research Help Now Virtual Reference Manual
[www.researchhelpnow.org/documents/VR Manual Policies and Procedures 2012.pdf](http://www.researchhelpnow.org/documents/VR_Manual_Policies_and_Procedures_2012.pdf)

Method

Construct a transcript-based training to review best practices with librarians at your institution. In Madlibs, you fill in the blanks to complete a story. The process is collaborative, each person taking a turn to fill in a word. During this training, librarians will collaboratively recreate the librarian portion of a chat transcript as a way of reviewing virtual reference best practices.

Present librarians with a patron question and ask them to use Socrative, a response system that works with mobile devices, to respond as they would to a chat question. Then, show the actual librarian response along with the best practice it illustrates and discuss alternate responses as a group. This is an interactive way to review virtual reference best practices by discussing alternative responses to patron questions.

Preparation

1. Take a virtual reference transcript and remove the librarian portion.
2. Select a few portions of the transcript to focus on and enter the patron prompts into an online polling tool as short answer questions or use our practice activity as a starting point.
3. Create a presentation with the actual librarian response along with the best practice it illustrates. You do not need to use the entire transcript for this activity, but present the patron questions in chronological order.

Variations

This training is suitable for any review of reference services best practices including face to face, text, email, and phone service. Scale the level of technology you want to use; the training will work with paper and pencil just as well. Provide librarians with the redacted transcript and a copy of the best practices for your institution.

Polling Tools

- **Socrative** (www.socrative.com) Create multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions, as well as exit tickets and space race (quiz as game). Quizzes can be shared. Up to 50 participants can respond by smartphone, tablet, or laptop. Download results with excel or google spreadsheet.
- **Poll Everywhere** (polleverywhere.com) Create multiple choice and short answer questions. Embed questions in a Powerpoint presentation. Free version allows up to 40 participants to respond by smartphone, tablet, or laptop, as well as by tweeting or text messaging. Download results with excel or google spreadsheet.

Best Practices Resources

- **Research Help Now**, a Michigan virtual reference service collaborative, has a checklist of best practices on pages 33-36 of the Manual of Policies and Procedures www.researchhelpnow.org/documents/VR_Manual_Policies_and_Procedures_2012.pdf
- **RUSA** Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference & Information Service Providers www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral