



The Reference Interview: A Common-Sense Review

Note: Techniques that help people with learning disabilities and other disabilities can also improve library service for all of the people in a community.

Greet

- Look welcoming and animated.
- Appear interested in the person and what he or she needs.
- Greet people warmly and directly.

Remember that you can't see a learning disability and that it might be in one area of perception or expression or a combination of areas. Here and throughout the entire process, speak clearly and not too quickly, and make eye contact. Because self-esteem is an accompanying problem, be sure to treat both the person and the question seriously and respectfully.

Probe

- Restate request.
- Ask open questions to get more information.

Speak clearly and not too quickly. Be prepared to restate questions often and in different ways. Refer to something written when possible or write key points in bulleted form if there seems to be a problem. Engage as many senses as possible.

Verify

- Restate specific question by paraphrasing
- Ask if some sources have been checked and what was found

If you haven't moved out to the materials, now is a good time to do it. Include a variety of formats. Try to choose at least one item that has a high proportion of pictures and diagrams and relatively little text. Include some items with sound and/or motion. Check discreetly for preferences in format, paying attention to non-verbal clues as well as actual statements. Ask if the person wants a quick, simple overview or something more in depth, if that's appropriate. If there's a pathfinder or other written material relating to the verified question, offer it. Offer an audio version in addition to print, if there is one.

Locate information

- Check appropriateness of level, depth of coverage.
- Ask about format preferences.
- Offer help with using the tool(s).

If printers are available for OPACs or reference tools, be sure to point this out. If there are computers for word processing and other applications, mention this too, including any assistive hardware or software. Continue to be an active listener and observer of non-verbal cues. Don't overdo or hover, but make the person feel comfortable and able to ask for help as needed.

Close

- Check if the question has been or can be answered with the material at hand.
- Check to see if the person is satisfied at the moment.
- Expressly offer additional help as needed.
- Withdraw cordially.

Follow up (a little later or if the person is looking in need of help)

- Ascertain if the question has been completely answered.
- Check to see if anything else is needed, or if there's another question.