

Working with Rude Patrons: 24/7 Reference Coop Policies

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24/7 Reference Cooperative
QuestionPoint



24/7 Reference overview

1100 libraries

Primarily US and UK

450,000 chat sessions/year

“Problem” Patrons

Types of questions



Behavior



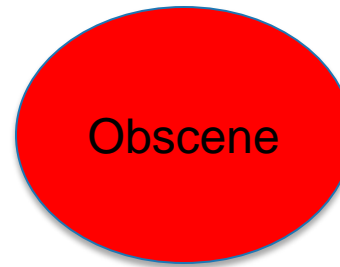
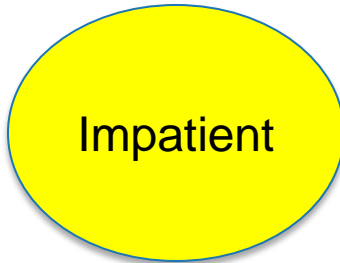
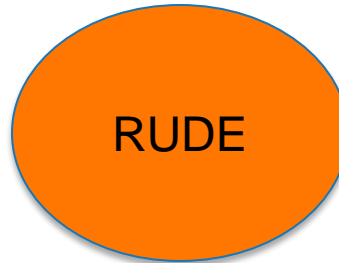
Class “bombs”



24/7 Reference Policies

- For the users: provide professional level reference assistance to those who seek it
- For the librarians: provide guidance/support in dealing with difficult situations

Problem Sessions



General Guidelines

- Greeting: establish rapport and mutual respect
- Reference Interview: discover intent (is there a question we can help the patron with?)
- Set expectations: it may take time to find a great answer
- Set boundaries: we don't tolerate abusive language/threats

Impatience

“HURRY UP!”

“It is going to take me a little longer. If you don't have time to wait, I can take your e-mail address and someone will get back to you later...”

Set expectations

Rudeness

“You are a moron!”

That isn't a very nice thing to say.
Did you find the web page I sent
earlier helpful?

Set boundaries

“Hurry the f**k up!”

Please don't use that language. It is going to take me a little longer. If you don't have time to wait, I can take your e-mail address and someone will get back to you later.

Set boundaries

Setting boundaries

Hurry the fk up!**

Please don't use that language. It is going to take me a little longer. If you don't have time to wait, I can take your e-mail address and someone will get back to you later.

fk you!**

I am disconnecting. Please come back when you are willing to be polite.

Give the patron a chance, but

I want to kiss you!

**let's focus on
your lips,
baby!**

Patron, we are a library service. Let's try to focus on finding those articles on the health benefits of frog legs

I am disconnecting. Please come back when you are willing to be polite.

Guidance for librarians

- 24/7 Reference Policies and Best Practices
- 24/7 Reference Advisory Board
- Quality Team, led by Wren Spangler

Effects on Chatting Librarians

“handling inappropriate sessions is the aspect of service that causes the most stress and unhappiness for our providers...”

--Joe Thompson, Maryland AskUsNow!, 2008

Effects on Chatting Librarians (cont.)

Different effects for each type of session:



Temporary emotional response



Lingering emotional response



Physical response

Strategies for coping...

Use different strategies for different types of rude behavior:

- Goofing off / Pranking
- Impatience
- Use of expletives or other vulgar language
- Attacks directed toward the librarian

Goofing off / Pranking

Clarify / Diffuse / Refocus

- Always ask a reference question, preferably about the **topic**
- Use humor when appropriate
- Turn the conversation back to the reference transaction

Real-life example...

Patron: I need help with divition

(after sending greeting...)

Librarian: Do you mean division as in math homework?

Patron: are all librariens hot?

Librarian: if they don't have air conditioning

Patron: your funny

Librarian: thanks

Librarian: What's up with your division?

QuestionPoint Blog!

To read the rest of this session transcript, see the Quality Tip posting in the QuestionPoint Blog:

http://questionpoint.blogs.com/questionpoint_247_referen/2009/03/tuesdays-tip-establish-rapport-through-humor.html

Impatience

- Explain the situation
Busy? Complicated? Tech problem?
- Involve patron in searching process
- Chat frequently
- Offer options
Transfer? Email followup? Phone?

Real-life example...

Librarian: still looking

Patron: can u hurry plz

Librarian: I am sorry that you are in a hurry

Librarian: it takes some time to find research

Patron: sorry

Librarian: <http://cidc.library.cornell.edu/dof/germany/germany.htm>

Librarian: this might help

Librarian: I am looking for more

Rude language

Expletives or other vulgar language

- Give warning / chance to continue
- End session if behavior continues
- Use library scripts; have your own prepared

Real-life example...

Patron: f*ing prik answer**

(after joining and sending greeting...)

Patron: is biology boring?

Librarian: I am happy to help you, but let me inform you that our service requires polite language. Would you like to continue?

Patron: yes

(later, after sending a page...)

Patron: i bet your a robot what the f* are you doing**

Real-life example (cont.) ...

Librarian: I see that you have continued to use language that has been deemed inappropriate or offensive.

Librarian: I am a real person

Librarian: and have been instructed to end calls when enquirers use language that is inappropriate or offensive, after giving one warning and if the behavior continues.

Librarian: So, goodbye for now...

Personal attacks

Disparaging comments directed toward the chatting librarian

- Give warning / chance to continue
- End session if behavior continues
- Use library scripts; have your own prepared

Real-life example...

Patron: i need some genaral info about filipino food

(after sending greeting, asking a clarifying question, sending a Google Books preview, and asking for feedback...)

Librarian: Okay, I have something else

Librarian: <http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/philippines/pro-food.htm>

Librarian: This information is provided by the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines.

Patron: you suck

Real-life example (cont.) ...

Librarian: I do want to help you with this, but you'll need to demonstrate some patience while we search. We aren't able to tolerate rude behavior on this service. Should we continue or just end the call now?

Patron: F* YOU**

Librarian: Sorry, but since you insist on using this kind of abusive language, I'm going to need to end the call. When you have an information question and can use appropriate language, we will be glad to help you then. Goodbye for now.

What NOT to do

- **Don't use the “ignore but still help” tactic.**
- **Don't engage the patron in the behavior**
- **Don't become defensive**
- **Don't argue with the patron**
- **Don't be overly tolerant in your definition of what is “rude”**

Real-life “bad” example...

Patron: why doesn't marijuana prohibition work?

(after sending greeting, asking a question NOT about the topic, and showing the patron a resource from a library database...)

Librarian: scroll to the bottom

Patron: you might possibly be the worst librarian i've ever had to talk to

Librarian: you'll see the section "Why I said Yes"

Patron: your mother should have had an abortion

Real-life “bad” example (cont.) ...

Librarian: I'm thinking that the Yes section would give reasons why the prohibition doesn't work

Patron: that has literally nothing to do with prohibition

Patron: did you finish middle school

(after asking another clarifying question...)

Patron: no retard, i'm talking about the literal aspect.

Patron: you couldn't be more stupid

Librarian: Let me see what else I can find,

Real-life “bad” example (cont.) ...

Librarian: This one has the full-text as HTML so you don't have to click on PDF

Patron: thanks idiot. go crawl back in your hole

Librarian: Ok, great, does this article seem useful to you?

Patron: no. you suck. your mother should have had an abortion

Librarian: Would you like me to find different articles that might be more useful to you?

Patron: no

Importance of following the policy

Following the policy will:

- Minimize negative effects for the librarian
- Establish boundaries for use of the service
- Prevent “rewarding” the rude behavior
- Allow local library to address issue, if possible

Hang In There!!



Don't forget...

There are many more polite and appreciative patrons than offensive and rude patrons!



Questions?

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