


## Subject: Library and Information Science

Production of Courseware

-Content for Post Graduate Courses



**Paper No : 04** Information Sources, Systems and Services

**Module : 17** Reference Service: Concept, Need, Types, Theories, Trends



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## **Module 17: Reference Service: concept, need, types, theories, trends**

### **I. Objectives**

After reading this module, you will be able to:

- Know that that reference service is an intensive and exhaustive kind of personal service,
- Understand that reference service brings together the user and the information,
- Know the history of reference service in libraries,
- Identify styles of reference service,
- State functions of reference service,
- Differentiate between ready reference service and long-range reference service,
- List levels of reference services,
- Evaluate reference services, and
- Learn e-reference services and digital reference services.

### **II. Learning Outcome**

After studying this module, you will learn that reference service is the intensive and exhaustive kind of personal service, which tries to bring together the user and information. You will also understand that the reference service manager who understands the users and their needs best supports the needs and services of users. Each reference interaction between a librarian and user is an opportunity for mutual learning within a shared space. You will be able to explain that the users communicate their information needs while the reference librarian, using probing queries, seeks to provide the appropriate resource. Lastly, you will know that the user and the librarians always work together toward lifelong learning and exploration.

### **III. Module Structure**

1. Introduction
2. History of Reference Service in Libraries
3. Reference Service and Definitions
4. Objectives of Reference Service
5. Theories of Reference Services
  - 5.1 Conservative or Minimum
  - 5.2 Moderate or Middling
  - 5.3 Liberal or Maximum
6. Functions of Reference Services
  - 6.1 Supervisory Function
  - 6.2 Instructional Function
  - 6.3 Informatory Function
  - 6.4 Guidance Function

- 6.5 Bibliographic Function
- 6.6 Appraisal Function
- 7. Ranganathan's Classification of Reference Services
  - 7.1. Ready Reference Service
    - 7.1.1 Need of Ready Reference Service
  - 7.2 Long Range Reference Service
    - 7.2.1 Need of Long Range Reference
- 8. Levels of Reference Service
  - 8.1 Ready Reference
  - 8.2 Long Range Reference Service
  - 8.3 Research
  - 8.4 Referral
- 9. Five Laws of Library Science and Reference Services
  - 9.1 The First Law Books are for Use
  - 9.2 The Second Law Every Reader his Book
  - 9.3 The Third Law Every Book its Reader
  - 9.4 The Fourth Law save the Time of the Reader
  - 9.5 The Fifth Law Library is a Growing Organism
- 10. Evaluation of Reference Service
- 11. E-Reference Services and Digital Reference Services
  - 11.1 Roving Reference
  - 11.2 Outreach reference
  - 11.3 Virtual reference
- 12. Human Resource Policy for E-Reference
- 13. Summary
- 14. References

## **1. Introduction**

The literature reveals that the reference service, as a distinct function of the library, began in the late nineteenth century, largely in response to the growing prevalence of publicly funded libraries seeking to serve relatively inexperienced and unskilled readers, researchers, scholars and users of the libraries. While the Father of Librarianship in India Dr. S. R. Ranganathan stated that the reference is establishing contact between reader and book or source by personal service. He recognised the four categories among readers as the freshman, the general reader, the ordinary or generalist enquirer, and the specialist reader. These four categories are provided the reference services as per their requirements like initiation is given to the freshman, general help to general reader, ready reference service to the ordinary or generalist enquirer, and long range reference service is provide to the specialist as well as generalist reader. Initiation and general help will involve a practical knowledge of the psychology of readers. Ready reference service will require a good knowledge of reference books and sources. The reference librarian needs to have the good bibliographical mastery and familiarity with the developments in the universe of knowledge and has to be updated with the new technological and trends in the world. So, the modern e-reference librarian need to offers users with the opportunities to extend access to their services and enrich the quality of their provision. The modern reference librarian is well aware of the vastness of the world of knowledge and the varieties of intricacies of the information required by the reader at different level, so it has been very important in the present world (Ranganathan, 1961).

## **2. History of Reference Service in Libraries**

The beginning of reference service is generally attributed to Samuel Swett Green, who in 1876 published the first article on helping patrons use the library. In the literature it is not clear that Samuel invented the idea of reference service for library users or he elaborated the concept in writing. But today he is better known as the father of Reference Services. He was the first to pay the stress on the need for librarians actively to assist members of their communities in using library resources. Samuel Swett laid down four functions for Reference Librarian as instructing the patrons how to use the library; answering patron queries; aiding the patron in selecting resources, and promoting the library within the community. This function were relevant in the era of 1870s and is relevant even today and will remain relevant in near times to come.

## **3. Reference Service and Definitions**

The chronological view of Reference Service can be traced from 1876. The first definition which is available is given by S. S. Green. Green identifies four components of Reference Services. The first component is to instruct the reader in the ways of the library; second is assisting the readers/users in solving their inquires. The third component is to aid the reader in solving their inquires and the fourth is to promote the library within the community (Green, 1876).

American Library Association, Committee of Library Terminology in 1943 gave the definition of Reference Work as that phase of library work which is directly concerned with assistance to readers in securing information and in using the resources of the library in study and research (ALA, 1943).

A. G. Rugh defined the Reference Service as direct aid to library users who need a particular book or books, or who need some information embodied in any books. It indirectly aids to the library users in the form of reference collection building and maintenance. He also defined the direct reference service as personal assistance provided to library patrons and instructional reference aimed to help the user select and use the proper materials. While indirect reference service is defined by him as providing the services to the users indirectly by evaluating and selecting materials for the collection and maintaining the collection in a form useful to the community served (Rugh,1975).

Ranganathan defines Reference Service as 'Personal Service to each reader in helping him to find the documents answering his interest at the moment pointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously'. Reference Service is establishing the contact between reader and book by personal service (Ranganathan, 1961).

B. M. Robinson deliberated that every question received by a librarian is mediated whether it is answered or not. He said that reference service includes Question handling, developing specialised resources like union lists, bibliographies. It also includes collection development, education and training of library staff and quality control of library services.(Robinson, 1989).

J. James enumerated the new types of reference services as e-mails, web-forms, instant messaging, chat, video-conferencing, MOO/MUD (James, 2002).

#### **4. Objectives of Reference Service**

The reference service is an opportunity for librarians to ignite a users/patron's sense of wonder about the endless paths of learning found within library resources.

The major objectives of providing reference services to its users are:

- To protect and arrange the collection.
- To present the collection before the readers.
- To have trained and professional librarian.
- To encourage coordination between employees and readers.
- To save the time of the reader.
- To conduct the fact finding research.
- To develop the library.
- To maximise use of reference services.

#### **5. Theories of Reference Services**

James Wyer has described three different philosophies of Reference Service which are labelled as "Conservative", "Moderate" and "Liberal". These only are known as Minimum, Middling, and Maximum by Samuel Rothstein.

##### **5.1 Conservative or Minimum**

Conservative Reference Services approach provides occasional personal assistance to the inexperienced and dazed reader. It limits the help to pointing the way only and so it is traditional in nature. The reference librarian helps the users in finding resources but does not read or interpret those sources for the user.

##### **5.2 Moderate or Middling**

The moderate reference service goes beyond providing mere instruction to actually helping the reader in using the book or finding the document and facts, etc. The reference librarian searches exhaustively to find answers for research and factual questions.

##### **5.3 Liberal or Maximum**

It includes the provision of providing the complete and reliable information to the readers. In this case reference librarians takes the user question and conduct the research, finds appropriate material and presents it to the user. The reference librarian if needed also writes the summary or analysis of the information found. Generally this kind of reference service is given in special libraries.

The first conservative approach emphasises over instruction over answers; the liberal approach emphasises answers over instructions and the moderate approach comprises equal part of each (Bopp and Smith, 2011).

#### **6. Functions of Reference Services**

American Library Association in 1942 categorized functions of Reference Services as a series of library job analysis. ALA has stated the following six functions of Reference Service:

## **6.1 Supervisory Function**

This function consists of the proper organization of facilities, reference section, selection of reference materials, direction and guidance of personnel and staff, and study of the library clientele. It all includes management of reference sources and preparatory function.

## **6.2 Instructional Function**

The Reference librarian should instruct the readers about the working of the library, the location of the material, the use of the online catalogues, the reference sources online and in physical format. An initiation or orientation programme should be arranged to acquaint the readers with the library practices and procedures. The readers can be made aware with the self arrangement, library website, collection of the library and reference sources available.

## **6.3 Informatory Function**

There should be a Reference and Information Desk with modern facilities like computer and mobile devices where enquiries and information requirement are received and routed to proper section. The reference librarians should be prepared to answer all types of questions, and should be able to produce the & sources that would answer the questions immediately. The reference librarian needs to use social media tools to answer the queries of users.

## **6.4 Guidance Function**

Reference Librarian's responsibility is to provide necessary guidance for the maximum use of the library and collection. The Reference librarian should be able to recommend a good reference source for the respective fields. They should be able to give guidance to the readers regarding the subject area, career related information or profession or vocation. Reference Librarian also guides its users with the location of the document, in the choice of material and other reading and learning materials.

## **6.5 Bibliographic Function**

Reference section or department prepares bibliographies for the easy search of the documents. Reference librarian is always in contact with researchers and other readers and makes them aware of latest literature and provides bibliography if required by the readers. The bibliographies need to be prepared in interest to the readers so that they are able to know about the books, various sources and other reading materials acquired by the library and which are required for their respective subjects.

## **6.6 Appraisal Function**

Reference librarian conducts evaluation programme of the effectiveness and quality of the reference work, reference services and reference staff. Appraisal is applied to know the use of collection and the service. Reference librarian and reference staff should evaluate their own services also. The libraries should possess the right kind of information sources and reference collections and the staff should be able to get the most out of it. The scales with which Reference Librarian can evaluate the effectiveness of Reference Services include:

- Whether the query of the reader is properly analysed?

- Whether proper procedure or process is followed?
- Whether the reader is provided information with full satisfaction?
- Whether library has sufficient reference sources?

If all the reference questions are satisfactorily answered than it is assumed that service is effective and efficient.

## **7. Ranganathan's Classification of Reference Services**

Reference service is a process in which readers receive their information through personal contact of the Reference Librarian. There are queries of many types, varieties and are time bound. Reference section or reference department of the library makes the efforts to remove the difficulties of the readers to fulfil their requirements. Therefore all such information which is provided to readers immediately are called Ready Reference Service, and reference service which indicates long time is called as Long Range Reference Service. American Library Association called it as Direct Reference Service and Indirect Reference Service respectively. S. R. Ranganathan defined the following facets of reference work:

### **7.1 Ready Reference Service**

Ranganathan defined Ready Reference Service as reference service finished or replied in a very short time, in a minute if possible. These include such reference services which direct the readers to reference sources immediately and information is gathered within short time. Generally the ready reference services are of the nature of fact finding that can be finished or answered in a very short time – in a short moment if possible. The reference librarian uses sources like reference book, online searches or offline/ online catalogue search for providing such kind of services. In the present context the need of ready reference services arises from the fact of the complex and vast nature of a data, information and knowledge, its artificiality, and arrangement of information. The distinguished person, fellows, foreign delegates, dignitaries, scholarly users generally approach for such type of services. Sometimes some customary and regular patrons/users also need the fact finding reference service because of shortage of time to locate and search there queries.

Ready Reference Service includes the following queries:

- Which are demanded direct
- Which are demanded by sharp medias
- Which are simple
- Which are answered on the table of Reference Librarian
- Which involve short answers
- Which are responded within short time, or within 5 minutes, or less

The Reference Sources which can be used for Ready Reference Queries are sources which are Fact Finding Sources. These include:

- Dictionaries
- Directories/Handbooks
- Census Reports
- Year Books/ Annuals

- Biographies
- Gazetteer
- Atlas
- Encyclopaedias
- Publications and websites of the specific organizations
- Authentic Online Web Based Sources
- Online Publishers Sources including Online Databases

### **7.1.1 Need of Ready Reference Service**

It is generally seen that readers have knowledge of books and other sources which are concerned with the studies but sometimes the readers need such information which are not known to them and their queries are not related to the concerned books and regular sources. Reference Sources are such books and literature which are referred and consulted as when the information is needed. So generally the users are not aware of these resources as these are arranged differently which is not familiar to the users. This makes the need for the ready reference service. In the present context also the patrons or users including students, researchers email or use social media to contact the reference librarian to ask the short questions relating to the ready reference and get the answers immediately.

### **7.2 Long Range Reference Service**

Ranganathan stressed that Long Range Reference Service is more used by the public and special libraries. This service indicates taking long time in providing reference service. It is given to the special readers demanding special information. Normally it takes more than 5 minutes to provide the service with the help of reference sources. It is based on referencing every possible source of information to arrive at the required solution; as such, it is not possible to deliver this type of service immediately. The search in the long range reference service starts with the reference books, literature and online reference sources in present context and then goes to the books, reports, monographs, articles in periodicals in physical and online format. If the information is not available in the library sources whether physical or online then the search can even go to other local libraries and even to the other libraries in the country. The long range reference service provided today can become the ready reference service tomorrow, as by this time the reference librarian will be able to locate the material speedily from his past experience and developed skills. The scope of long range reference service has now even expanded to bibliographical service, referral service, translation service which is considered as long range reference services.

#### **7.2.1 Need of Long Range Reference**

##### **a. It Save the Time of the Reader and the Experts**

The time is precious for a reader and research scholar. As the researcher spends more time in literature search so the reference librarian can help its user with the reference sources and the procedures to search the required information.

##### **b. Knowledge Explosion**

Due to knowledge explosion vast literature is produced and the researcher/ user can not study the universe of knowledge in physical and online format. Libraries procure a variety of



resources of literature and reader is always eager to know the details and the whereabouts of the literature received in the library or published anywhere in the country or the world. Reference librarian is well versed and trained in the search techniques of literature. He can help the readers to trace his/her documents. Reference librarian can serve the reader with the help of reference tools and sources.

### **c. Complexity of Information Sources**

Information sources are many and full of complexities. Every information source has different arrangement, style of presentation, language barrier, which is not known to readers. Reference Librarian with his abilities provides all information to the readers.

### **d. Information Sources of other libraries**

No Libraries complete in itself and requires the help of other libraries for using and sharing the information sources. Similarly, due to the limited funds and huge information sources the libraries need to depend, each other. Therefore Reference librarian can help its users in providing the resources from other libraries.

## **8. Levels of Reference Service**

### **8.1 Ready Reference**

- Less than 5 minutes
- Use a designated reference collection to provide the answer
- Done while its patrons wait
- The result is always an answer
- Simple questions with generally simple answers
- Involves looking up factual information
- Requires quick access for ready reference materials

### **8.2 Long Range Reference Service**

- From 5-30 minutes
- May take more than one day
- The result is usually an answer or a referral
- Simple question/ simple answer
- Requires more sophisticated resources
- Involves looking up information - not analysis

### **8.3 Research**

- Labour intensive - consuming anywhere from a day to a week
- Library staff conducting secondary research
- The result is an explanation of research findings rather a clear cut answer
- Also may be called extended reference
- Complex question / complex answer
- Requires many sources
- Involves analysis

## **8.4 Referral**

### a. Question Referral

- One librarian referring a question to another librarian
- The referral is between librarian and libraries
- The referring librarian remains in control of the question

### b. Client Referral

- Referring the client to another librarian or to an alternate source of information
- Once the referral is made, the referring librarian is out of the loop
- Providing a lead or making a contact (Robinson, 1989)

## **9. Five Laws of Library Science and Reference Services**

S. R. Ranganathan provided the laws of library science and his interpretation further formed the groundwork for the reference service. The reference service satisfies the Five Laws of Library Science by the ways of personal contact, understanding the queries of the readers, making the reference sources available to the users and by saving the time of the users. The laws are enumerating with explanation on how the reference service abides to Five Laws of Library Science.

### **9.1 The First Law Books are for Use**

According to Ranganathan, the First law is to put the book to its maximum use and it is best to employ reference service to help the readers to help themselves. Reference librarian stimulates the users and attracts them to the resources of the user choice. Similarly explaining the law in reference to readers Reference librarian establishes personal relations with the readers by his sweet behaviour, liberal attitude, knowledge and personality. In other words, Reference librarian is a friend, thinker and guide. So his role is to provide maximum service to the reader.

### **9.2 The Second Law Every Reader his Book**

According to Ranganathan, reference service is required to aid the reader to get along with the document search. Similarly, the reader should also shoulder his responsibilities to understand the library sources and facilities.

### **9.3 The Third Law Every Book its Reader**

To Ranganathan, the book cannot travel to the reader on its own, but will require reference service to interpret the collection to the potential user or match the reader's query with the document. The reference librarian needs to keep personal contact with the readers and encourages them to use various resources of the library. Book exhibitions, new arrivals display, web based promotions, social media contacts, traditional services like translation, indexing, and abstracting, bibliographical compilations also helps in keeping the library resources in contact with the users.

#### **9.4 The Fourth Law save the Time of the Reader**

According to Ranganathan, reference service comes to the aid of the researcher and scientist whose time cannot be wasted. Efficient and speedy reference service will definitely help in saving the time of the users.

#### **9.5 The Fifth Law Library is a Growing Organism**

According to Ranganathan, the collection, the readers, and time increase to meet altered situations; the kind of reference service will have to be altered to take advantage of technological advances. Similarly, the efficient and good reference service increases the number of the readers and thus it further helps in the growth of the library collection, staff and the infrastructure. It thus satisfies the fifth law.

### **10. Evaluation of Reference Service**

The criteria for evaluation of Reference Service are as follows:

- Access
- Equity
- Response Time
- Impact
- Accessibility/ Convenience
- Value
- Usefulness
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness in meeting needs
- Effectiveness in anticipating needs
- Approachability
- Reliability
- Empathy
- Interest
- Listening /Enquiring
- Follow ups
- Service Quality
- Tangibles
- Assurance
- Accuracy of Answer
- User Satisfaction with service
- Rate of repeat users
- Costing per transaction
- Completion Time
- Role of Technology

### **11. E-Reference Services and Digital Reference Services**

The present world has moved to electronic reference, e-reference, services with Internet-based question and answer which easily connects the patrons and users with library professionals who have expertise in the information sources through web forms, e-mail or

social networking platforms. They have transformed the reference service from physical to virtual by establishing various information formats, packages, tools and delivery channels and further by reducing physical constraints of time and boundary. Libraries are now able to provide reference services on campus and off campus 24 X7 through web portals and web pages.

According to Janes, Carter and Memmott (1999), “Digital Reference Service is a mechanism by which people can submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means (email, chat, web forms, etc.), not in person.” Digital Reference Service is communicating and interacting with users in virtual environments by utilizing computer and Internet technology. The asynchronous system of Digital Reference Service include emailing, using social media tools and web based forms where patrons/ users can submit their questions/ queries and receive answers, usually within 24 hours while synchronous digital reference service support real time communication with reference librarian through chatting and instant messaging.

The modern reference can be provided traditionally and non- traditionally. These different avenues of reference services can meet the diverse needs of a community and can be explained in three models:

### **11.1 Roving Reference**

The reference librarian meets the patron where they are, be mobile within the library space or moving among the stacks, they are available as required by the users.

### **11.2 Outreach reference**

Reference Librarian being visible in the community and connecting with user and patrons face to face. Participating in community events and providing program is an opportunity to teach the public about library services and resources.

### **11.3 Virtual reference**

Available through phone, text, chat. Mobile Technology allowing for the immobile, distance or tech-savvy users to use library reference services.

## **12. Human Resource Policy for E-Reference**

Some of the major things which need to be considered while deputing the Human Resource for the E-Reference Services include:

- Contractual Human Resources for e-reference service to be avoided
- Scheduling of reference librarian hours for e-reference service 24 X7- includes operations, workloads, shift lengths
- Priority for e-reference in comparison to other work and services of the Library
- Staffing levels, obligation to staff training and professional development (Johnson, Peter and Newton, 2011)

### 13. Summary

Reference service is the intensive and exhaustive kind of personal service, which try to bring together the user and information. The reference service manager who understands its users and their needs best supports the needs and services of its users. Models that work well in one library will not necessarily be relevant to other that serves a different type of community library, so the reference service needs to be personalised as per the requirements. Each reference interaction between a librarian and patron is an opportunity for mutual learning within a shared space. The user communicates their information needs while the reference librarian, using probing queries, seeks to provide the appropriate resource. So, the patron and librarian work together toward lifelong learning and exploration.

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