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

- PRANK
- RUDE
- Impatient
- Obscene
- Abusive
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
Obscenity

“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 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.

f**k 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 division

(after sending greeting...)

Librarian: Do you mean division as in math homework?
Patron: are all librarians hot?
Librarian: if they don't have air conditioning
Patron: your funny
Librarian: thanks
Librarian: What's up with your division?
To read the rest of this session transcript, see the Quality Tip posting in the QuestionPoint Blog:

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
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 general 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
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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