

## Reference Services and Instruction

*Rebecca Graff, col. ed.*

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# The Intersection of Reference and Instruction

Rebecca Graff

As an academic librarian, I often have conversations about reference or instruction. However, those conversations are seldom about reference and instruction. I believe that this is due to the structural realities of ALA; discussions about reference take place in RUSA and talks about instruction occur in ACRL. This is unfortunate because reference informs and enhances instruction and vice-versa. Moreover, as a result of this siloing, I don't know what other divisions have to say about the links between reference and instruction. Fortunately, RUSA is the perfect place to hold those dialogues since people from all divisions come together here regarding reference. I think we need to create a space to hold these discussions, which is why I've created this column.

I work as a humanities research librarian at SMU Libraries in Dallas. My reference interests include virtual reference, data collection, and reference evaluation. I've been a RUSA member for more than 20 years. I'm a past-chair of RUSA's Reference Services Section (RSS). I have served on and continue to contribute to a number of committees, including Evaluation of Reference and User Services; Education and Professional Development for Reference; Managing, Marketing, and Measuring Reference; Research Help in Academic Libraries; Virtual Reference Services; and Virtual Reference Resources. In addition, I worked on the RUSA Futures task force. I've also chaired two RUSA task forces, one for revising the Definition of Reference and the other for reviewing the Behavioral Guidelines.

This column will explore the intersection of reference work and library instruction. When working on the 2021 Definition of Reference,<sup>1</sup> our task force was concerned that people only thought about reference interactions when they thought about reference. So we added a section about reference work. Reference work includes providing informational expertise, recommending and interpreting resources, promoting services, and managing service points. With this in mind, reference work includes developing research guides and other asynchronous aids to understanding libraries and resources. This is an example of how reference intersects with library instruction. Library instruction focuses on teaching users the skills needed to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Too often, library instruction is used only to discuss class-based scenarios; yet, during reference interactions, we frequently teach library users how to find information more effectively.

There are many opportunities when providing reference to include instruction. I believe that academic and school libraries, in particular, are obligated to serve in an instructional capacity as part of their missions. This is why, in my library, when evaluating chat transcripts, we look for

whether the library staff took advantage of teachable moments. What does your type of library do to not only provide information, but also show library users how to find information independently?

What are you and your library doing with regard to the intersection of reference and instruction? Do you have insights, experiences, or research to share about how these two vital aspects of library service overlap and enhance user experience? How can we better infuse instruction into reference? Tell us! We welcome a wide variety of perspectives. Please submit your column ideas so we can all learn from you how to better serve our library users.

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## **Reference**

1. Rebecca Graff et al., "Definitions of Reference," Reference and User Services Association, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/rusa/guidelines/definitionsreference>.