



Reference and Information Services Competency Set Portfolio Development Suggestions April 11, 2011

Library Support Staff who work at reference desks support library users who seek access to information in all formats, wherever these resources are located. Reference work involves both the ability to perform basic research as well as an ability to explain to users how to do basic research. These competencies require an understanding of basic searching skills, how to access and evaluate information resources, how to conduct reference interviews and commonly used citation systems. Library Support Staff must also know when it is necessary to refer questions to others.

These Portfolio Development Suggestions (PDS) includes examples of possible activities you might use to demonstrate your achievements for each competency in this set. These activities or activities that you design yourself will be the primary documentation of your achievements for your online portfolio.

You might recognize some of these activities as experiences you have already had at work. You may also choose to use these as ideas for new self-directed learning projects and ways to demonstrate what you learned.

These are ONLY examples to help you get started thinking about both what experiences you already have related to specific competencies and what new learning you may want to pursue. While you may choose to use some of these suggestions for your Reference and Information Services portfolio, you may also choose other relevant activities from your experience or new learning activities to demonstrate your proficiency in each competency.

The goal is to demonstrate that you have achieved the competencies. Your documentation may be a written narrative, a video, an audio recording or digitized copies of documents you have already prepared in your work experience. You may submit these documents in any format that can be uploaded into your online portfolio. Remember to make a clear link between the competency and the document so that evaluators will know what competency you are demonstrating. When appropriate, you may also apply documentation for one competency to another competency. If so, indicate that in your portfolio.

Helpful Hints

In order to complete some of the activities you may need to conduct research. This research may be from print resources, web resources, visits to and observations of



other libraries and interviews with library staff or library users. If you need to conduct research to complete one of the activities listed below, be sure to cite the resources that you consulted and your personal opinion of what you learned.

Some of the PDSs ask for a bibliography. Usually a bibliography should include notations that are both descriptive and evaluative. Descriptive means your notation briefly describes what is relevant; evaluative means your opinion about what you read.

In some cases, we suggest that you compare and contrast what happens in at least two libraries or other settings. Compare and contrast means that you identify the similarities and differences between the way different libraries or other settings operate. If you currently work in a library, you may use that library as one of the examples. You may use the same type of library for comparison (public OR academic) or different types of libraries (public AND academic). Unless the suggested activity specifically indicates that you should look for examples in BOTH public and academic libraries, you may choose which types you would like to compare and contrast. You can discover how other libraries operate by conducting online research or by visiting another library and interviewing its staff.

You may also be asked to analyze or describe “your community.” Community is a broad term that could mean the community served by a public library or the higher education community served by an academic library.

In Summary

In summary, in order to submit this competency set as completed, you are expected to demonstrate that you have achieved each of the 13 individual competencies in the Reference and Information Services Competency Set. However, you are NOT expected to complete all of the examples listed with each competency.

Good luck as you achieve this competency set.

Library Support Staff will know:

Competency 1. The general scope of the library’s collections including areas of strength and specialized collections.

Portfolio Development Suggestions



1.1 Develop a guide to two of a library's collections. This guide may be a printed brochure or web page which informs library users about the collections' scope and areas of strength, such as subjects, authors, genres or media.

1.2 For a week, keep a record of the directional questions users ask. Develop recommendations for changes in current signage or a new signage plan to answer these questions. Explain why you think your plan will help library users to more easily locate collections and services.

1.3 Design a tour of the library's general and special collections. Document the overall scope of the tour and explain what you would highlight and why. Video, audio tape or provide a script of the tour.

Competency 2. Legal issues involved in reference services, including user privacy, confidentiality and copyright.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

2.1 Create a bibliography of five articles on library user privacy and confidentiality. Summarize and evaluate the usefulness of these articles. Complete the ALA copyright tutorial. Write a brief essay about the challenges libraries face with respect to one aspect of the copyright law: for example, in electronic reserves or interlibrary loan services.

2.2 Collect sample policies on privacy, confidentiality or copyright from at three different libraries of varying type and size. Compare and contrast these policies; which ones do you think are best and why? Write a recommendation for adopting specific policies for the last library in which you worked.

2.3 Give examples of the types of legal issues you have encountered when working with different library users and how you have applied library policies to these situations.

Competency 3. Basic reference, information and community resources.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

3.1 Develop three pathfinders or research guides on basic reference or information sources, including community resources, for either public or academic library users. These guides help library users looking for a variety of types of information: for example, basic business sources or foreign language dictionaries.



3.2 Make a list of 10 different types of basic reference sources such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories and atlases. Under each type, explain its purpose and give examples of the types of questions that can be answered by each source. Mention how community resources are typically used to supplement library resources.

Competency 4. Classification and organization schemes for collections.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

4.1 Compare and contrast three different organizational methods for library collections, including the Dewey Decimal System and Library of Congress. Discuss in detail the strengths and weaknesses of one of these methods.

4.2 Develop an organizational and classification method for a collection that you own (books, DVDs, CDs, comics). Investigate how you might apply standard library classification, Dewey or Library of Congress, to that collection, and discuss the advantages of your personal organization method in contrast to a standard library method such as Dewey.

4.3 Document the various organizational and classification schemes in use in a library. Develop a guide for library users to these different collections that explains the various methods.

Competency 5. Basic search methods, display options and terminology of the library's catalog, website and other information access tools.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

5.1 Compare and contrast the basic and advanced search functions of a library catalog; one general database such as Proquest or EBSCOhost; and one internet search engine, such as Google.

5.2 Identify 10 library terms or jargon that library users might find confusing in catalogs and databases. Create a help page to explain these terms. Write a brief accompanying explanation explaining why you chose those particular terms to define.

5.3 Create a help page for a web or wiki or for use in print for each of the following activities: conducting a basic and advanced library catalog search; searching a periodical database; and using an internet search engine.

Library Support Staff will be able to:



Competency 6. Conduct effective reference interviews, helping users define their information needs.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

6.1 Keep a journal of reference questions asked in person for one month. Describe the initial questions, conversations between you and the user and the final question on which you assisted the library user. Based on what you learned, develop a reference interview form that can provide guidance to others on how to conduct interviews.

6.2 Create a bibliography of five articles or book chapters on the reference interview. Summarize the articles and discuss the two or three that you found most helpful.

6.3 Video, audio tape or provide a script of three mock reference interviews with experienced reference librarians. Demonstrate poor and good techniques.

Competency 7. Judge when referrals to a librarian or a resource outside the library are necessary and use appropriate referral procedures.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

7.1 Develop guidelines for you to use when making referrals. Provide specific examples of questions that might or might not need referrals.

7.2 Using 20 questions from logs from chat reference, email questions or the reference desk, analyze the questions to identify when referrals were made and why. Identify any questions that should have been referred but were not.

Competency 8. Instruct users in basic research procedures, including use of the library's catalog, general database and web searching and locating materials in the library.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

8.1 Create an online tutorial that guides users through basic research procedures. The online tutorial might be a video or pod cast. Determine the most critical features that users must learn to achieve a basic level of success.

8.2 Suggest the content of a training program that teaches basic research procedures to library support staff. Include the major principles you will include in the program and the best method for delivering the training.

8.3 Video, audio tape or provide a script of a role play in which you train a user in how to use a basic online research tool. Discuss how you developed this training program.

Competency 9. Use basic searching skills to find information in print, non-print and digital resources.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

9.1 Select two general topics that interest you. Research these subjects using library catalogs, databases and the internet. Document the search terms that you use in each search of each resource. Create a search guide for others using what you learned in your searches.

9.2 Select five examples of reference questions asked by library users and create search strategies to find the answers. List the question, your strategy (including search terms that were effective and ineffective) and what resources you used to find the answer.

Competency 10. Use locally developed tools such as subject guides, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and other resources that provide guidance to answer information requests.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

10.1 Compile four examples of research guides developed by a library and evaluate the readability and usefulness of each guide.

10.2 Keep a journal of reference desk interactions for one month and note which locally developed resource guides might have been used in answering these questions. Evaluate the guides' usefulness and suggest ways in which they might be improved.

10.3 Review chat logs, email questions or specific questions asked at the reference desk. Determine what FAQs or other guides the library could develop to more easily answer some frequently asked questions.

Competency 11. Help users select the most appropriate information resource to meet their needs and evaluate the quality, currency and authority of information retrieved.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

11.1 Compile a list of resources on a topic or use a previously developed list and explain why you selected the sources you included. Discuss the quality, currency and authority as they pertain to the topic.

11.2 Describe how you would help users select the most appropriate resources on a topic. What cues would you point out to help the user evaluate the quality of a resource? Discuss not only quality, currency and authority, but audience as well.

11.3 Develop guidelines for selecting trusted web sites and create a web page with this information. Address issues of quality, currency, authority and audience.

Competency 12. Identify and locate information in all formats and assist users in retrieving materials, including those not held locally.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

12.1 Describe which tools you would use to find journal articles, books, videos or audio materials. Discuss how you might go about accessing those materials. What options are there for users if your library does not own these resources?

12.2 Create a research guide for users that helps them understand and use an interlibrary loan system.

Competency 13. Interpret a bibliographic record and citation formats.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

13.1 Compile a set of 10 bibliographic records which document at least four different types of resources: for example, a journal article, book and web page. Create a user guide which explains the various fields in these records. You might create a poster, brochure or web page to help users understand the different parts of the bibliographic record.

13.2 Create a web page with the most common citation formats, such as MLA/ Chicago or APA, and explain the various fields in the citation. Give examples of the appropriate citation format for a chapter in book, a webpage, a journal article, an encyclopedia article and a book.