A Better Reference Evaluation Survey

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SUMMARY

This survey obtains student opinions about subject specific support, including specialized research assistance they may have received from multiple encounters with a librarian.

A brief online survey distributed by email at the end of the semester in which they ask their librarian for help provides students with the opportunity to:
- evaluate their librarian's service and expertise after a project's completion rather than shortly after the interaction
- Emphasize what was most helpful from their encounters
- Assess and reflect upon their overall research process and perform a final stage in constructivist learning when answering, "What advice or information related to your research assignment do you wish someone had given you sooner?"

In addition to giving customer feedback, the survey results help the librarian to:
- Set priorities for which skills and strategies to emphasize in future transactions
- Describe the skills, tips and topics typically covered
- Quantify the major formats where reference services are provided
- Collect tangible advice to use for future students engaged in similar research assignments.

Coupled with library instruction evaluation surveys, this instrument provides a more rounded and customized view of students' needs throughout their research process.
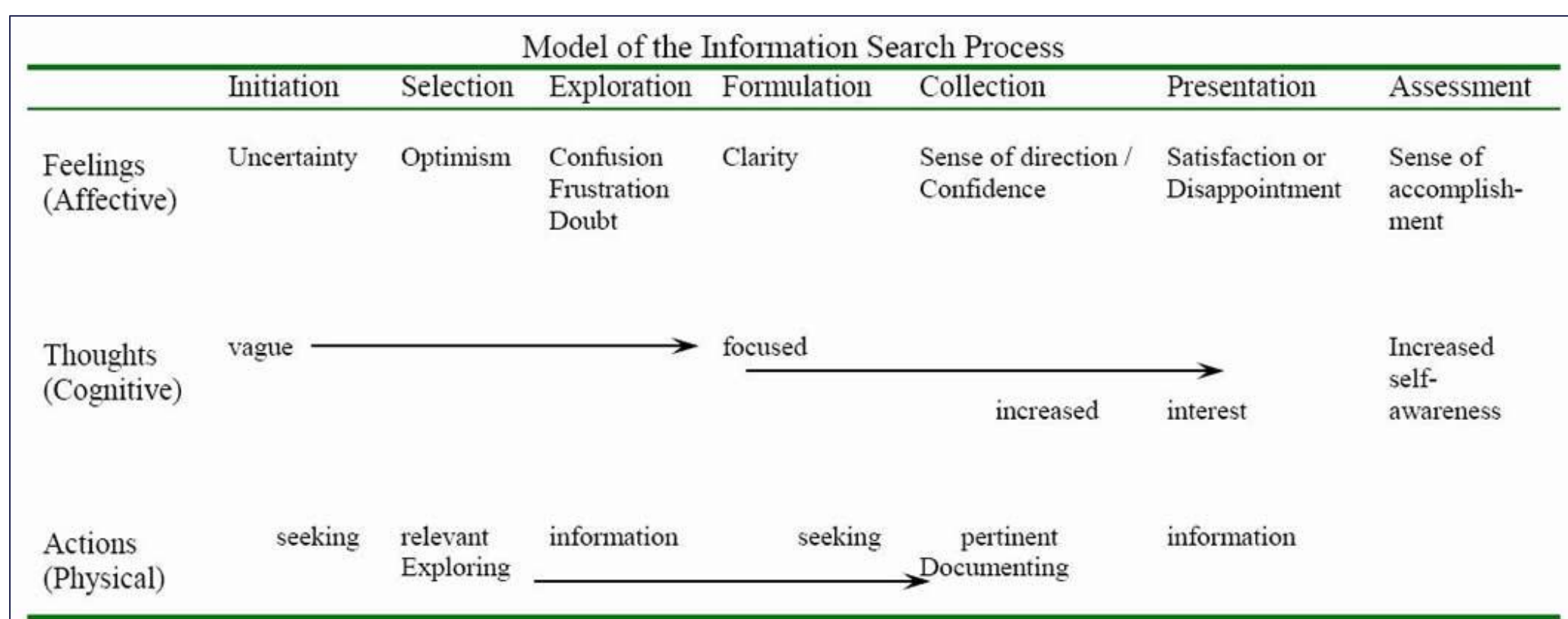
The REFERENCE/ INSTRUCTION CONNECTION

Increasingly, academic reference and instruction librarians develop relationships with students that begin in instruction sessions and extend through the duration of research projects.

Library instruction increases reference traffic (Saunders, 2003), and it likely increases student demand for follow-up consultations with librarians who know their courses, assignments, and particular research needs.

In addition, librarians learn how to improve their instruction after follow-up reference interviews with the students they have taught.

SELF ASSESSMENT IN LEARNING & TEACHING

Model of the Information Search Process

	Initiation	Selection	Exploration	Formulation	Collection	Presentation	Assessment
Feelings (Affective)	Uncertainty	Optimism	Confusion Frustration Doubt	Clarity	Sense of direction / Confidence	Satisfaction or Disappointment	Sense of accomplishment
Thoughts (Cognitive)	vague			focused			Increased self-awareness
					increased	interest	
Actions (Physical)	seeking relevant Exploring		information Exploring	seeking pertinent Documenting		information	

http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~kuhlthau/images/isp_chart.JPG

Carol Kuhlthau's model of the *Information Search Process* (2007) includes 7 stages, including a final assessment stage where students reflect on their whole research process and consider:
- What they have learned
- What problems they had along the way
- What they will do in the future

This survey provides an opportunity for students to assess themselves and their experience formally in questions 3 and 6.

Because the survey is NOT anonymous, the librarian can...
- Quote the tangible advice in workshops for future students with the same assignment
- Compare what the student remembered with what the librarian covered

The SURVEY INSTRUMENT

A brief online survey is sent to student emails via the Library's Survey Monkey account at the end of the semester.

2. Which statements best describe the nature of your research consultation?
=
Customer Satisfaction
+
Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.

3. Which statements describe what you learned?
=
Self Assessment
+
Customer Satisfaction
+
Shows the librarian what students found most important.

6. What advice or information related to your research assignment do you wish someone had given you sooner?
=
Advice for future students
+
Self Assessment

Answers have included:
- "Don't procrastinate."
- "Seek help sooner."
- "The answer was always there, I just needed to ask."

1. How did you learn about this service?
=
Marketing + Publicity
Instruction
=>
More Reference

- ~75% of students learned about the service in a library instruction session.
- Most of the rest were referred by a professor.

4. By which methods did you communicate?
=
Measures reference formats
+
Prioritizes where to provide future service

5. Which aspects of library research did you discuss?
=
Students remember what was important + effective

7. What was helpful?
8. What to improve?
=
Quality Feedback

The library instruction evaluation survey for students includes similar questions.

Responses have emphasized the importance of:
- Prompt communication
- Librarian's subject knowledge
- Written takeaways

HOW IS THIS SURVEY DIFFERENT?

1. **Connects reference to library instruction**
2. **Is NOT anonymous**
3. **Obtains patron feedback at the end of a research project**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **How** do you evaluate reference service at your library?
- **How** do you evaluate specialized research assistance?
- **When** do you solicit feedback for your services?
- Does library instruction increase reference traffic at your institution?

REFERENCE EVALUATION

Most reference service evaluation focuses on patron impressions of reference service shortly after their encounters. Much of the recent assessment instruments and discussions have focused on measuring the value and effectiveness of virtual reference service and describing the complexity of reference questions (McLaughlin, 2011). In most cases they suppose a semi-anonymous exchange between a service provider and patron.

The California State University system uses a modified Warner model (2001) for classifying reference statistics by focusing on the level of skill and the strategies used. This is helpful in considering library staffing, but it does not measure the relationship between library instruction and research assistance.

Off Desk Transactions Name: Date(s):	In-Person	Email	Phone	Virtual/Chat/ Text
Level 1 is a non-resource based question (Directional)				
Level 2 is a Skill-based question (usually Technical Skills: how to use the catalog)				
Level 3 is a Simple Strategy based question (finding an answer to a specific reference question including subject searches)				
Level 4 is Complex (generally, a Consultation involving evaluation and/or "how to" requiring multiple answers or multiple resources)				

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