Presenting information

Introduction

Before you present information to clients, you must evaluate it to ensure that it is valid, reliable, and relevant to their needs. Then you must ask them whether it meets their needs. You should also ask clients if they want the information in a particular format - e.g., are pictures required, or is written information sufficient?

Packaging information for clients depends on:

- client needs
- available staff time
- the library’s policy on the appropriate level of service
- any legal restrictions on supplying information (e.g., copyright).

When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

- complete a reference interview
- compile a bibliography
- refer clients to other appropriate sources
- apply the Australian Interlibrary Resource Sharing (ILRS) Code to an interlibrary loan request.

The main topics in this section are:

1. Finalising the reference interview
2. Packaging the information
3. Compiling a bibliography
4. Referral
5. Interlibrary loan

Finalising the reference interview

Whenever you answer a client’s enquiry, you must ask the question ‘Is that what you wanted?’ This question includes:

- Was the information accurate?
- Was it on the right topic?
- Was there enough (but not too much) information?
- Was it at an appropriate level for the client?
- Was it timely?
If the information you have gathered does not fully meet the client’s need, you may have to continue the reference interview, or even begin again.

**Packaging the information**

As we noted earlier, different types of library provide different levels of reference service. This applies to the searches staff conduct on behalf of clients. It also refers to the packaging of the results, which may be as simple as providing one fact or the URL of a relevant website, or as complex as compiling a bibliography or even writing a report.

Comprehensive packaging of information is limited to some special libraries, such as parliamentary and scientific libraries. For most, it is sufficient to provide answers to straightforward questions, or sources of information (e.g., a website, an encyclopaedia article) for more detailed queries.

**Compiling a bibliography**

A bibliography is often the result of a search, as it points to an existing body of information on a topic, and provides a starting point for clients to pursue their own research.

Many libraries compile bibliographies for clients using library resources including electronic databases and the Internet. In general, a bibliography should include citations for books, journal articles, websites and, where appropriate, conference papers and/or non-book material such as videos or kits.

As well as the exact topic, you need to be aware of the importance or otherwise of the currency of the material. In some subject areas - e.g., history, cultural studies - it is not so important that material is recent, and a significant proportion of older material may be appropriate. In others - e.g., information technology, space exploration - it is critical that all the material be as up-to-date as possible.

**Style of bibliography**

There are many styles for citing items in a bibliography. Your organisation may specify a particular style. It may simply require the style to be consistent, and provide a basic set of bibliographic details.

Important bibliographic details include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books (monographs)</th>
<th>Journal (serial) articles</th>
<th>Non-book items</th>
<th>Electronic sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• author/s,</td>
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There are many guides to citation styles on the Net. They include:

- AGPS (Australian Government Publishing Service) Style  
  (http://www.library.uq.oz.au/training/citation/agps.html) or  
  RMIT University Library - References and Bibliography Guide  

- APA (American Psychological Association) Style  
  (>http://webster.commnet.edu/apa/apa_index.htm) or  
  (http://www.wooster.edu/psychology/apa-crib.html#Examples)

- Harvard Style  
  (http://www.lmu.ac.uk/lls/lls/docs/harvfron.htm)

- MLA (Modern Language Association) Style  
  (http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/bibliography/  
  mla/mlamenu.htm)

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) website provides general information and links to a number of citation guides for electronic documents  
(http://www.ifla.org/I/training/citation/citing.htm)

Referral

Some queries cannot be answered using the resources of a single library. Referral to another information agency is an appropriate response to many difficult or specialised questions.

It is important to be familiar with the resources of your own library, including those you can access online. It is equally important to be aware of other available resources and facilities,
and refer clients and/or their questions to other information providers when this is appropriate. This is a valuable extension of your library’s reference service, and should be seen as part of its effectiveness, rather than a deficiency or failure.

There is more about other information providers in Providing information.

**Interlibrary loan**

Part of the extended service your library can offer is borrowing material from other libraries. Interlibrary loan (ILL) is generally available between libraries, and operates under a set of agreed conditions, the Australian Interlibrary Resource Sharing (ILRS) Code (http://www.alia.org.au/interlibrary.lending/ilrs.code.html).

This code has been adopted recently to replace the ACLIS Australian Interlending Code. It was developed to address concerns expressed by library staff and users, and is expected to provide greater predictability, consistency, and flexibility in obtaining materials.

The ILRS Code provides for four levels of service: core, priority, rush, and express. The core service is mandatory. Libraries are encouraged to offer all four service levels. Core and priority levels must be provided before offering the higher levels. Maximum prices are recommended for each service level.

Some libraries limit their interlibrary loan to particular categories of borrowers - e.g., academic libraries may provide ILL to staff and postgraduate students but not to undergraduates.