

**INTRODUCTION  
TO REFERENCE WORK**

*Volume II*    **Reference Services  
and Reference Processes**

*Fourth Edition*

**William A. Katz**

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and Reference Processes**

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***William A. Katz***

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*Reference Services and Reference Processes*

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this second volume is to give the reader an overview, or a broader understanding, of the possibilities of reference service. An effort is made to introduce the sophisticated, imaginative, and, I believe, really more interesting aspects of the reference process.

There are some major departures here from the third edition. The introductory chapter on the community has been shortened. The writer must apologize for not including all members of the community in this section, but space simply does not allow for the consideration of the vast numbers and types of audiences now in need of additional, not less, library service. The suggested reading section at the end of the chapter may at least point up the importance of this area and what other material is available.

The "interview and search" section (Part II) is closer to what was found in the third edition than any other part of this revised text. Still, even here there have been necessary cuts and additions. And this points up another aspect of the text: one need not read each chapter consecutively. For example, having considered the interview and search section, some readers may want to skip to the chapter on the on-line search, a chapter which considers many of the same problems, but in the context of the computer.

The most obvious departure from the third edition is found in the emphasis here on the place of online reference services. In addition to the introductory chapter, there is a more detailed chapter on bibliographic data bases. Here basic individual sources are treated separately, in the same fashion as printed works are treated in the first volume.

In discussion of the individual data bases, an effort has been made to avoid the usual emphasis on scientific sources. More space has been given to general and ready-reference works, as well as to those likely to be used in the social sciences and the humanities. This

is done not to downgrade scientific sources, only to redress a lack of balance. It is the conviction of this writer, and of many experts in the field, that in the next decade the social sciences and the humanities will become increasingly important as bibliographic data bases.

Beyond this chapter there is increased emphasis on the general methods employed in searching data bases. Here "general" must be stressed because it is not the scope and purpose of this text to give detailed instruction on how to use individual data bases. Still, an effort is made to establish the general rules and principles which beginners should appreciate before taking up specific search patterns for particular systems and data bases.

Networks, and their increasing importance as the major link in on-line reference service, are given a separate chapter, which provides much more detail than in the previous edition. Also, interlibrary loan and document delivery are considered in greater depth.

The economics of the online search is given much more space than before, and the reader is asked to consider a major question: Who pays for what? The problem of fees for computer-aided reference service is one of the primary ethical questions of the decade. By implication the fee situation may change the traditional role of the library in society.

In other chapters current problems are considered in more detail than previous editions. There has been a cutback in the treatment of communications—in fact, the material is now treated as part of another chapter rather than standing alone. This revision was done at the suggestion of several teachers.

The final chapter concerns basic methods of evaluating the reference collection and reference services. Parenthetically, evaluation is a major concern of both volumes of this text, and almost every chapter has some material on evaluation of particular types of reference sources.

As in the first volume, an effort has been made to list current sources (i.e., 1979 and later) in the footnotes and in the suggested readings section. Often some excellent material is mentioned in the footnotes but not repeated in the suggested readings in order to avoid citation duplication.

I wish to conclude by expressing thanks to all those students, teachers, and librarians who made so many helpful suggestions for the improvement of this work. I again am particularly grateful to Sara D. Knapp, the skillful and intelligent librarian in charge of computer searches at the library of the State University of New York at Albany. Ms. Knapp not only read the chapters on online reference service, but made numerous suggestions which have considerably improved the section.

*William A. Katz*

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*INFORMATION AND  
THE COMMUNITY*





THE COMMUNITY  
INFORMATION AND

## CHAPTER ONE

# Reference Service and the Community



THE LIBRARY is an institution obedient to the attitudes and the whims of the community it serves. Librarians may formulate long-range policy and make daily decisions about service, but ultimately they must answer to those served—or not served.

Today librarians face economic and technological pressures which are rapidly changing many concepts of reference service. Public libraries must consider whether to continue to try to reach out to serve nonusers or to concentrate on serving the small, but active, user group. Academic libraries are faced with serious problems of rising costs for reference service and shrinking enrollments and budgets. School librarians may have to decide whether they should even try to serve reluctant students. The special libraries appear to be in an easier position than others, although they also face budget and technological problems.<sup>1</sup>

Community attitudes tend to be favorable to the idea and the existence of the library, yet they are far from supportive of the financial needs of the institution. Individuals who believe in free

<sup>1</sup>*The National Inventory of Library Needs* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1977). Here it is reported that in 1975 "libraries in the United States were grossly underfunded" and that about \$5 to \$6 billion a year more was needed, as well as about \$12 billion for one-time catch-up expenditures. Now several years old, the report's findings today would be even more negative, estimates of needed funding even higher.

education and library service may still vote against state or federal measures to finance those services. The same Americans who vote down funding for libraries and education in general are often enraged when the local library suffers. *That* library deserves support. It's just the *others* that are wasting money.<sup>2</sup>

### The information literates

The trend in library services for the last decade or so has been to give most reference service to those users whose education and background lead them to value information. As a group these people are sometimes called the "information literates," and they inevitably compose the professional strata of the middle and upper-middle classes.<sup>3</sup>

When one speaks of serving this group, it is usually in terms of supplying information for the persons who operate within the academic, business, scientific, government, or technological environment.

At the other extreme are the non-library users, those who, in fact, may be most in need of information, but who rarely, if ever, turn to the library. The failure of this group to make use of library services reinforces the notion that library audiences are generally limited to the more affluent and educated groups.

There are major disparities between socioeconomic groups, disparities reflected in library use. Some critics see it as an inevitable circle: education and economic security lead to exposure to information, which in turn leads to increased knowledge about self and the community. The poor and undereducated rely on interpersonal communication and organization, usually outside formal channels. If librarians are to reach these people, they must understand the methods of communications and the limited information universe of the information illiterates, who number in the many millions.

Conversely, the number of information literates may be no more than two or three million, less than one or two percent of the adult population. Probably this ratio is true not only for the population at large, but holds within the scientific, technical, and business sector as well. And the ratio seems to remain fairly stable.

Librarians are concerned with striking a balance between meet-

<sup>2</sup>Noel Savage, "News Report 1979," *Library Journal*, January 15, 1980, pp. 168+. Here Savage gives several examples of communities which cut aid to libraries. On the other hand, Savage notes: "Community support has in many other cases given libraries the muscle to fight off assaults on their budgets" (p. 170).

<sup>3</sup>Charles R. McLure, "The Information Rich Employee . . .," *Information Processing and Management*, No. 6, 1978, pp. 381-394. An analysis of the "information literates."

ing the needs of the information literates and reaching out to the rest of the public who do not, or cannot, use a library. Librarians recognize a need as well to reach others who use the library only from time to time. As one observer puts it, "As far as information technology is concerned, the entire public is a disadvantaged group."<sup>4</sup> Information and Referral Services (I&R) offer one approach to balancing needs and serving more people.

### INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES (I&R)<sup>5</sup>

Information and referral services take many forms and have numerous names—information counseling, community information, operation outreach, learning service, etc. The primary purpose of I&R centers is to bring reference services to people where they work and where they live. Information and referral service is an effort by the library to reach out to both users and nonusers rather than expecting the public to "reach out" to the library. As Jones observes:

*Perhaps we have grown too cynical to speak of libraries in terms of "irresistible" or "compelling" except when referring to confirmed readers (certainly mystery fans qualify). On the other hand, it is not ludicrous to speak of offering something at the "gut level," help that reaches people where they are. Information and referral service in public libraries merits serious consideration as a major additional tool to help people in their everyday lives. In the evolution of library practice it has emerged as a logical response to a demonstrated need.*<sup>6</sup>

The information center adapts the library to the needs of people, instead of asking them (as was the case too often in the past) to adapt to the needs of the library and the librarian. Centers are located in urban districts previously without library service and often where the nonlibrary users are unable to reach a larger library. Hence, convenience of location is provided in the atmosphere of the area familiar to the nonuser. In cities with extensive branch libraries, information centers often operate within the libraries, as an extension of the reference function, but with special personnel and services.

<sup>4</sup>Colin Mick, "Specialization, Information Technology and Libraries," *The Catholic Library World*, July/August 1977, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>For a listing of such services see: *Directory of Outreach Services in Public Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1980). There are many books and hundreds of articles on this subject. One of the best books: Clara S. Jones, *Public Library Information and Referral Service* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Gaylord Brothers, 1978).

<sup>6</sup>Clara S. Jones, "The Urban Public Library: Proving Utility," *Library Journal*, January 1, 1976, p. 84.

### Types of questions and answers

I&R services might be called upon to answer such typical questions as: "I am in need of some help with my landlord, who has increased the rent beyond what I can pay. Where do I go, whom do I see?" "Where can I find information on a senior citizens' home?" "Do you have anything or anyone who can explain the raise in my taxes?" "My social security check has not arrived. Whom do I contact?" "Where can I find a speaker on gardens to talk to my group?"

Answers to the questions may be found by using regular reference sources or, more likely, by using library files of names of people and organizations to whom the librarian or the questioner may turn for information.

Even at the less personal level, the need for information is "problem-oriented." The majority of people seek data in hope of finding answers, if only partial ones, to such concerns as air pollution, energy conservation, production problems, public health matters, etc.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of these I&R centers is twofold: (1) to provide current information and data on local community services, and (2) to maintain a constantly updated file of names and organizations, to which a person may turn for specific information about a special or a community problem. Since the material tends to be local, and since it must be updated frequently, it is usually not available in printed form; but is maintained as a file by the librarian. The file may be in a form as simple as a card index or as complex as a computer data base.<sup>8</sup>

In actual practice much I&R service is limited to standard reference work, although, to be sure, it is at a level which does meet individual need. The "referral" aspect is only infrequently used by librarians.

Specifically, Childers found that 68 percent of the public libraries with I&R service provide "the inquirer with the asked-for information on outside resources, such as phone numbers, addresses, contact persons, etc., without further probing." This is really little more than ready-reference work and is closely related to such existing reference services as providing information from a telephone book or city directory. Childers also found that a more complex type of reference search is done by slightly more than one-half (54 percent)

<sup>7</sup>"Studies Probe Information Systems," *American Libraries*, May 1979, p. 251.

<sup>8</sup>Detailed information on the type of material in such a file and how it is collected will be found in numerous sources. See Jones, op. cit., and Catherine McKinnon, "Developing an Information Service," *Ontario Library Review*, September 1978, pp. 210-215.



of the libraries queried. Here the same information as described above is requested, but some time is spent in trying to find out precisely what is needed. Some 43 percent of the libraries in Childers' study "construct a file or directory of outside resources and make it available for the inquirer to consult." However, Childers reports that of all the libraries in the study, only 13 percent "provide a bona fide I&R service in that they actively help the client make contact with an outside resource by making an appointment, calling an agency, etc."<sup>9</sup>

This wide failure of librarians to accept the referral role may be explained in terms of advocacy. In referral, and in follow-through, which is implied in referral cases, the reference librarian assumes an advocate role rather than serving merely as a passive source of information. A number of librarians feel somewhat uncomfortable in the advocate role, particularly those librarians trained to be "objective" in all aspects of their work.

In some libraries the narrow line between regular reference questions and I&R queries makes it difficult to determine who is in charge of what. The result may be conflict between the I&R staff and the regular reference staff. Since the I&R center does not operate in a vacuum, but draws upon the regular reference services, any conflict or ill-feeling between the two staffs can present problems.

## ADULT SERVICES

Information and referral service is one method of providing services to the adult community. However, there are other approaches. One such approach is "adult services." As with many library operations, the term "adult services" has numerous definitions and interpretations. Generally it has come to be applied to those services which give special attention to the disadvantaged, the illiterate, the aged, the various ethnic minority groups, and any other groups of people requiring special attention.<sup>10</sup> Adult services, together with I&R, con-

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Childers, "Trends in Public Library I&R Services," *Library Journal*, October 1, 1979, pp. 2036-2037. This is an excellent overview and a fine summary. See also Childers' "Profiles of Public Library I&R," p. 2038, where he outlines moderate and maximum services.

<sup>10</sup>Joyce Wente, "What Are Adult Services?" *RQ*, Spring 1979, p. 231. Most of this issue is given over to articles on the subject and it is a good beginning point for anyone interested in a modern interpretation and discussion of adult services. Space here does not permit treatment of all groups, e.g., service to women, service to labor, but see *Directory of Outreach Services* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1980).

stitute a trend moving libraries toward a dynamic and useful place in the community.

What follows is an abbreviated look at a few of the more reference-oriented adult services.

### **Adult education**

Estimates vary, but a conservative judgment is that about 50 percent of the adult American population borders on being illiterate.<sup>11</sup> This is an astonishing figure, and one which has been a constant challenge to librarians.

While I&R represents one effort to reach many of the functionally illiterate, libraries today are also carrying on active literary training programs.<sup>12</sup> In that the reference librarians are invariably called upon for resources and materials for such programs, they are directly involved with the services offered in adult literary training.

The adult independent-learner program in the past few years has assumed increasing importance to universities and colleges seeking to boost enrollment. While the learner's program is supervised by an academic, the student may use either the public library or the college library for necessary materials.

### **Ethnic groups<sup>13</sup>**

There are various ways of designating the groups which are composed of other than the white, middle-class, "average" users of the library. The descriptors of these groups vary because it is impossible, and unwise, to lump all of them under a single name. However they are called, they very likely represent nonusers of library services.

Primarily, there are two large groups in the category of "the

<sup>11</sup>*Adult Illiteracy in the United States* (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1979).

<sup>12</sup>The American Library Association, particularly active in literacy programs, regards the problem as a major consideration of all libraries. For an overview see Helen Lyman, *Literacy and the Nation's Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977). The work lists "sample programs, funding sources, and kinds of materials needed for the library's literacy collection." See, too: Henry Drennan, "Libraries and Literacy Education," *Catholic Library World*, April 1981, pp. 376+.

<sup>13</sup>*Ethnic Groups in American Life* (New York: Arno Press, 1978) begins with a brief historical survey. This is substantially a reprint of articles from *The New York Times*. There are numerous useful articles for reference librarians, e.g., Michael Gonzalez et al., "Assessing the Library Needs of the Spanish-Speaking," *Library Journal*, April 1, 1980, pp. 786-788; David Cohen, "Ethnicity in Librarianship . . ." *Catholic Library World*, March 1980, pp. 342-346.

disadvantaged." The first is composed of the educationally disadvantaged. The second, which may be a part of the first, comprises the ethnic minorities: black, Mexican-Americans, American Indians, Asian-Americans, etc. While not all members of the minority groups are underprivileged, their numbers are sufficient to identify them with the larger, deprived group. In any case, and whatever the descriptor, the disadvantaged include both adults and youngsters, both city and country dwellers.

In providing reference service to ethnic minorities there are several factors to be considered: (1) Foreign language materials, particularly the basic reference works, e.g., encyclopedias, dictionaries, geographical sources, etc., should be part of acquisitions whenever possible. (2) Members of the reference staff should be familiar with the language(s) of the ethnic groups. (3) Community information files should be tailored for the needs of these groups. (4) Maximum effort should be made to reach these groups through I&R centers, publicity, etc. The use of television and radio and door-to-door canvassing are effective tools here.

### **The handicapped**

Many people have limited access to library services, largely because they are "invisible," either in institutions or at home, and because they are unable to make their needs known. These are the physically and mentally handicapped.

Renewed interest in and financial aid for the disabled and the handicapped, who are estimated to number over 38 million in the United States, has brought increased interest in providing library services for this large portion of the American population. Actually, the libraries' involvement is many decades old, but until the federal government made funds available, much of the work, particularly in public libraries, had to be carried on with a minimal budget. Funds are still limited, but available monies are increasing.

Some of the services which the library might offer the handicapped include: a referral center for volunteer reader services; a space set aside where impaired patrons can work with librarians; and specialized materials and equipment. A recent study offered advice applicable to reference librarians: "Sensitivity and training programs should be undertaken for library employees and patrons. Regular and special services (e.g., homebound, bookmobile, etc.) should be expanded to include disabled people. Qualified disabled people should be used as advisors for the programs. Information about