



One-on-One Instruction

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INFORMATION MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

One-on-One Instruction

INTRODUCTION

There are several reasons to consider the topic of one-on-one instruction. Many reference librarians who are not primarily responsible for formal information management education (IME) may have a significant instructional role every day at the information desk or in other settings in which interactions with clients take place. In other institutions, there may not be an identified need or the resources for group instruction. In still other situations, those who have responsibility for formal IME may also participate in providing reference or other public services. In addition, those in technical services positions occasionally find themselves instructing clients in their areas of expertise. Thus, almost every library staff member will find himself in a one-on-one instructional setting at one time or another.

The following are several guidelines which have proven to be useful in interactions with individuals in which education, as well as information provision, take place. Many of the guidelines will look familiar to those who conduct group instruction. Here they are modified slightly for a different setting.

WHAT YOU NEED TO FIND OUT

1. Determine whether the client is *open* to instruction. A simple question, "Would you like me to show you how to use this?" or "I'd be happy to show you how this works, if you like," are quite effective. "Reading" non-verbal cues may obviate the need for a direct question, for example, observing that the client is flipping through the instruction manual or the prefatory material.

2. Determine the *purpose* of the instruction. The following are examples:

- to refresh the client's knowledge of how to do something;
- to get a client started working on his own until you have time to come back and help him further;
- to answer a client's specific question about the tool, equipment, or service;
- to provide a fairly thorough description of how to do something as the client wants to be able to do this on his own at home or at another time.

Each of these purposes requires a slightly different approach in the amount of instruction required and the content of it. For example, a refresher may require highlighting key points or beginning steps.

3. Find out if this is a need by a *group* of people or an individual. This may lead to an opportunity for group instruction and thus a more efficient or effective approach. The most common example is from an academic setting in which the student is working on some type of assignment. If you can find out the instructor's name, course name and/or number, and make a copy of the assignment, follow-up is easier. A phone call to the instructor offering to come to class, inviting the class to the library, or another approach that is feasible and comfortable for you could be in order. What you hope to convey is that you are delighted the instructor's students are using the library and that you would like to help in that effort.

WHAT YOU NEED TO TELL YOURSELF

1. Be *selective* versus missionary in your approach. Zeal is a wonderful inspiration for others but care must be taken not to overwhelm with too much instruction on too many things at one time.

2. *Avoid jargon* or, at a minimum, explain technical terms, for example, monographs, series, stacks, ILL.

3. *Simplify* by breaking a process down into logical steps—first, you do “x,” second, you do “y,” and so forth. Modify the KISS acronym to KIS (Keep It Simple).

4. *Avoid adding detail*. This is related to “selective” and “simplify” above. You are not educating a future librarian and you can always end with, “If you’d like more specifics, let me know,” or “We’ve really brushed the surface only; there are several more things I could explain but this will be enough to get you started.”

5. Let the client *do* as you teach or, at a minimum, demonstrate the process and then talk through the steps as he practices. The choice of approach is determined by the client’s reluctance to start; the demonstration and practice approach almost always gives confidence to the timid. It helps ensure that the client experiences immediate success.

6. *Follow up* to see if the client is finding what he needs, whether he needs more instruction, needs a refresher or more detail, or if he is ready to go on to the next stage in his search for information.

WHAT YOU NEED TO TELL THE CLIENT

1. *Compare* and contrast with something familiar to the client, for example, if showing a CD ROM database, see if he has used the print counterpart or another CD ROM, and use that as a basis for examples and a starting point in instruction.

2. Explain *limitations* as well as capabilities of the tool, equipment, or service. In other words, bring out points that will help the user interpret the comprehensiveness of his search results. For example, note if coverage is limited to United States publications in English, or if coverage is limited to 600 key journals and not books, audiovisuals, or government publications.

3. Provide *positive* feedback, such as “You’re right on track,” “That is exactly so,” or “Well done!” These are just as necessary with individual instruction as in the classroom.

4. Explain the *relationship* of what you are teaching to other tools or services, such as interlibrary loan or other parts of the collection. Anticipate what the client’s next step is likely to be and offer to help him later when he reaches that step. A good example is showing a

client how to use an index and explaining that not all the materials may be owned by the library. Explain that when he has found relevant items, you can show him how to tell if they are in the library or must be obtained from other libraries. What you are attempting to do is to break a complex process into stages and offer help for the next stage when the client is ready for that help.

5. Invite *questions* at any time.

WRAP-UP

After a one-on-one instructional "session," find out if the client is interested in learning more. Explain what user aids, online help, and instructions in text are available if you have not done so already. Offer additional help, possibly leading to a separate appointment to teach in a more relaxed setting. If this is desired by the client, encourage him to bring a friend or two, if it is appropriate. This can be very effective in maximizing resources as well as providing group support of what will be learned.

You may be saying to yourself: all this seems like too much to do in a quick reference question setting. Start with the very first point in this column and recognize that most of these points can be covered very quickly—in a matter of minutes—and will become more natural and efficient with practice. Begin by trying to add one or two in the next client interaction you have and go from there—KIS!

If you have found other rules of thumb to be useful, or are in an institution that has developed goals and/or objectives for one-on-one instruction, please share these with the column editor. They will be printed in a future issue.

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Comments and suggestions should be sent to the Column Editor:
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