On Consulting for Submissions

Introduction

This workshop is intended to provide an introduction to using archival reference interview techniques to help clients devise their name and arms submissions. A reference interview is a conversation between an information professional, such as an archivist or herald and a client, usually at a reference desk, in which the information professional responds to the user's initial explanation of his or her information need by first attempting to clarify that need and then by directing the user to appropriate information resources. The goal of this workshop is to provide a conceptual framework which consulting heralds can consider all client communications, and to help establish a service standard for consultation.

The five main areas to the reference interview include:

1. Approachability,
2. Interest,
3. Listening/Inquiring,
4. Searching, and
5. Follow Up.

Within these steps there are three distinct categories. They are:

A.   General - Guidelines that can be applied in any type of reference interaction, including both in person and remote transactions.

B.   In Person - Guidelines that are specific to face-to-face encounters, and make the most sense in this context.

C.   Remote - Guidelines that are specific to reference encounters by telephone, email, chat, etc., where traditional visual and non-verbal cues do not exist.

Following the Guidelines of the Reference Interview can help clients articulate what their submissions should include.

Note: The term herald in this document applies to all who consult with SCA members interested in developing personal or group heraldry.

APPROACHABILITY

In order to have a successful reference transaction, clients must be able to identify that a consulting herald is available to provide assistance and also must feel comfortable in going to that person for help. In remote environments, this also means placing contact information for chat, email, telephone, and other services in prominent locations, to make them obvious and welcoming to clients. Approachability behaviors, such as the initial verbal and non-verbal responses of the herald, will set the tone for the entire communication process, and will influence the depth and level of interaction between the herald

and the clients. At this stage in the process, the herald could serve to welcome clients and to place them at ease. Heraldry can seem daunting to the uninitiated. The herald's role in the communications process is to make the clients feel comfortable in a situation that may be perceived as intimidating, risky, confusing, and overwhelming.

To be approachable, the herald:

General

- Establishes a "reference presence" wherever clients look for it. This includes manning a consultation table at events, encouraging contact via local newsletters and gatherings.

- Is poised and ready to engage approaching clients. The herald is aware of the need to focus their attention on the clients' needs.

- Employs a system of question triage to identify what types of questions the clients have when more than two clients are waiting. Frequently asked questions, brief informational questions, directional questions, and referrals can be answered quickly, allowing more time to devote to in-depth reference questions.

In Person

- Establishes initial eye contact with clients, and acknowledges the presence of clients through smiling and attentive and welcoming body language.

- Roves through the event area offering assistance whenever possible. Heralds should make themselves available to clients by offering assistance at their point-of need rather than waiting for clients to come to seek them out, such as receiving an award granting the right to having personal arms.

To rove successfully, the herald should:

- Be mobile. Get the clients started on the initial steps of their search, then move on to other clients. This works particularly well when there is an event Herald's Point.

- Address the clients before addressing the resources (books, laptop, etc…) on hand. Clients are more likely to confide in heralds.

- Check back on the client's progress after helping them start a search.

Remote

- Should provide prominent, jargon-free links to all forms of reference services from the home page of the library's Web site, and throughout the site wherever research assistance may be sought out. The Web should be used to make reference services easy to find and convenient.

INTEREST

A successful herald must demonstrate a high degree of interest in the reference transaction. While not every query will contain stimulating intellectual challenges, the herald should be interested in each client's personal ideas for their submissions and should be committed to providing the most effective assistance. Heralds who demonstrate a high level of interest in the inquiries of their clients will generate a higher level of satisfaction among users. To demonstrate interest, the herald:

General

- Faces the client when speaking and listening.

- Focuses attention on the client's interest, or if it is not possible to document their initial concept, draw their attention to related elements.

In Person

- Faces clients when speaking and listening.

- Maintains or re-establishes eye contact with clients throughout the transaction.

- Signals an understanding of clients' needs through verbal or non-verbal confirmation, such as nodding of the head or brief comments or questions.

Remote

- Maintains or re-establishes "word contact" with the client in email or online chat environments by sending written or prepared prompts, etc., to convey interest in the client's question.

- Acknowledges user email questions in a timely manner.

- Providing active (tested) links to resources in an accessible place on the Web.

LISTENING/INQUIRING

The reference interview can act as the heart of the consulting activity. The herald must be effective in identifying the client's initial concepts, or preferred elements. Strong listening and questioning skills are necessary for a positive interaction.

As a good communicator, the herald:

General

- Communicates in a receptive, cordial, and encouraging manner.

- Uses a tone of voice and/or written language appropriate to the nature of the transaction.

- Allows the clients to state fully their information need in their own words before responding.

- Identifies the goals or objectives of the user's research, when appropriate

- Rephrases the question or request and asks for confirmation to ensure that it is understood.

- Seeks to clarify confusing terminology and avoids excessive jargon. The language of blazoning can be intimidating to non-Heralds.

- Uses open-ended questioning techniques to encourage clients to expand on the initial idea or present additional information.

- Uses closed and/or clarifying questions to refine the idea.

- Maintains objectivity and does not interject value judgments about subject matter or the nature of the question into the transaction.

Remote

- Uses reference interviews or Web forms to gather as much information as possible without compromising user privacy.

SEARCHING

The search process is the portion of consulting in which behavior and accuracy intersect. Without an effective search, not only is the desired information unlikely to be found, but clients may become discouraged as well. Yet many of the aspects of searching that lead to accurate results are still dependent on the behavior of the herald.

As an effective searcher, the herald:

General

- Finds out what clients have already tried, and encourages clients to contribute ideas.

- Constructs a competent and complete search strategy. This involves:

    ❖ Selecting search terms that are most related to the information desired.

    ❖ Verifying spelling and other possible factual errors in the original query.

    ❖ Identifying sources appropriate to the client's need that have the highest probability of containing information relevant to the client's query.

- Explains the search strategy and sequence to the clients, as well as the sources to be used.

- Attempts to conduct the search, since the herald will have the greatest experience using heraldry related web sources and texts.

- Explains how to use sources when appropriate.

- Works with the clients to narrow or broaden the topic when too little or too much information is identified.

- Asks the client if additional information is needed after an initial result is found.

- Recognizes when to refer clients to a more appropriate guide, database, library, herald, or other resource.

- Offers pointers, detailed search paths (including complete URLs), and names of resources used to find the answer, so that clients can learn to answer similar questions on their own.

In Person

- Conducts the search with the client (at least in the initial stages of the search process).

Remote

- Uses appropriate technology (such as co-browsing, scanning, faxing, etc.) to help guide clients through library resources, when possible.

FOLLOW-UP

The reference transaction does not end when the herald leaves the clients. The herald is responsible for determining if the clients are satisfied with the results of the search, and is also responsible for referring the clients to other sources, even when those sources are not available in the local herald's collection.

For successful follow-up, the herald:

General

- Asks clients if their questions have been completely answered.

- Encourages the clients to return if they have further questions.

- Roving at events and/or meetings is an excellent technique for follow-up.

- Consults other heralds or experts in the field when additional subject expertise is needed.

- Makes clients aware of other appropriate reference services (email, etc.).

- Makes arrangements, when appropriate, with the clients to research a question even after the reference transaction has been completed.

- Refers the clients to other sources or institutions when the query cannot be answered to the satisfaction of the client.

- Facilitates the process of referring clients to another library or information agency through activities such as calling ahead, providing direction and instructions, and providing the library and the clients with as much information as possible about the amount of information required, and sources already consulted.

- Takes care not to end the reference interview prematurely.

Remote

- Suggests that the clients visit or call the library when appropriate.

Sciath's Quick Reference Interview Approach (Interest and Search)

Name Submissions:

1. Have you already thought of what name you would like?

2. Do you have a preference for culture? Language? Time frame?

    a. If no, then – Is there a historical event that you would like to place your persona near to?

    b. If no, then – Are there activities (martial, A&S) that you would like to ensure that your persona could do historically?

3. Which of these elements is the most important?

At this point, online and text resources are consulted. OSCAR and the O&A may also be consulted.

4. Based on what we have found, do you have a preference for name elements?

Try to obtain several options pleasing to the client, which may then be checked for conflict requirements. Confirm final name option for submission and provide documentation.

I like to complete the submission form for the client, so that the documentation may be accurately described.

Device Submissions:

1. Which do you prefer – yellow or white?

2. Pick two colours – blue, green, red, purple or black. Pick a third (just in case)

3. (Select a primary charge) Do you want this device to represent something you actively do, or describe who you are in the SCA? Would you prefer an animal, plant or object on your device?

    a. (select secondary charge) Are there any other elements you would like to include?

4. (Field divisions) Select the field division you prefer. I use a book that includes illustrations.

At this point, online and text resources are consulted. OSCAR and the O&A may also be consulted. While providing an opportunity to do an initial conflict check, this also provides the client with a chance to see the range of device options.

5. Based on what we have put together, which option is your first choice? Second choice?

Conduct a check for conflict requirements. Confirm the final device, including blazoning, with the client.