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# Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities: What Librarians Really Need to be Successful at the Reference Desk

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# Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities: What Librarians Really Need to be Successful at the Reference Desk

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## Introduction

Librarians at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library are using reference statistical software to record transactions at the merged reference desk. The software program allows libraries to easily compile and report on reference transaction data. Aggregated and analyzed reference transactions for a period of one year will be presented. The data demonstrates the needs of the patrons from this merged library and conversely indicates what proficiencies and capabilities are required from employees.

Important information can be gained from using a reference tracking system. Understanding the nature of the questions being answered at the desk will enable libraries to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that all reference providers should demonstrate. Maintaining and analyzing reference statistics will allow libraries to better train, support, and mentor developing reference professionals.

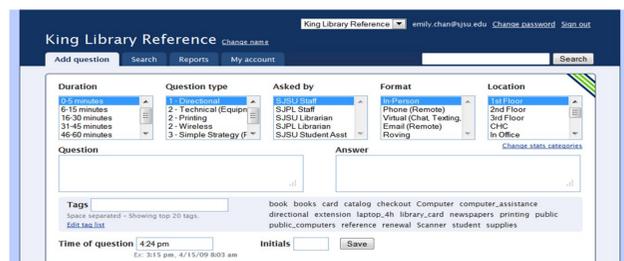
## Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library is joint academic/public library. The reference desk is a merged service point, which is supported by academic and public librarians, library paraprofessional staff, and student assistants.



## Reference Transactions

Reference transactions were collected by the Gimlet software. Informational fields included the duration of the interaction, the question type and format, location, and who fielded the question. Answer fields were customizable, allowing the King Library to designate the types of questions that were most important for reporting purposes.



## Collection and Analysis

Library staff input their transactions into Gimlet. Questions are searchable and can be aggregated and analyzed through spreadsheet software.

### Searching

#11725	Looking for a restaurant in Sunnyvale that would have been around in the 1990's CA Room closed — looked at available Haines Directories on the floor, called the Clerk-Recorder's Office and found that they have all of their historical records (70 W. Hedding) King Library Reference - 2nd Floor - SJSU Librarian - 4 - Complex Strategy (Reference) - In-Person - 16:30 minutes - etc	6/14/13 9:52 AM	Get   Delete
#11335	Large print dictionary King Library Reference - 2nd Floor - SJSU Librarian - 3 - Simple Strategy (Reference) - In-Person - 6:15 minutes - etc	6/7/13 10:07 AM	Get   Delete
#11345	Lacatan or lakatan bananas King Library Reference - 2nd Floor - SJSU Librarian - 3 - Simple Strategy (Reference) - In-Person - 6:15 minutes - etc	6/7/13 9:47 AM	Get   Delete
#11340	Crops, cultivation of durian Regular patron King Library Reference - 2nd Floor - SJSU Librarian - 3 - Simple Strategy (Reference) - In-Person - 10:30 minutes - etc	6/7/13 9:38 AM	Get   Delete
#11328	Books/works by Burges Johnson LL and 7th floor King Library Reference - 2nd Floor - SJSU Librarian - 3 - Simple Strategy (Reference) - In-Person - 6:15 minutes - etc	6/7/13 9:07 AM	Get   Delete

### Reporting Using Excel

Spring 2012	2nd Floor Merged Reference Desk
02/26/2012-05/29/2012	
	Question Type Count
1 - Directional	3,073
2 - Technical	3,889
3 - Simple Strategy (Reference)	3,854
4 - Complex Strategy (Reference)	696
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11,512</b>

## Methodology

Reference librarians, staff, and students input their transactions into Gimlet. Data from 2/26/2012-05/25/2013 was collected and analyzed on a semester-by-semester basis in Microsoft Excel 2010.

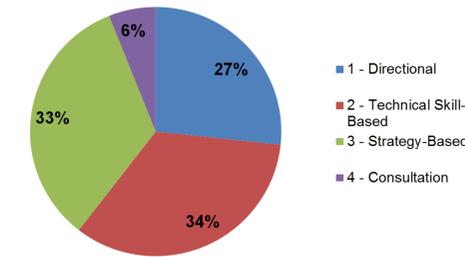
Questions were divided among four categories: Level 1: Directional, Level 2: Technical Skill-Based, Level 3: Strategy-Based, and Level 4: Consultation. These categories were based on Debra Warner's 2001 article on the classification of reference statistics.

Required informational fields, like duration, question type and format, and answered by were quantitatively evaluated. Optional fields, like tags and questions and answers were qualitatively interpreted. Questions posed at the reference desk were deposited into Wordle to create word clouds. Each semester has a corresponding word cloud to visually demonstrate the frequency of the words that appeared in users' questions.

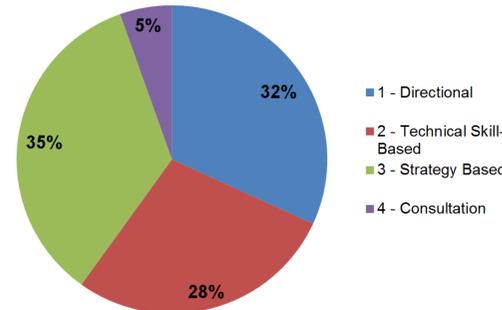
## Results



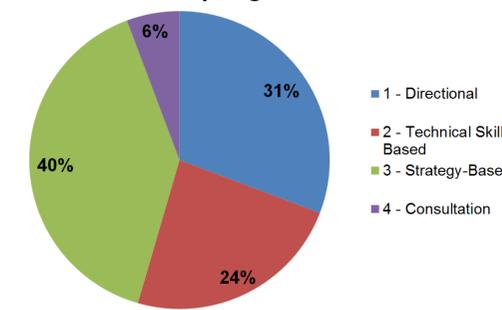
Reference Questions Allocation, Spring 2012



Reference Questions Allocation, Fall 2012



Reference Questions Allocation, Spring 2013



## Conclusions

At a merged academic/public library, reference questions that require resources, strategy, and consultation continue to constitute the highest percentage of work performed at the reference desk. This is followed closely by user queries that require technical skills.

Technical skills required of library employees include the ability to assist with using computers, printers, scanners, and copiers. In addition to these procedural and localized functions, users are asking for assistance in operating the software programs on library machines. As more and more processes and information resources move to the online environment, these skills will be increasingly in demand.

## Discussion & Further Research

Reference statistics provide a wealth of information. They can track user queries and greater community needs, as well as identify the competencies that library staff need to exhibit to adequately handle and address the reference questions posed. It is important to note the level of employee input and adherence can limit the potential of reference statistical software. Further research on this topic is required.

Larger thematic categories should be created to organize the types of questions that the library staff receive at the merged service desk. These organized questions can then be used to create training and professional development materials.

Questions logged into a reference tracking software program can also be mined to populate a frequently asked questions (FAQs) page. Lastly, the information from the reference tracking software can inform and effect policy changes to improve the user experience at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library.

## Bibliography

Warner, D.G. (2001). A new classification for reference statistics. *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 41(1), 51-55.



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