Using the READ Scale to Track the Effort of Resolving Electronic Resource Access Issues

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What is the face of electronic resources troubleshooting for the average library patron?
“I’m not even supposed to be here today”
Best Practices

- Develop a good plan. A good plan is collaborative, and includes well-defined workflows and checklists.
- Treat problems as customer service opportunities.
- Open and frequent communication between technical and public services staff is essential.
- Clerical staff can and should have a customer service role.
- Be proactive in looking for problems and solve them before a patron ever notices.
Easier said than done
routine product maintenance
The READ Scale and (Hopefully) Beyond:

Adding Qualitative Assessment to Enhance Library Statistical Practice

Bella Karr Gerlich, PhD
Why the Read Scale – or any qualitative data?

- Research evolved from dissertation
- ‘Reference’ work primary function – but not acknowledged statistically
- Recent data gathering initiatives focused on user satisfaction
- Lacking expert, or “LPOV” view
-Stats are down – isn’t that bad?
- Administrators wanting narratives, outcomes, and ROI for resources
- Administrators not knowing what we do
A 2002 ARL survey of member libraries reported a “general lack of confidence in current data collection techniques”;

The study remarked on declining transactions but noted that the librarians’ feeling of ‘being busier than ever’ contributed to the librarians’ observation that data collected ‘does not accurately reflect their own level of activity’.
Categories Typical – examples:

“Reference” question
“Directional” question
“Technical” question

Approach Type recorded – examples:

“Walk-up, or In-Person”
“Off-desk”
“Phone”
“Email”
Traditional Reference Statistics

(Hash mark)  (Hash mark)
The READ Scale

- Reference
- Effort
- Assessment
- Data

A six point (1 - 6) sliding scale that asks librarians to assign a number based on effort / knowledge / skill / teachable moment instead of a hash mark after a reference transaction.
The pilot study results done at Carnegie Mellon in 2003-04 were disseminated at an ALA & ARL poster session.

Institutional grants received from Georgia College & State University and Carnegie Mellon funded the launch of the 2007 national study, with Bella Karr Gerlich (PI) and Lynn Berard as co-researchers.
National Study: 14 Institutions, 12 States
Participant Data

- 14 Institutions (public & private, diverse enrollment size)
- 24 Service Points
- 170 Participants
- Full / PT / Faculty / Staff
- Varying experience levels
Study Components

- IRB
- Set Timeline (3 week and semester long)
- Pre-test, local calibrations
- Data gathering
- Surveyed participants (102 responses out of 170, or 60%)
Total transactions submitted, 3 Week and Semester long

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READ Scale</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Points</td>
<td>9497</td>
<td>5622</td>
<td>3085</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off Desk</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Totals     | 10155 | 6257 | 3650 | 1221 | 420 | 121 | 21824 |

14 Institutions, 24 Service points
170 participants
Approach Types, Service Points, All Transactions

In Person: 81%
Phone: 9%
Email: 8%
Chat: 2%
Approach Types, Off-Desk, All Transactions

**Email**: 36%

**Phone**: 18%

**In Person**: 46%
Modifications were put into the following categories:

Delivery Method/READ Scale Appearance; (9)
Time Element; (5)
Skill Level Element; (4)
Clarity of Categories; (4)
Discussion Component; (2)
Comments / Observations. (2)
Practical Applications

- Staffing
- Training / Continuing Education
- Renewed Personal & Professional Interest
- Outreach
- Reporting / Statistics
Staffing

- **Alter** staffing patterns to best serve the users and librarians.
- **Can be used to supplement** and strengthen the value of reference desk staffing at busy times.
Training / Continuing Education

- **New staff.** Develop a training regimen.
- **Continuous learning.** Writing down any questions that elicit an assignment of a category of 4 or higher at the service point and share with colleagues.
- **Monitor referrals.**
Renewed Personal & Professional Interest
Self Assessment / Reference as Activity

- Reference staff can rate their effort / knowledge / skills as appropriate.
- Gives recognition to primary function and can be compared to other libraries / librarians using the Scale.
- Acknowledges the two activities most important to reference staff in terms of job satisfaction (Gerlich): helping users and detective work.
Outreach

Recording Liaison Activity

- Off-desk statistics are often not recorded.
- Demonstrates subject specialization knowledge / needs of the campus.
- Where off-desk statistics are low or READ Scale assignments are in the low end range, outreach activity could be re-examined, surveys taken, etc in that particular area and services redesigned as needed.
Research / Statistics

- **Develop Narrative Statistics.** Records hidden work.
- **Time.** Estimate or actual real time statistics for effort working with patrons.
- **Comparisons** with like institutions who use the Scale.
- **ROI.** Record dbs used during transaction.
A six-point sliding scale that captures supplemental qualitative data including training, skills, education, effort, teachable moments, knowledge and expertise that occurs during any work function in a library.
Can also be described by the following:

\[ \text{TR} + \text{SK} + \text{ED} + \text{TE} + \text{EF} + \text{KE} \]

Or

\[ 1 (+1) = 2 (+1) = 3 (+1) = 4 (+1) = 5 (+1) = 6 \]
One naturally completes parts or all of the formula in progression on the Scale. You cannot get to a 3 without having done steps 1 & 2 on the Scale, and so forth.
Training + Skill + Education + Teaching + Effort + Knowledge / Expertise

1) **Training** = Learned through initial contact, no specialized education.

2) **Skill** = Learned through experience, additional training, no specialized education, customer service considered.

3) **Education** = Specialized higher education needed or equivalent years of experience; customer service; problem solving.

4) **Teaching** = Interaction involves teaching others, either patrons or staff; problem solving; time a factor; multiple resources used.

5) **Effort** = Exceeds routine problem solving, consultation with others, referrals; time a factor; multiple resources used; initiative.

6) **Knowledge / Expertise** = Highly specialized; all other factors come into play; multiple consultations, resources or primary materials used; time a factor; initiative; multiple solutions considered.
ER READ Scale Examples

1:
- Brief technical problems such as short internet outage that only restrict access for several minutes
- Reminder of correct account to use for off campus authentication.
- Reloading page or restarting browser solves issue.

2:
- User error in off-campus authentication (wrong password, status, etc.)
- Explanation of off-campus authentication policies from information widely available on library website.
- Referral to IT or other appropriate department for password reset.

3:
- Verification that the library still subscribes to a particular database or electronic journal.
- Access issues which can be resolved quickly via information readily available on vendor website.
ER READ Scale examples

4:
- Adding a new resource to off-campus authentication method, such as a proxy server.
- Access issues which require submission of help ticket to vendor.

5:
- Some project management is involved for short duration projects.
- Access issues for which sufficient documentation or user support is not available
- Access issues which require multiple follow-ups to vendor to resolve.
- Complicated or custom database information must be added to proxy server.

6:
- Project management is involved for long term projects.
- Large-scale projects requiring collaboration with multiple library/information technology staff, such as installation or upgrade of services to ensure access.
Patron Report Form

Report a Problem

Your Name

Your Email Address *

Dominican Affiliation *

-Select-

Name of Resource *

Are you...

○ On Campus
○ Off Campus

Describe Your Problem *

Submit  Reset

Report Abuse
Librarian View

Download at:
Issues Reported

- 1: 6
- 2: 4
- 3: 10
- 4: 10
- 5: 4

Total: 34
How to Implement

- Review the READ Scale
- Ado(a)pt a system for tracking issues that is accessible to public and ER staff
- Attach READ Scale to these issues
- Analyze what types of questions were answered by whom
Lessons Learned

- Be very clear about how to respond to patrons.
- Checklists are hard to make and easy to forget.
- Changes in procedures must be carefully communicated.
- Give librarians a sense of ownership of problems.
- 1s and 2s coming to the electronic resources specialist indicate areas for training and documentation.
What does the workflow look like at your library?

How formal is this process? Is it documented?

A lot of success in effective ER troubleshooting is staff empowerment. What type of training or enhanced access could you offer your public services staff?
Thank You!

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