

Not Dead Yet!
Ready Reference in Live Chat Reference
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Classification Scheme for Types of Reference Questions Including Virtual Reference

Katz (1997) Classification Scheme, modified by Arnold & Kaske (2005), and Seeking Synchronicity (2007)		
Directional	D	““Where is the catalog?’ ‘Where are the indexes?’ ...The general information or directional question is of the information booth variety, and the answer rarely requires more than geographical knowledge of key locations. The time required to answer such questions is negligible...” (Arnold & Kaske, 2005, p. 179).
Ready Reference	RR	““What is the name of the governor of Alaska?’ ‘How long is the Amazon River?’ ...These are the typical ready-reference or data queries that require only a single, usually uncomplicated, straightforward answer. The requested information is normally found without difficulty in standard reference works, ranging from encyclopedias to almanacs and indexes... Ready-reference queries may be divided and subdivided in many ways...Who? What? When? Why? Where?...It usually takes more than a minute or two to answer this type of question” (Arnold & Kaske, 2005, p. 179).
Subject Search	SS	““Where can I find information on sexism in business?’ ‘What is the difference between the conservative and the liberal views on inflation and unemployment?’ ...The essential difference between the specific-search and the ready-reference question is important. Ready-reference queries usually can be answered with data, normally short answers from reference books. Specific-search answers almost always take the form of giving the user a document, for example, a list of citations, a book, or a report” (Arnold & Kaske, 2005, p. 179). (Note: Katz/Kaske/Arnold called this “Specific Search.”)
Research	R	“Almost any of the types of questions described in the ‘specific- [subject] search’ section above may be turned into research questions. A research query is usually identified as that coming from an adult specialist who is seeking detailed information to assist in specific work...Research questions differ from other inquiries in that most involve trial-and-error searching or browsing, primarily because (a) the average researcher may have a vague notion of the question but usually cannot be specific; (b) the answer to the yet-to-be-completely formulated question depends on what the researcher is able to find (or not find)...another useful method of distinguishing types of queries” (Arnold & Kaske, 2005, p. 179-180).
Policy and Procedural	PP	Includes questions like: ““How do I borrow books?’ ‘How do I get access to my patron information?’ ‘How do I borrow books from another library?’ Most of these questions begin with ‘How do I?’” (Arnold & Kaske, 2005, p. 180). They differ from directional questions in that they usually require some explanation of a policy or a procedure.
Holdings / Do You Own?	H	Questions about specific holdings of a library in print or digital form. “Normally, the customer has the title of a book, journal, video, among other things and would like to know if the library owns the material” (Arnold & Kaske, 2005, p. 180). Also includes how to locate journal articles. “How do I get the full text of a particular journal article when I have the citation?” (Seeking Synchronicity, 2007)

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Additional Categories Identified by Seeking Synchronicity (2007)		
No Question	N	Includes systems test, practice sessions between 2 librarians, any interaction in which there is no discernable reference question.
Inappropriate	I	Questions which are not appropriate for a reference service including personal questions (e.g., “How old are you?”), goofing around (e.g., “What can I do? I’m bored.”), rude questions (e.g., “How do you have sex?”), or questions containing obscene language.
Reader’s Advisory	RA	Reader’s Advisory questions are asked by users who want to “find books they want to read, usually fiction books to be read for pleasure” (Ross, Nilsen, & Dewdney, 2002, p. 162). (e.g., “I read <i>The DaVinci Code</i> by Dan Brown, what other books can I read that are like this one?”)

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Ready Reference Accuracy in Live Chat Virtual Reference Transcripts

Coding Procedures

These procedures were followed by the Seeking Synchronicity research team to code the accuracy of ready reference answers in live chat virtual reference transcripts.

The first step is to eliminate two types of ready reference interactions that will not be coded:

- Questions that were not answered, but were referred for follow-up (via e-mail, fax, to another library/librarian, etc.)
- Questions that were not answered because of technical difficulties, such as user disconnecting. Note: questions that were answered even though the user disconnected will be coded, not eliminated

The remaining ready reference answers are to be placed into one of the following categories:

1. Correct with citation
2. Correct without citation
3. Correct without citation, no citation needed
4. Incorrect with citation
5. Incorrect without citation
6. Incorrect, without specific information requested, with only general/related resource
7. Other

These categories are described in detail in Table 1 below: “Ready Reference Accuracy in Live Chat Virtual Reference Transcripts: Code Descriptions with Examples.” Categories 1 through 5 are consistent with the criteria used by Arnold and Kaske (2005). Categories 6 and 7 emerged as new categories in the Seeking Synchronicity analysis. Category 6 was created for those answers that were incorrect because they provided general information/citation/site that did not answer the specific question. Category 7 was created for answers that were complete, but did not fit into any of the other categories.

Live chat transcripts may have more than one ready reference question/answer. Each question/answer will be given a unique number and coded individually. For each answer, the coder will determine whether the answer is correct by checking the sites/links provided. In cases where links are not provided or are wrong, the coder will conduct research to determine whether the answer was correct or incorrect.

In order to be coded as correct, the answer must provide information that answers the specific question rather than general information on the topic. If one of several links provides the correct answer, the answer is considered correct, which is particularly important when the initial question is wrong and the correct question and answer is arrived at only through the chat.

For each incorrect answer, the coder will determine which of the three incorrect categories is appropriate.

The category “Other” will be assigned to responses that do not fit into any other category, such as the librarian being unable to find the answer. The coder should make a note of the reason the response was placed into this category.

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**Table 1 - Ready Reference Accuracy in Live Chat Virtual Reference Transcripts:
 Code Descriptions with Examples**

Category	Description	Example*	Coding Notes
Correct with citation	Question is answered completely and accurately with appropriate reference	U: "can you please send me song lyrics for Under pressure by my chemical romance?" L: sent lyrics and link http://www.plyrics.com/lyrics/mychemicalromance/underpressure.html . (QP001)	The answer can be complete, accurate and cited even when the answer is no. For example, a user was looking for "A Village Life" by Derek Wakott on the internet (ts243). The librarian did a thorough search and gave references to full-text sites. Although the poem was not on any of those sites, the answer (no, in this case) was complete and accurate.
Correct without citation	Question is answered completely and accurately without appropriate reference	U: "What is the definition of alliumphobia?" L: "Fear of gralic [garlic]." (QP038)	A citation would have been appropriate, but would not have changed the accuracy of the answer.
Correct, no citation needed	Question is answered completely and accurately without appropriate reference and none is needed	U: "how do ypu say test plurally. Is tests acceptable?" L: "Yes, tests is the correct form of the plural." (TS191)	Answers are obvious or well-known, no citations are needed.
Incorrect with citations	Question is answered incompletely or inaccurately with appropriate reference	U: "How far is it from Maryland to the North Pole?" L: provided the North Pole website and general location information. (QP14)	The question was not answered, but the user could find the answer from the site provided.
Incorrect without citations	Question is answered incompletely or inaccurately without appropriate reference	U: "How do I know when a journal is peer reviewed or are all journals peer reviewed?" L: "When instructors say 'peer reviewed' they usually mean simply scholarly journals. 'Peer reviewed' journals are a small subset of scholarly journals." (TS225)	Further research finds that answer was wrong and no citations were provided.

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Incorrect, without specific information requested, with only general/related resource	Question is answered incompletely or inaccurately with reference that is related to inquiry but does not address specific question	<p>U: "Where is the great wall of china on a map with longitude, lattitude with near by cities on scale?"</p> <p>L: pushed the site (http://www.travelchinaguide.com/china_great_wall/) which is about the Great Wall, but has no map or information about longitude, latitude or nearby cities. (T261)</p>	General answer to the inquiry without responding to specific information request but cites provide general information on the topic.
Other	Miscellaneous	<p>U: "what is the number to finiancial aid"</p> <p>L: "Okay. Let me see if I can find the number for you. Please hold on."</p> <p>U: "thanks sorry found it." (TS100)</p>	A variety of circumstances, including librarian being unable to find answer and users finding information themselves. Does not include responses that were terminated without an answer due to technical problems or inquiries that were referred elsewhere.

Note: Transcript excerpts in quotation marks are verbatim. TS indicates 24/7 example, QP indicates QuestionPoint example.

Coding procedures derived from Arnold & Kaske (2005) and developed by Janet Torsney, and revised by Marie L. Radford for Seeking Synchronicity (2007).

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