

Daniel A. Sabol

# Best practices in roving reference services

## Six steps for success

**R**oving reference requires an open and friendly person who is understanding of the student's needs. Also, roving reference requires a good deal of interpersonal skills and the ability to read a situation. We tend to walk the library and find students who are lost in the stacks or sitting in a chair with a database open, but not quite sure what to do with it. These are the students we are trying to reach, the student who needs help but will not ask or it.

In my approach, I find that saying hello before your intervention, remembering names, and keeping the students' best interest in mind achieves the best outcomes for both the librarian and the learner. Roving reference has value to the student and offers a service that adds value to librarians. Librarians play an enormous role in the learning and student outcomes. However, many students are not aware of what exactly it is that we do.

The students have to trust you and expect to be treated as colleagues. Keep in mind that we are in college, and this is a learning experience for them as much as it is for us. They are here to learn all the skills they can before or while entering the workforce. In addition, I have found that we want to act as a guide of sorts. We want to show them how to use databases and other tools and not allow them to get too accustomed to coming to us everyday with minor requests. We have to take a student-centered approach to learning, even with roving reference.

I also find that we cannot leave a student without giving them an answer or a solution to his or her problem. You have to always be willing to help and have an even and steady personality each time you make contact with them. If you are in a bad mood or are not feeling confident in your work when you approach a student, then that the student may not want to work with you again.

Below, I have listed the steps which I take for roving reference:

1. Every time the reference librarian gets a chance to walk around the library during a busy day they should. This is also dependent upon how much traffic we have and should be left to the librarian discretion. The librarian should have an iPad or any device that will allow them to provide students with the appropriate steps they need. This iPad or device in hand should have all the essential apps that are used in your institution.

2. When you are roving, you should look for lost students—students in the stacks or in the areas of the library where they may be out-of-place. The key to helping students at the computers is to look for those not using

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our subscription databases, but Wikipedia, Google, and sites that seem unrelated to inappropriate for a research paper. When you see this, you have an available and teachable moment to make a connection with a student. This interaction can go a long way with relationship building.

3. Approach the student, introduce yourself, and ask if they need any help. Students usually say yes, they do need help. Try not to make students feel incompetent or give directions and walk off. If they are using Wikipedia, ask them if you can show them a great reference tool that is better than Wikipedia. In addition, ask if they need help with breaking down a topic. I found that this is where students are stuck. I like to remind them that research is to support what they are stating in the research paper.

4. Making sure that you remember whom you approach is critical. You do not want to contact the same person five times in 20 minutes, as students can be bothered or interrupted by you. I try to cut the library into four squares, so that I can work on each one and not visit one I have already covered. It is also important to realize that a student may not need your help at the moment but may remember your offer. Make yourself available

and visual to them if they do decide to ask you a question.

5. You can turn roving into a consultation, as the student may need more in-depth help than what is being given. Roving is a referral system in which you can provide students with direction to other resources that can help with a project, which requires more than thirty minutes of your time.

6. Be sure to wrap it up with a thank you for letting me help you. Also, possibly leave a way for them to get ahold of you or your reference team for follow-up.

Roving reference may require a second librarian ready to step in at the reference desk if you use the model and it takes off. The library has room for outreach regarding student service. We have to try different things to gain the student's attention. We have to model how to use our tools, such as our databases and skills, especially with tools they are unaware of. This requires us to prove to our students (I could not change the brakes on your car unless somebody demonstrated it to me) how to search or order an item using interlibrary loans. We then should let them try with our guidance. This is where the consultation comes in handy, as you can ask that the student sit with you and you work through a problem together. *~*

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Impostor Syndrome in Instruction Librarians: Impact and Solutions (Webcast: February 28, 2019)

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