



“Pls hurry it up thanks!!!”

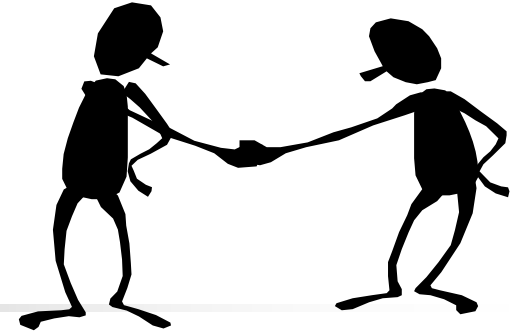
Interpersonal Communication in Virtual Reference

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Introductions



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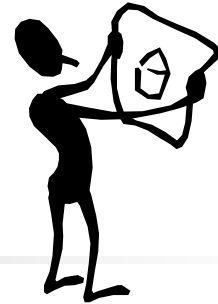
www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mradford

<http://librarygarden.blogspot.com/>

- **Participants**



AGENDA



- **Similarities & Differences Chat vs. Face-to-Face**
- **What Can Transcripts Tell Us?**
- **Boosting Accuracy in Chat**
- **Interpersonal Communication**
 - **Facilitators – Making Chat Better**
 - **Barriers – Problems**
- **Recommendations**

Similarities

Chat vs. Face-to-Face

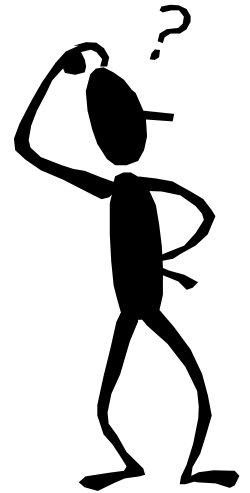
- Real Time
- Time Pressure!
- Negotiating Questions
- Answering Questions
- Service Excellence as Goal
- Variety of Users
- Building Relationships



Differences

Chat vs. Face-to-Face

- Keyboard Woes!
- Lack of NV Cues!
- Limited Knowledge of User
- Chat Speak (see handout)
- Knowledge of Available Resources
- Technical Problems
- Transcript Produced



Seeking Synchronicity:

Evaluating Virtual Reference Services from User, Non-User, and Librarian Perspectives

- Project duration
 - 10/1/2005-3/31/2008
- Four phases:
 - Focus group interviews*
 - Analysis of 850 QuestionPoint transcripts
 - 497 online surveys*
 - 283 telephone interviews*

*Interviews & surveys with VRS users, non-users, & librarians

Seeking Synchronicity:

Evaluating Virtual Reference Services from User, Non-User, and Librarian Perspectives

- \$1,103,572 project funded by:
 - Institute of Museum and Library Services
\$684,996 grant
 - Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
and OCLC, Inc. \$405,076 in kind contributions

What Do Chat Transcripts Tell Us?



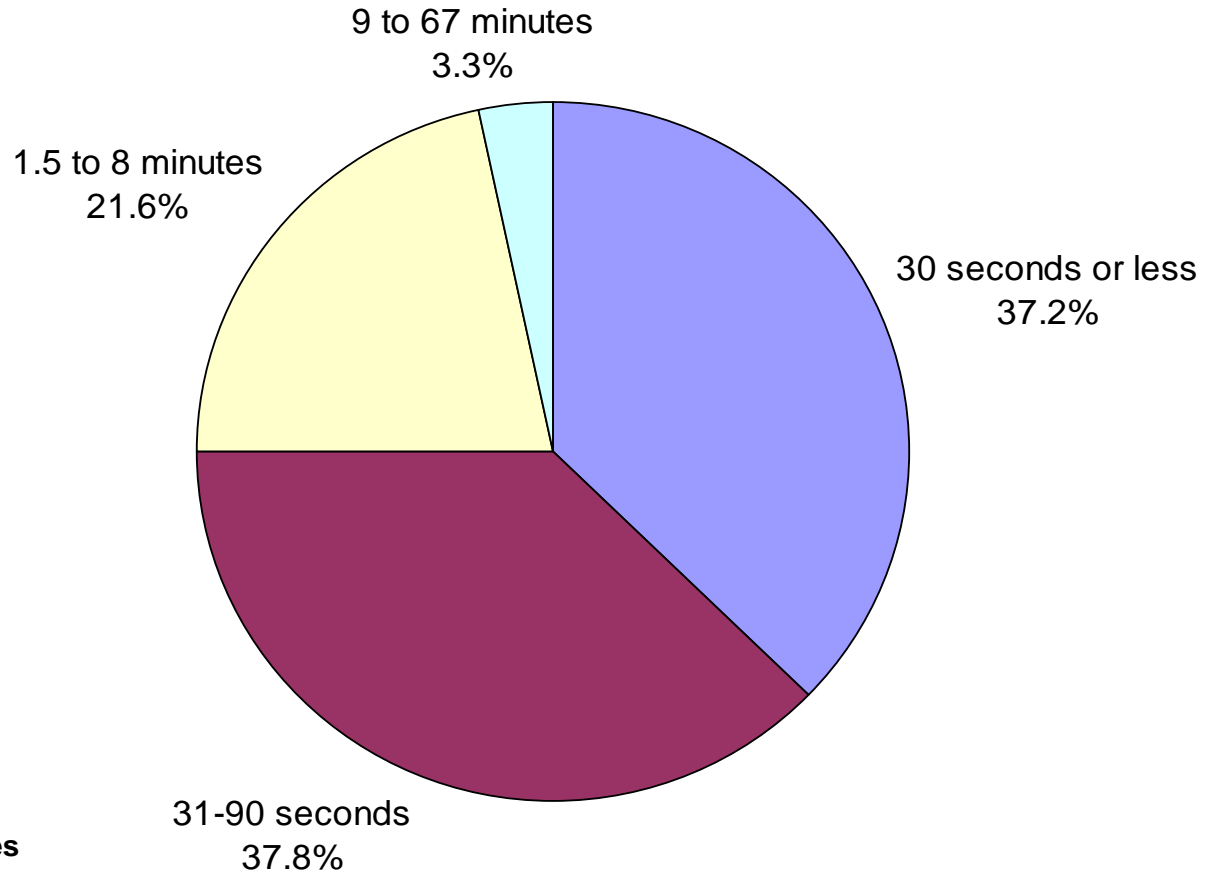
- Random Sample from 24/7 & QuestionPoint OCLC
 - July, 2005 through August, 2006
 - 561,910 sessions
 - 25-50 transcripts/month
- Total transcripts analyzed: 850

VRS Session Times

- Wait time for Users
 - Mean – 1.87 Minutes
 - Median – 1 Minute
 - Minimum – 1 Second
 - Maximum – 67 Minutes
- Session time
 - Mean – 12.42 Minutes
 - Median – 12 Minutes
 - Minimum – 12 Seconds
 - Maximum – 71 Minutes



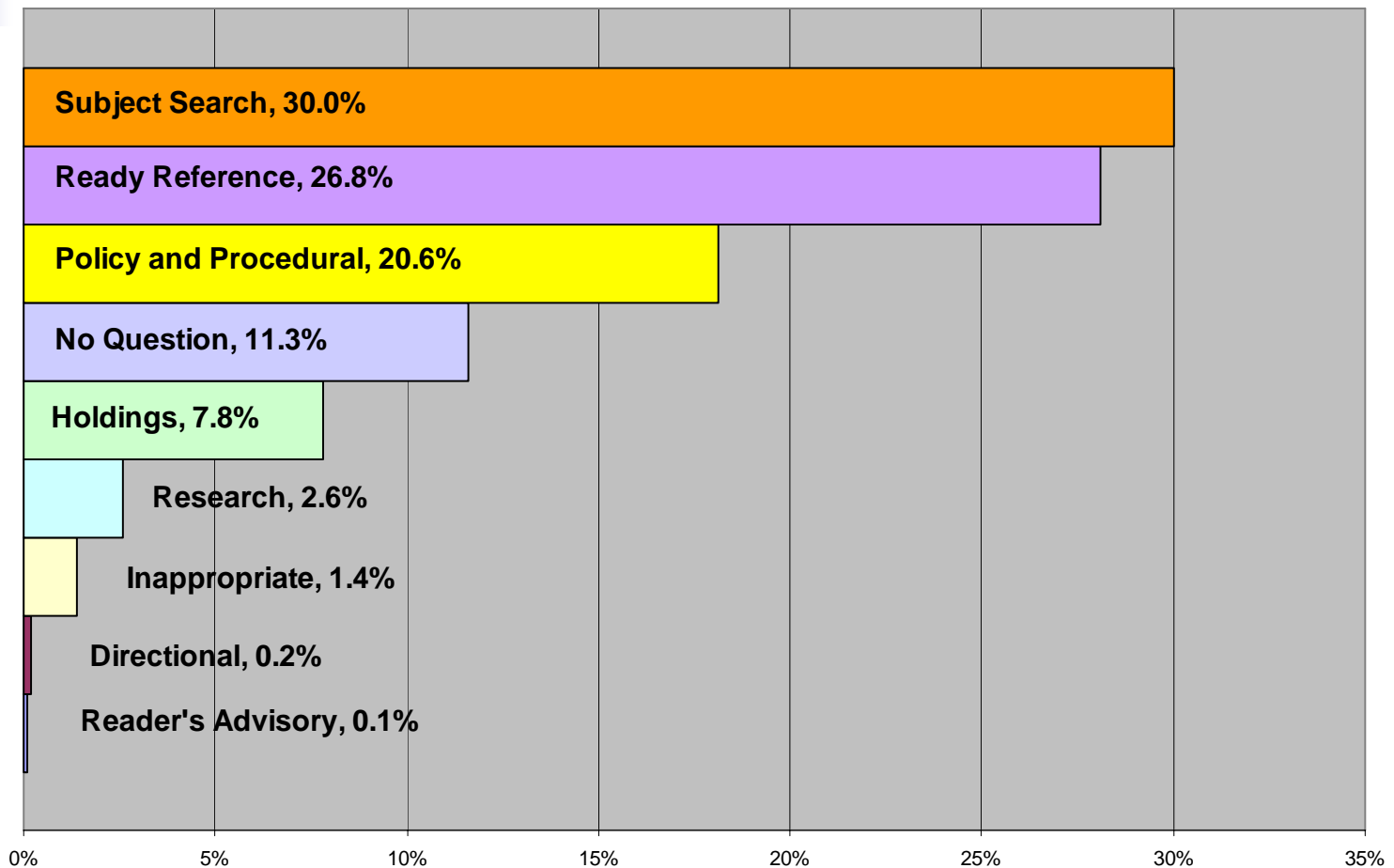
Another View of Wait Time for VRS Users



MEAN = 1.87 minutes
MEDIAN = 1 minute

N = 658

VRS Questions by Type



Percent of Occurrence



THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
RUTGERS



N = 810

Three Simple Ways to Boost Accuracy

#1 – For ready reference queries, **answer specific question** asked!

- **Before** you push a general info. page...
- **Make sure** it has exact answer to user's question



Boosting Accuracy

#2 - For all types of queries

- **Clarify the question!**
- Use a follow-up question.
- End with “Did this completely answer your question?”



Boosting Accuracy

#3 - Always check web links pushed to user

- **Make sure** they are not broken links!



Interpersonal Communication Analysis

Theoretical Framework

Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson (1967)
Pragmatics of Human Communication

- All messages have both **content** & **relational** dimension.
 - Content = Information (WHAT)
 - Relational = Relationship Aspects (HOW)



Interpersonal Communication Research Questions

- What relational dimensions are present in chat transcripts?
- Are there differences in relational dimensions/patterns of chat users & librarians? If so, what are they?
- How do users & librarians compensate for lack of nonverbal cues in chat?



Method



- **Qualitative Analysis of Transcripts**
 - **Development of category scheme**
 - **Careful reading/analysis**
 - **Identification of patterns**



Results

2 Major Themes (See Handout for Sub-Themes)

- **Relational Facilitators**

- Aspects with positive impact on interaction that enhance communication.

- **Relational Barriers**

- Aspects with negative impact on interaction that impede communication.



Transcript Examples

■ Positive Transcript Example

“Mathematics in the Islamic Empire”

- Question Type: Subject Search
- Subject Type: Mathematics
- Duration: 19 min., 21 sec.

■ Negative Transcript Example

“Physics”

- Question Type: Subject Search
- Subject Type: Physics
- Duration: 17 min., 8 sec.



Small Group Activity

- Looking at transcripts
- Facilitators, Barriers
- What works?
- What doesn't work so well?
- Comments?





Recommendations

- See Checklist in handout
- Use basic interpersonal skills
- Greetings & Closings
 - Beware robotic scripts & negative closure
- Awareness user may need reassurance
- Awareness of appropriate self-disclosure



More Recommendations

- Humor – importance of acknowledgment
- Inclusion (we, let's, etc.)
- Take cue from user & mirror relational strategies
- Don't be afraid to use informal language, abbrev. & emoticons as appropriate ;)

Dealing with Rude or Impatient Users

- See Checklist
- Don't mirror rude behavior!
- Apologize when appropriate
- Dealing with impatience (pls hurry up!)
- Dealing with complaints
- Don't take it personally!





In Conclusion...

- Research results are from the project *Seeking Synchronicity: Evaluating Virtual Reference Services from User, Non-User, & Librarian Perspectives*, M. L. Radford & L. S. Connaway, Co-Principal Investigators.
- Funded by IMLS, Rutgers University & OCLC, Inc.
- Special thanks: J. DeAngelis Williams, P. Confer, D.M. Dragos, M. A. Reilly, J. Strange, S. Sabolcsi-Boros, & T. Dickey.
- **See bibliography for additional readings!**