Overcoming Resistance:
Motivating Students to Join the Information Age

by
Gail MacKay, MLS
Bibliographic Instruction Librarian
Indiana University Kokomo, IN
and
Joni Kanzler, MLS
Instructional Services Librarian
University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN

The suggestions gathered from the Talk Table can assist both the public library patron and the academic library student in gaining confidence in using the library. In the discussion, patron resistance was generally seen as anxiety created by inexperience with using libraries. The experience of the participants reflected that when students and patrons become oriented to the library, resistance and hesitation greatly diminish. Ideas offered by the group fell mainly into the categories of library resources and library instruction.

Library Resources: Electronic Catalogs and Anxiety

To alleviate anxiety generated by the library's computerized catalog, the group suggested reminding patrons that all library catalogs (computer or card) allow you to search for books by author, title, and subject. Often, just minimal reassurance that they still know something about libraries will enable students to feel a little less anxious about using new technology.

This same philosophy will also carry over into electronic periodical indexes. Even though the format is new, traditional indexing concepts are still alive and thriving in the nation's libraries. Patrons will still find basic citation information (author, title, publication, volume, date, and page numbers) regardless of whether they are searching print or electronic formats.

Participants mentioned that handouts and guides to using the library resources are an effective way to assist students in using the library. It was generally agreed that often, printed instructions are most effective for those with some prior experience in using library resources while less experienced users need more interaction with and instruction from a librarian.

Library Instruction

Talk Table participants agreed that the most effective library instruction, whether formal or informal, happens when the library user is actively participating in the process. Whenever possible, the library patron should be the one at the keyboard or the one turning the pages of a print index.

The group shared ideas on ways to involve and engage student participation in instructional activities. Suggestions ranged from guided hands-on practice activities to allowing students some exploring time on a given topic. Additionally, the concept of having students work in groups and then report their findings to their classmates was explored. This practice allows the students themselves to demonstrate to classmates effective skills for using library resources, whether print or electronic. The desired outcome of these instructional methods is for the students to develop more positive attitudes about using the library by being actively involved in the instruction process.

The group concluded that most library users just need a little bit of patience with themselves and some reassurance from a librarian to overcome their resistance to today's library and to become willing participants in the information age.

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