
I will admit to having a strong dislike for "how-to" books that over-simplify complex activities such as reference service. This is not what Ford has done with *Crash Course in Reference*. This text is intended to provide a self-directed overview of foundational principles, practices and tools for effective reference service. Her stated intention was to create a textbook for people working in libraries who do not possess graduate training in librarianship. This is a significant distinction: this was not envisioned as a graduate textbook, and on its own I would find it inadequate for this purpose. Some confusion surrounding its intended audience might arise from the author's use of "librarian" as a generic term for those working in libraries, rather than library professionals, even though she defines how she uses this term.

Ford is well qualified to write such a text, having more than two decades experience in reference roles in libraries and recent experience as a professor of library science. This first-hand experience was evident when she described aspects of reference service. The author is American and the resources and examples she used reflect this context. There are other books on the topic of reference services, policy development or collection development but few with the broad scope of this text or directed to this particular audience, and certainly none this affordable.

The book has twelve chapters, with a very detailed table of contents and a subject index. Each chapter includes a discussion of the topic, a summary section, review questions and endnotes. Regrettably many of the review questions are rote level and although there are some application questions, I would have liked to have seen more. There is no separate bibliography, as chapter twelve serves as the bibliography of works cited in each chapter, general reference tools, further reading and Web links. This could serve as a very useful guide for building a core collection for a small reference service. As always, as soon as one commits a Web address or hot online tool to print, the list is dated by the time it is published. Some recommended Web addresses, including those from the ALA, are already dead links, but generally the online resources here are established services and unlikely to disappear soon.

The chapters were clearly laid out with appropriate subject headings and a logical flow. Chapter one began by describing reference service and set the format for the next two chapters: communicating with patrons and building the collection. The next five chapters described the search process generally, using print and online resources, and then focused on tools for particular kinds of information: books, articles, encyclopedias and ready reference. Ford briefly described these tools as she introduced them and outlined their strengths and limitations (e.g. Wikipedia vs. Britannica). It was hard, given the amount of space and the number of sources Ford felt obliged to include, to provide more than a cursory analysis of each; however, I found her approach balanced and careful. These chapters also included screen captures of various databases and Websites. The formatting and quality of these were uneven, and although it did add to the visual appeal of these sections, with the rapid evolution of database interfaces, the
instructional value of these images is limited. Chapter Nine discussed the role of the
Web not just as an information source but also as an access and marketing tool. I was
pleased to find chapters both on "reference ethics" and "networking". The ethics chapter
introduced the reader to codes of ethics and the ethical obligations of librarians. Ford
then turned to "twenty-first century ethical dilemmas" and the importance of creating
library policies. She does not leave the reader there, but rather offers a number of
resources to aid in policy development. Her networking chapter explored the librarian's
role in the local and library communities. Ford lists associations and continuing
education opportunities valuable for the developing librarian, though these are all
American. It would be valuable for some enterprising author to develop a companion
directory for Canadian audiences. Her admonitions to become proactive in developing
competence and expertise were well taken, and she framed this obligation as a matter
of public trust.

Though written for the non-professional, it would be a mistake to consider it "dumbed
down." Ford is careful to provide definitions for librarian jargon such as "opac" or "meta-
search engine", remembering her audience, but is not afraid to explore difficult
questions such as ethics, confidentiality, and professional competence. I was pleased
with the depth of works cited in the notes and bibliographies, including standard library
reference and collection development textbooks found on many library school reading
lists. There are also frequent references to guidelines and resources available through
professional associations. This kind of referencing adds weight to the author's words
and communicates to the reader that this is more than one person's opinion of "doing
reference." These references additionally provide interested readers the opportunity to
explore beyond the materials Ford presents, as good instruction should. Apart from the
small criticisms noted above, my greatest concern with this work is that it attempts to
cover a lot of material and might fail Ford's own injunction not to "overwhelm patrons
with information" (p. 15). It might be valuable for the reader to partner with a
professional librarian in order work through the material. I would also like to have seen
greater discussion of the role of instruction in reference, but Ford was already ambitious
in what she chose to cover.

I have worked with volunteers in small community libraries, as well as paraprofessionals
in academic contexts, and I cannot overstress the value of ongoing skills training. If you
are wondering how to begin, then I recommend Ford's guide. This user-friendly
resource will begin building the skills that will give your staff the confidence that they
can provide effective reference service.

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