

(Exercise developed by Margaret Irby Nichols; used with permission)

## **REFERENCE INTERVIEW CASE STUDIES**

The interviews which follow vary in quality. Read each one carefully, noting positive and negative aspects of each exchange. Since body language, environment, voice, etc. cannot be observed, judge each case on the verbal exchange only.

### **INTERVIEW A**

**Librarian:** Good morning. May I assist you with something today?

**Patron:** Can you tell me where the psychology books are located?

**Librarian:** They are in the far stacks near the west windows. (As she rises from her chair and starts toward the section, she continues to talk with the patron.) Could I help you find something on some particular aspect of psychology?

**Patron:** Oh, I just want to browse through what you have.

**Librarian:** We have quite a number of books on psychology. Some focus on counseling, some on behavior, some on abnormal psychology. If you tell me more about what you have in mind, I may be able to help you identify some books that would be useful.

**Patron:** I think I need something about behavior. You know, what makes people act like they do.

**Librarian:** If you have a specific behavior problem in mind that you would share with me, that would be helpful.

**Patron:** Well, it's my daughter. We've always been close and gotten along fine, but lately we seem to be on a collision course. I guess what I need is to know how to handle her or know how to react when she becomes difficult.

**Librarian:** Are you talking about a teenager or a younger child?

**Patron:** She's almost fourteen. She's never been a problem before, but recently even the slightest thing becomes an issue. I must be doing something wrong.

**Librarian:** Perhaps you want something about adolescent psychology, especially mother/daughter relationships, in order for you to better understand why your daughter feels and reacts as she does. Is that what you have in mind?

**Patron:** That sounds like what I'm looking for.

**Librarian:** We have several good books on that subject. A new one came in the other day.

Let's see what's in right now. And there may be some magazine articles that would be useful.

(After selecting several books to check out and articles to photocopy, the patron starts to leave the library.)

**Librarian:** I hope you found something that will be helpful. If the material turns out not to be what you need, please come back. There is a lot of information available on that topic.

### INTERVIEW B

The librarian is busy at the reference desk with a work assignment that is due later in the day and does not see the patron approach the desk.

**Patron:** I hate to bother you, but I need some magazines.

**Librarian:** You'll find them in the racks on the wall (as she points and quickly returns to her work).

(After several minutes, the patron returns to the desk).

**Patron:** I'm not sure how to find what I want in those magazines.

**Librarian:** Maybe you need an index to periodicals. Would that help you?

**Patron:** An index, yes, I guess that's what I need. Are periodicals magazines?

**Librarian:** Yes, magazines are one type of periodical. Try looking in the Reader's Guide. It indexes popular magazines. It's that set of green books on the table. See if that helps.

**Patron:** I think I used it once, but what do I look under?

**Librarian:** That depends on what you are looking for. What are you trying to find?

**Patron:** Something about earthquakes, I think. You know, like that bad one in Japan recently.

**Librarian:** (As she finally puts down her work.) What would you like to find out about earthquakes?

**Patron:** Well, it isn't really about earthquakes, I guess.

**Librarian:** What are you looking for?

**Patron:** Something about the problems children have after going through something like that.

**Librarian:** Then articles about earthquakes are not what you want. I think you need material that deals with trauma resulting from natural disasters. Is that what you have in mind?

**Patron:** That sounds sort of like what my teacher said. Have you got anything on that?

**Librarian:** Have you a copy of the assignment?

**Patron:** (As she digs out a copy of her assignment.) It's for this paper I have to write that's due tomorrow.

**Librarian:** If it's due tomorrow, you should have been working on it long before now. I'll show you where to look, but next time you have an assignment, don't wait until the last minute to come to the library.

### INTERVIEW C

A boy of about 10 approaches the desk.

**Librarian:** What can I do for you today?

**Patron:** Have you got any books on weird things?

**Librarian:** What do you mean by weird things?

**Patron:** You know, things like sea monsters and vampires.

**Librarian:** Is this for school or do you just want to read about them?

**Patron:** It's for school, but I like to read about creepy things anyway. You know, about that Lock Mess or whatever his name is. Have you got any books about him?

- Librarian:** We might, but first I need to know what your teacher wants. Are you to just read a book about weird things or do you have to write a report about them?
- Patron:** She said to look it up in the library.
- Librarian:** What is your assignment? Do you have a copy of it?
- Patron:** She gave us a sheet, but I didn't bring it with me.
- Librarian:** What did your teacher say?
- Patron:** She said to write at least a page about something weird.
- Librarian:** Are you to read a book about something weird and then write a report about it?
- Patron:** I'm supposed to look it up in the library and write about it.
- Librarian:** Did she say it had to be about sea monsters or vampires?
- Patron:** No, I think she said it could be anything weird we like to know about, but I like sea monsters. Do you have anything on them?
- Librarian:** I think we do. Let's see what we can find that you would like.