Prompt: View all the following videos and links. Post a min. 150-word posting regarding your reaction to all the videos. Speak about one or two new factors or techniques you discovered from the viewing. What do you think of the approach taken in terms of the reference interview in “Ellen the Bad Librarian” as viewed in videos? Did Ellen do a better job the second time around? Comment on your past reference interview experience as a student seeking information.

2. Ellen the bad librarian http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOVioAv-Z2U; Ellen the better librarian http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mr087CoHS00
3. Interview with a Reference Librarian http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xur5G2R_XRI
4. Five Steps to An Effective Reference Interview http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCGRkVh7N3s&feature=youtu.be

“The Reference Interview: Conduct over Content”

Through different illustrative techniques, all five of these videos reinforced the same core concepts of a reference interview, as also expressed by Cassell and Hireman in Reference and Information Services in the 21st Century.

“The Reference Interview” was very cute, and I liked the adage that a good reference interview is the “difference between finding the answer and being lost in the stacks.”

In “Ellen the Bad Librarian,” Ellen was too distracted and busy to effectively assist the student. Her body language in particular was immediately negative and made the student feel uncomfortable. According to Cassell and Hireman, body language is key in establishing initial rapport with the user (p. 17). “Ellen the Better Librarian” definitely demonstrated this, as she turned away from her computer towards the student, as well as maintained eye contact immediately and throughout the reference interaction. According to “Five Steps to an Effective Reference Interview” Ellen the Better was able to "set the tone" early and correctly.

Ellen the Better also illustrated the benefit of asking open-ended questions. For instance, if I were in the reference position (and it was occurring where I live), I would have assumed that the student’s "water crisis" information need meant California’s drought versus population growth problem, when what he actually needed were more philosophical sources about "who owns water." At the same time, I also appreciate that Cassell and Hireman advocate for both open- and close-ended questioning (p. 19). For example, asking Ellen’s student the close-ended question “Do you need current or historical information?” may prompt the him to
consider a different option of available information, whereas the open-ended "What sort of information do you need?" is a good starting point but also may be too broad for the student to answer. I think that especially when dealing with non-expert patrons, close-ended questions may be particularly helpful in guiding their information-search learning.

In a study of 8th graders’ information search skills, Tu, Shih, & Tsai (2008) found that close-ended prompts allowed the majority of students to search more successfully. Since students often associate overall assignment success (rather than process success) with learning, this supports the idea that close-ended questions are useful for non-expert patrons. Harmeyer (2010) agrees, in his article reflecting on personal experience incorporating information literacy with reference services. He also goes into the importance of showing the patron how and why each step is done in the reference search process. The latter is an important step in the reference interview process described by Cassell and Hireman too.

Finally, the underlying message in all steps of the reference interview is, as Cassell and Hireman state, that "conduct is as important as content" (p. 15). Patrons return for more help from librarians who they view as being more respectful, and each individual step of the interview process combines to create the ultimate experience in good reference conduct.

References

