

READ: All about it! Reimagining reference stats to demonstrate value and guide public services with the READ Scale©

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Abstract: The READ Scale© adds a qualitative dimension to reference statistics by recording the effort, knowledge, skills, and teaching employed in reference transactions. The Scale provides copious data that can be used to inform reference staffing and training, library instruction, liaison, marketing, outreach, and campus partnerships. Results can also be used to improve way finding, facilities, and user interfaces. Libraries can analyze READ data and implement changes in public services based on their findings.

What is the READ Scale©?

“The READ Scale© (Reference Effort Assessment Data)© is a six-point scale tool for recording qualitative statistics by placing an emphasis on recording effort, knowledge, skills, and teaching used by staff during a reference transaction.”

Bella Karr Gerlich and G. Lynn Berard. “Testing the Viability of the READ Scale© (Reference Effort Assessment Data)©: Qualitative Statistics for Academic Reference Services.” *College & Research Libraries*, 71.2 (2010): 116-137.

The six levels of the READ Scale©:

1. Directional; no consultation of resources; requires no specialized knowledge or expertise	What are the library hours? Where are the printers/restrooms/scanners?
2. Informational; requires only minimal specific knowledge; nominal resource consultation	Using the catalog to find call numbers; providing library policy information; troubleshooting printing problems
3. Reference knowledge & skills come into play; consultation of ready reference materials; minimal instruction in catalog, databases, etc.	Searching for a topic in the catalog; help with remote access to databases
4. Reference exchange is more supportive of user & more instruction-based; multiple resources consulted; consultation of subject specialists may be needed.	Complex searches in the online catalog, databases, and web; cross referencing resources; help with ILL
5. Extensive user instruction; subject specialists need to be consulted; research consultations w/user may be scheduled; “back and forth” dimension to reference dialogue; multiple resources consulted	Interdisciplinary consultations; question development assistance with graduate-level research
6. Very extensive user instruction; inquiries can’t be answered on the spot; primary and secondary resources may be used; covers “special library” type research services	Assistance with in-depth PhD or faculty research; collaborative and ongoing research

Implementing the READ Scale© at Auburn:

- A library faculty member gave an informational presentation and training session to all reference librarians to norm on READ Scale© question levels.
- Reference librarians were given two weeks to answer and categorize twelve “homework” questions. The department met to review and discuss their answers and scoring.
- Library Systems developed a Google Docs statistics form that was tested and implemented by library faculty, staff and student workers.
- Use of the scale began February 19, 2012 and continues to the present.
- The data presented graphically in this poster are primarily from 2.19.12 to 3. 10.12.

Typical application of READ Scale© data

- 1. Examine staffing:** Look at question patterns, question types, and time on task over the span of day, week and semester to make optimal use of available staff and provide best possible service. Data can be examined by modes of inquiry (i.e., question type), date, day of week, time of day, READ Scale© level 1-6, amount of time spent per question, and a combination of variables.

MORE Typical Applications of READ Scale© data

2. Develop training for new librarians, paraprofessionals, students and others who work at, and provide referrals to, the reference desk: Use archived questions for sample training materials and examples of typical inquiries.

- My professor told me to contact a business librarian. Who would that be?
- Does the library have *Political Poetry as Discourse: Rereading John Greenleaf Whittier, Ebenezer Elliott, and Hip-hop-ology*?
- I'm looking for an article in *JAMA* that is not available electronically. Can you help me find it?
- I need books on genetically engineered food.
- I need to find articles arguing that obesity is not a person's fault.

3. Provide continuing education and learning for library professionals by examining difficult questions and sharing strategies for answering them: Use subject specialists to expand colleagues' reference expertise.

- The cost of product placement in the movie *Talladega Nights*
- Epidemiological, meta-analysis, and empirical articles on multiple sclerosis and exercise endurance
- The molar extinction coefficient of naphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene
- The costs and benefits of the sanitary and phytosanitary measures related to trade

Additional applications of READ Scale© data:

Tracking questions by READ Scale© type and troubleshooting issues revealed by these questions can improve many of the libraries' public services:

1. Build information literacy. Use questions to uncover possible instruction needs, map instruction to ACRL Information Literacy Standards, and assess student learning from information literacy sessions.

- I need an article that discusses the bad effect of technology.
- I have been trying to find some [articles] that relate to the cruel treatment of African-Americans in *A Rose for Emily*.
- Having trouble finding sources on the benefits/risks of sugar vs. sweeteners for an information speech

~ Determines the nature and extent of the information needed>Defines and articulates the need for information>Identifies key concepts and terms that describe the information need--ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, ALA, 2000, S1; PI 1; Oe

~ Accesses needed information literacy effectively and efficiently>Constructs and implements effectively-designed search strategies>Identifies keywords, synonyms and related terms for the information needed--ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, ALA, 2000,S2; PI 2; Ob

- Do you have the book, *Nursing Diagnosis Handbook*?
- I need the 2004 volume of *Journal of 18th C. Studies*.
- How do I get this article? "Combustion characteristics of vegetable derived oils..." *Archivum Combustionis* 6 (1986) 23-37.

~ Accesses needed information effectively and efficiently>Retrieves information online or in person using a variety of methods>Uses various search systems to retrieve information in a variety of formats--ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, ALA, 2000,S2; PI 3; Oa

- I need to cite a figure from US DoT In APA.
- Can I use rap lyrics in my speech?
- I need to know how to format footnotes in Chicago style.

~ Understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally

~ Acknowledges the use of information sources in communicating the product or performance>Selects an appropriate documentation style and uses it consistently to cite sources>Understands many of the ethical, legal, and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology>Demonstrates an understanding of intellectual property, copyright, and fair use of copyrighted material--ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, ALA, 2000,S5; P3 ; Oa;S5; P1: Od

2. Highlight usability and interface issues:

-I'm having trouble using Article Linker in Academic Search Premier

-I'm having trouble with ALLIES. [universal borrowing]. The tutorial doesn't match my current search screens.

-I was not able to view the catalog on my cellphone. Could you look up a book for me?

3. Identify way finding concerns:

- Where is Special Collections (Lost and Found, the Media and Digital Resources Lab, Study Partners, etc.)?
- How do I get to the parking deck?
- I'm not sure where I'm supposed to go for the public history symposium luncheon.

4. Focus collection development efforts on items not in the collection that users are asking for:

- I cannot find these Man Ray books.
- Do you have a DVD collection?
- I would like to know if we have the new SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) journal.

5. Underscore value of resources in the collection—both those required to answer typical reference questions and those required to answer more in-depth questions:

- I am looking for 2 sources for my ENGL 1120 paper on three values of voodoo. Last time I found what I needed in Academic Search Premier. Will that help me with this question?
- I need to know how to install and use SciFinder Scholar for a literature review.
- I need to logon to Hoover's.

6. Record the often unseen or unmeasured (i.e., off-desk) liaison activity of 17 reference librarians identified and asked for by name at the reference desk:

- I would like to include in my manuscript a portrait of the magazine publisher James Dunwoody Brownson De Bow. Can you help me locate a public-domain image of him?
- How would William T. Harris, Commissioner of Education, have found the pieces to append to this reprinting of his own essay from the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1890?

7. Improve liaison relationships by answering questions that invite closer collaboration with faculty on assignments or students' use of the library:

- My instructor said there was a section in the library where I could find peer-reviewed articles for a paper.
- I can't access an article that was posted on Canvas.
- I need help finding online versions of three NASA commission reports mentioned in my class materials.
- My instructor posted a link to an article, but I am a distance student and I can't open it.

8. Target user groups for improved outreach:

- I'm an Auburn resident and I was wondering how I can check out books from the University.
- My student is in junior high and we need information about Mont Saint Michel in France. Can you help us?

9. Improve public relations and marketing. Publicity and marketing efforts, as well as financial resources, can be directed to specific populations and underutilized services based on user questions and requests.

- Does the library have computer locks? Headphones?
- How do I reserve a group study room? Can I get a study carrel?
- Where is the textbook reserve? Can textbooks be checked out from the library?
- How many books can a grad student check out?

10. Provide feedback to library partners (writing center, tutoring services, information technology office, etc.)

- I'm having problems with printing/accessing the wireless network.
- How do I make this copier work?
- There's no one at the Study Partners/Writing Center tutoring desk. How can I make an appointment?
- Is Caribou Coffee still out of oatmeal?

11. Improve Interlibrary loan/document delivery:

- When will I get my book? Can I renew an ILL book? (Distance student)
- I didn't get all of the pages of my ILL document.
- I need help filling out an ILL request.
- My online ILL request is coming back with an error message.

12. Advance development ideas to create endowments or gifts for frequently requested items:

- School supplies, standards, biomedical resources and databases, large microfilm sets, papers of individuals, rare and primary source materials, additional back files of databases are all things requested and recorded with the READ Scale®.

THE MOST IMPORTANT APPLICATION OF THE READ SCALE®: To record the valuable but behind-the-scenes work that can be used to tell the reference services story to administrators, both internal and external to the library.

Google Docs form for collecting data: <http://lib.auburn.edu/ReferenceForm/index.html>

Examples of possible types of data analysis over a three week period

The screenshot shows a Google Docs form with several dropdown menus. Blue arrows point from these menus to corresponding data analysis visualizations. The form fields include:

- Date and Time:** A date field with '12' selected.
- Question Type:** A dropdown menu with 'Face to face' selected. An arrow points to a list of options: Face to face, Phone, Email, Chat, Text.
- Contact Point:** A dropdown menu with 'Reference Desk' selected. An arrow points to a list of options: Reference Desk, Information Desk, Admin Office, Circulation, Government Docs, MDRL, Document Delivery, ER & Serials, Monographic Services, Systems, SPEC, LADC, Vet Med, Individual Office.
- Time spent:** A dropdown menu with '< 5 minutes' selected. An arrow points to a list of time intervals: < 5 minutes, 5 -> 10 minutes, 10 -> 15 minutes, 15 -> 20 minutes, 20 -> 25 minutes, 25 -> 30 minutes, 30 -> 45 minutes, 45 -> 60 minutes, 1 -> 1.5 hours, 1.5 -> 2 hours, > 2 hours.
- Result Code:** A dropdown menu with '1' selected. An arrow points to a list of options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Other elements include a calendar for September 2012, a 'link' for definitions, a 'Patron question' text area, and a 'Comments' text area.

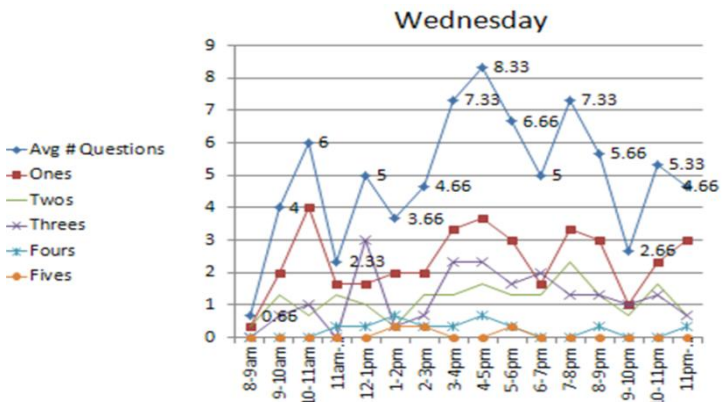
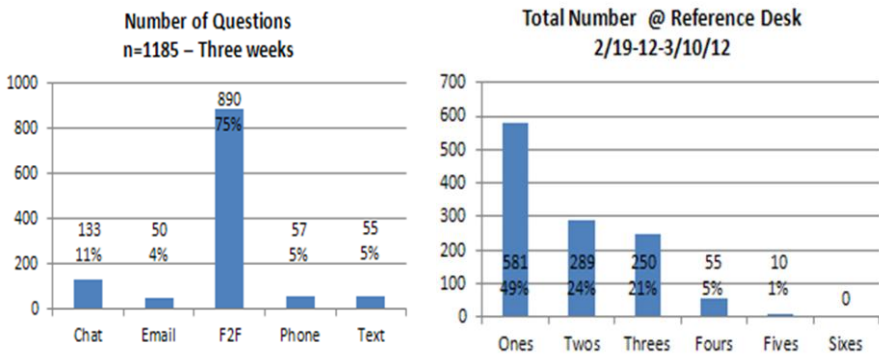


Figure 1: Number of questions at the reference desk by mode of inquiry over a three week period
 Figure 2: Number of questions at the reference desk by READ Scale® level over a three week period
 Figure 3: Average number of reference questions by hour and READ Scale® level over three Wednesdays