

Tina P. Franks

Let's race!

Supporting research anytime, anywhere learning

In my former life as a civil engineering design firm librarian, my path crossed with a co-worker who was a young engineer-in-training (EIT) who, according to the office grapevine, was preparing to take the Professional Engineer (PE) Exam.

Some folks have argued that the PE exam is one of the most difficult exams to pass. Many test takers found themselves having to sit for the exam multiple times before achieving a passing score.

It was his first visit to the library and he was only there because his supervisor sent him to retrieve items that were on reserve.

I try to capitalize on every opportunity when interacting with in-person users because it's a necessary step for cultivating repeat constituents. Since I had an opportunity to engage him in conversation, I delivered my well-rehearsed speech about how the library can help provide better service to his clients and build his own personal development.

He commented that he didn't need to use the library because he could find everything he needed on his own using Google. It's tempting to overlook a user who appears to be a confident searcher, but I'm tenacious about asking users if they need assistance or inquiring if they appear to be encountering difficulty.

I shared my favorite quote with him, "Google can bring you back 100,000 answers. A librarian can bring you back the right one."¹

He shrugged his shoulders and his facial expression showed his lack of agreement. The EIT was a millennial who was born at a time when visits to a physical library were not a necessary part of completing school assignments. He successfully navigated his college days by avoiding a librarian. Librarians routinely encounter users who echo the same self-confidence as the EIT. Our daily user interactions support the message that "...library users increasingly prefer to conduct research independently without the assistance of library staff."²

I'm a huge fan of Google, and I use it every day, but years as an experienced searcher helped to eliminate the unnecessary research results. It's mind boggling that 18,962 search results display in less than a second, but that doesn't really mean anything if I need to spend hours clicking on each link to see if it's credible information.

The EIT was a structural engineer working in the bridge inspection department. A normal day at work for these thrill-seeking folks was being strapped into a rappelling harness to inspect each part of the bridge while using rock climbing techniques. Google the phrase "bridge inspection images," and you will see jaw-dropping photos.

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I enjoy the challenge of recruiting unwilling library visitors and cultivating them into lifelong users. I'm very competitive, just like the young bridge inspectors who often debated which co-worker climbed the highest or fastest. Knowing this information gave me an idea of how to get my point across about the value of using the library and seeking out librarian expertise.

"I use Google every day just like you," I said to the EIT. "But I'll bet you that I can find information faster than you. Let's race!"

I sent him upstairs to get his laptop and the bibliography of articles he needed to study for his PE exam. When he returned to the library, he sat down at a nearby table, opened his laptop and smiled. I could sense he was confident he could beat the middle-aged librarian.

On your mark!

Get set!

Go!

We started typing, and it didn't take long for me to find the first article.

I turned and watched him as his fingers were flying across the keyboard and he frantically tapped the mouse pad. After several minutes, he stopped typing, turned to me, and asked, "How about best 2 out of 3?"

Even though he encountered failure looking for the first article, he was engaged enough to continue searching for the articles he needed. Alas, he lost all three rounds to the librarian.

Ultimately, he ended up the overall winner because he witnessed firsthand the

value of asking the librarian for assistance. He discarded his unsuccessful searching methods and increased the amount of time he spent working on his client projects.

He also ended up being one of my frequent library users and a strong library advocate. I experienced an increase in reference requests from young engineers after our "race," and I would like to believe it was the result of hearing about the value of the library from a peer.

I shared this story as part of my candidate presentation when I interviewed for my current position. I'm surprised at the number of colleagues who mention to me how much they enjoyed listening to the funny story, but, more importantly, that it served as a useful example of student engagement.

While my unconventional "Let's Race" technique may not work for every librarian with all users, it's a successful method to engage students anywhere and anytime, while challenging their assumption that librarians are not a necessary part of the research process.

Notes

1. "Neil Gaiman," Good Reads website, accessed September 4, 2013, www.goodreads.com/quotes/427823-google-can-bring-you-back-100-000-answers-a-librarian-can.

2. Lesley Moyo, "Perceived Ease of Use and Student Satisfaction and Engagement with the Library," in *Student Engagement and the Academic Library* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2012), 46. *zz*

"Putting information . . ." (cont. from page 95)

Suggested readings

King-Sears, Margaret E. "Designing and Delivering Learning Center Instruction." *Intervention in School and Clinic* 42, no. 3 (2007): 137-147. <http://ezproxyles.flo.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/211755347?accountid=12060>.

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tion." Ph.D thesis, Lesley University, 2011.

Martin, Susan F. and Andre Green. "Striking a Balance: Advancing English Language Learners' Linguistic Fluency Through Learning Centers." *The Science Teacher* 79, no. 4 (2012): 40-43. <http://ezproxyles.flo.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1017897394?accountid=12060>. *zz*