

## Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience

**It's time for some "virtual field trips" to explore the Web sites of libraries providing chat reference.**

Your library's Web site is the gateway to its virtual reference service. A well-organized navigational structure, uniform naming conventions and links from many areas of the Web site, will ensure that patrons are able to quickly and easily locate and use the virtual reference service.

The VRS Marketing [Guidelines](#) contain excellent suggestions for developing the Web presence and user experience for your virtual reference service.

In the "Anytime, Anywhere Answers" training program, many learners said that the Virtual Field Trips were the most valuable part of their training.

Here's how you can take some field trips through a variety of chat reference services.

- ✓ First, using this list, select several library Web sites to visit. You may want to choose a combination of public, academic and special libraries. (Be sure to visit the Web site of an individual library, not the Web site for the consortium.)

[Members](#) of California's Ask Now consortium  
AskColorado participating [libraries](#)  
[Members](#) of InfoAnyTime (Connecticut)  
Boston Library [Consortium](#) (academic libraries)  
KANAnswer [members](#)  
Keystone [network](#) (Pennsylvania)  
KnowItNow 24/7 Ohio [libraries](#)  
L-Net (Oregon) [members](#)  
AskUsNow! (Maryland) participating [libraries](#)  
QandA NJ [members](#)

- ✓ Second, use the form below to record your impressions of the Web site.
- ✓ Third, record your overall impressions of the sites that you visited. What did you observe that you want to remember when planning or improving your library's gateway to its chat reference service?

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a division of the Office of the Secretary of State.

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## VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP QUESTIONS

Site visited:

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Date/Time:

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## BRANDING

**What is the name of the service? What image or logo is used to “brand” the service? How is the service described? Is library jargon used? Do you think the name, image, and description are appealing and attention-getting?**

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**Is the link easy to find on the main library Web page? Are there links to the virtual reference service from all areas of the library’s Web site? From the catalog? From the online databases? From the circulation information page?**

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# ACCESSIBILITY

**Is the service open to anyone? Is a library card or student ID number required for access? What other restrictions exist? Where are these restrictions stated?**

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**Is an e-mail address required or recommended? If not required, is it clear how the user will receive a transcript of the transaction?**

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**When is the real-time reference service open? What are the user's options when the service is closed? Is the service available on holidays?**

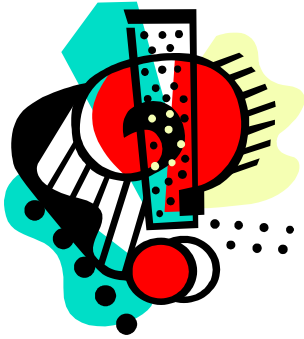
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## SCOPE OF SERVICE

**Are there limits on the kinds of questions answered? Does the service offer more than simple, factual answers? If targeted to college students, is it clear how much research help will be provided?**

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**Does the service promote information literacy by offering to demonstrate how to find answers or use the Web more effectively? Are links to starting points for Web searching provided? Links to how to cite Web sources?**

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# AUTHORITY

**Who are the staff providing answers through this service? What are their qualifications? Subject expertise?**

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**Is there any disclaimer about providing medical or legal advice? Are there any statements about copyright restrictions or about citing online sources?**

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# CONFIDENTIALITY and DATA GATHERED

**What kind of information is gathered in advance about the user or about the question? Reading level or level of information sought? Homework assignment? Phone number?**

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**How is this information used? What is the privacy or confidentiality policy?  
Where can a user find the privacy policy?**

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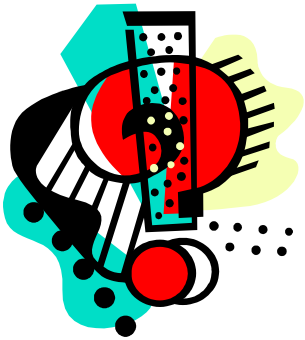
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**Is there an option to remain anonymous? If so, is there an explanation of  
what that option means?**

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## **GENERAL IMPRESSIONS**

**Some things that I want to remember for planning and  
implementing our virtual reference service are:**

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