

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIPS

Getting Ready for Your Site Visits



To prepare for your Virtual Field Trips activity:

First, read the article by Steve Coffman and Abe Anhang on the future of traditional reference librarians. (“The great reference debate.” *American Libraries*, March 2002, p. 50+) This article is available through Expanded Academic Index. What do you think about their visions of reference service? Are reference librarians toast?

Second, read the [focus group results](#) from the Washington Statewide Virtual Reference Project. Pay particular attention to the users’ comments about not knowing what to expect from a library and that they don’t want to feel stupid when using a library or being helped by library staff. Think about virtual reference services from the users’ perspectives.

For this activity, your objective is to explore the Web sites of libraries providing virtual reference, answering a series of questions. During your field trips, you may ask a real-time question if you wish, but the reference transaction itself is part of another activity (Secret Patron).

You will be exploring virtual reference services from five perspectives:

- **Branding**
- **Accessibility**
- **Scope of service**
- **Authority**
- **Privacy and data gathered**



Time to take a Virtual Field Trip!

- 1. From the Virtual Reference Service Directory, find three library Web sites to explore.**
- 2. Print out copies of the Virtual Field Trip Questions, one for each Web site you visit. Use these questions to evaluate the sites.**
- 3. Using the questions in the Sharing Your Experience sheet as a guide, summarize your impressions and post to the virtual reference training listserv. Which sites will serve as good examples for you in planning and implementing your virtual reference service?**