



Strengthen Your Staff's Searching Skills with Search Camp!



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What Is Search Camp?

Search Camp began many years ago at the University of Minnesota as a search-focused training meeting for reference desk staff during the summer months. The model evolved, and now **Search Camp is a hands-on, regularly-scheduled, monthly search training mechanism.** It provides a forum to continually develop the strong search skills that are the foundation of excellent service.

Quick Facts

- Format is a monthly 60-minute meeting.
- Average of 15 people at each session.
- Attendees represent a variety of job classes (librarians, paraprofessionals, students), and a mix of education and experience levels.
- Meeting focuses on conducting literature searches in MEDLINE and CINAHL.

Why Do It This Way?

- Helps ensure a basic level of search competence among staff.
- Service demand has shifted from mediated searching to helping users research their own questions.
- Discussing the approach to a search with another person is good practice for coaching patrons.
- Allows staff to practice real search questions in a low pressure environment, and receive instant feedback.
- Good forum to share ideas and expertise.
- Fosters an atmosphere of teamwork.

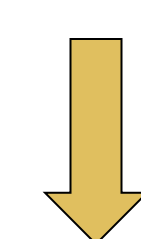
The Process of Search Camp

Counselor: An experienced searcher with access to a wide variety of patron questions.

Campers: Any staff members who work with patrons requiring search assistance.

Campground: A computer lab or a room with laptops for hands-on search, and with a projector for discussing and debriefing afterward.

Counselor distributes one or two search questions and gives any necessary information or instructions.



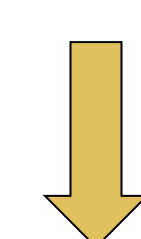
Campers pair up (more experienced with less experienced works best) at a computer.



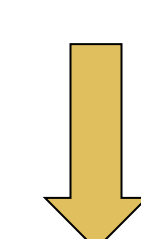
Counselor allows ample time (15-20 minutes per question) for camper pairs to discuss strategies and work on the searches.



Group reconvenes.



Counselor facilitates a discussion of the search question, and demonstrates a good approach.



Questions are posted to the search blog for later training or practice.

Tips For Success

Things That Work Well

- Use real patron questions in the form in which they were received (while protecting privacy). Being able to formulate a researchable question from what a patron asks is half the battle, and practice with real questions is extremely valuable.
- Whenever possible, choose questions that have widely applicable search elements – these are more useful training mechanisms than atypically difficult questions.
- Encourage staff to think not only about finding the perfect article, but about how they would coach patrons to be able to continue the research on their own.
- Do Search Camp consistently (at least monthly).

Things To Avoid

- Don't send out the question in advance and ask people to prepare ahead of time - the debriefing is too far removed from the actual search, which compromises the spontaneity of the process.
- Don't put a camper on the spot to lead the search discussion.

Acknowledgements

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