The Inform(ed) Reference Interview
Using Inform7 to create a reference interview training tool for graduate assistants
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Introduction
The Choose-Your-Own-Adventure (CYOA) Reference Interview game arose from a need to introduce new graduate assistants to practical reference interview scenarios during training. “Interactive fiction” was an ideal tool for this purpose, as it encourages the player to learn about reference interview best practices in an active environment.

What is a CYOA game?
Interactive Fiction (IF) commonly refers to fiction or stories that require reader participation. CYOA is just one flavor of IF, and can be either print or electronic (think of the choose-your-own-adventure novels from your childhood). The player navigates through the story by selecting from a list of choices. New information becomes available based on the choices the player makes. In the case of our CYOA reference interview, the player receives information or “Knowledge Nuggets” from the patron based on the quality of questions asked.

Project Goals
1. Give new graduate assistants opportunity to practice reference interview while introducing them to the RUSA “Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers”
2. Teach effective use of open & closed questions
3. Validate interactive fiction as a viable training tool

Methodology
While creating the CYOA game, we wanted to follow a user-centered and bottom-up approach to using technology. After evaluating available software (Inklewriter, Inform7, Twine, hand-coding in HTML/JavaScript), we decided to use Inform7 not only because it offered a CYOA add-on but also because it was free and open source. To enable online play, we used iPalyF.com’s parser called Parchment.

To ensure our methodology was sound, we met with the assessment librarian to develop our assessment measures (a survey and focus group questions) based on our goals. We kept our end-user in mind by conducting user testing with graduate students who were not familiar with the reference interview to assist in assessing the pedagogical aspects of the game. User testing consisted of one in-person session and web-based user testing via a survey.

Ultimately, by considering our users throughout the process, we created a training game that teaches the reference interview and the RUSA “Guidelines” in an enjoyable way.

Creative Process
• Started with outcomes: what would be best and worst case scenarios of reference interview?
• Drafted backstory, using guiding questions:
  - Why is the patron asking this particular question?
  - What kind of day is she having?
  - What else is happening around the desk?
  - What are you (the librarian) currently doing?
  - What has the patron already done before coming to the desk?
• Drafted story using XMind (see image above)
  - Creating the game visually allowed for complex connections between questions and answers.
  - Planned for incorporating RUSA Guidelines into each “ending” of the game
• Coded game in Inform7
• Since Inform7 allows for the creation of objects which the player can retrieve, created “knowledge nuggets” which reflect the information which the player has received from the patron. “Knowledge nuggets” reflect the quality of questions asked.
• Developed scoring system based on “knowledge nuggets” obtained
• Planned assessment (user testing) based on learning goals

User Testing Results
Change layout for readability
“Some sort of differentiation between various blocks of text would make it a lot easier to progress and to read.”
“It should have pictures.” “I think it’s fine without pictures.”
“Break up text more - maybe different colors?”
Solution: Changed order of knowledge nuggets, and added line between each interaction. Next release may alternate colors.

Personal or stylistic differences
“Scores are based on the answers of a patron who isn’t in front of me, and since I can’t read them on an emotional level, my answers are going to be different.”
“Sequence was representative of a real reference interview.”
“Some options felt blunt.”
“I liked the knowledge nuggets as rewards.”
Solution: Each librarian brings her/his own style to the reference interview. While not everyone agreed with the way each question was worded, the game sparked conversation and debate among the user testing participants. The game will expose players to one way of conducting a reference interview, but will be most successful in an environment where players can thoughtfully discuss their results.

Best Practices
• Set clear goals for project
• Designate roles (story writer, coder, etc.)
• Allow sufficient time to write the story and then code the game
• Be consistent when writing the game code (declare pages in same way; printing mind map and labeling it helped with consistency)
• Test the game (for both functionality and pedagogical goals)
• Fix errors while proof reading or during initial testing
• Conduct user testing with intended audience

Future Plans
• In the future we hope our Choose Your Own Reference Interview Adventure will be used to train incoming graduate students. Our user testing indicates the game helps start conversations about the reference interview process.
• We hope future training sessions will be evaluated to learn if the game is a helpful training tool or if further modifications need to be made.
• We hope to develop additional interactive fiction-style scenarios. These could include: E-Resources troubleshooting; Difficult patron interactions; Helping patron refine a research topic.
• We aspire to publish our development process as well as our assessment results since games are less commonly used for library staff development than they are for patron education.

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