Readers' Advisory Conversation

The readers' advisory conversation takes place between a reader and a library staff member about books and reading. This conversation includes the readers' advisory interview, the determination of appeal factors, reading suggestions, and the follow-up, both immediately and over the long term.

Included in the readers' advisory conversation section of the toolkit are suggestions for participating in a readers' advisory conversation by means of:

Using interview skills to clarify customer's interests
1. Approach
2. Conversation or interview
3. Actions to offer suggestions
4. Closing and follow-up

Understanding appeal
5. Identifying and using appeal factors
6. Recommending books in alternative formats

Participating in the conversation in alternative ways
7. Social media and digital resources
8. Personalized reading lists
9. Integrating RA into your program and services

Appendix – Bibliography and Learning Resources

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What are the overall benefits of developing the readers' advisory conversation?

With the rise of quick customer-access information on the Internet, reference requests are declining in most public libraries. Readers' advisory is a unique service that only qualified and engaged library staff offer. This service can continue to be the basis for increased use of libraries in the future.

Libraries will be viewed as a place that supports readers and facilitates further reading of the library's collection, which in turn will enhance the library's profile in the community.

Customers who participate in successful readers' advisory conversations and receive good suggestions will borrow items in the short term, and are more likely to return for more suggestions and books over the long term.

Staff will be engaged in serving customers who read for pleasure, a service that promotes sharing their own reading experience. These interactions will develop staffs' ability to assist customers with readers' advisory requests.

Matching reader interest and staff expertise will increase collection use beyond popular bestsellers as a variety of books are matched with new readers.

These benefits will be expanded upon and reinforced through the practical examples and recommended reading in this toolkit.

Using Interview Skills to Clarify Customer's Interests

1 – Approach

How do you approach the readers' advisory Interview?

Libraries must create an atmosphere that encourages and invites conversation. The space should be inviting and leave visual cues (a comfortable reading chair near a service point) that encourage contemplation and requests for assistance. Service points should be uncluttered and well-staffed. Consider the extent to which the library's best resources (staff members) are hidden as gatekeepers behind large desks, and the message this sends to customers. Using clear signage and labelling helps direct the independent customer. Effective signage indicates the location of collections, highlights databases such as Novelist, and promotes reader's advisory service and staff assistance. Well-stocked displays and genre arrangements of materials can make the collection more accessible to customers. Annotated lists, newsletters for readers, and printed booklists (such as "if you like") create a climate that encourages reading, and gives the impression that the library is interested in the reader. Promoting staff picks also humanizes staff and reminds visitors that they, too, are passionate readers.

As customers enter the library, staff should greet them and make them feel comfortable – many library users find approaching staff intimidating or risky. Staff should acknowledge customers with welcoming body language. They should also stop other activities and focus their attention on the customer and her needs. While there is considerable work to do in the library, staff should nevertheless be polite, and when approached, give customers respect and attention. Staff should address customers before looking at a screen, and not immediately consult a computer to solve a query.

As staff rove through the library completing tasks and filling book displays, they need to be aware of customers and offer help without being intrusive. Even something as simple as greeting them, relaxes customers, and lets them know that staff are available. A simple question such as "Do you need help finding anything?" opens the door for a potential conversation. Remember that many readers are reluctant to ask for help.

Identifying staff with name tags or "Ask Me" buttons indicates that they work there and provides a prompt for assistance. Staff should demonstrate active listening, reflection, and confirmation of the customer's request. The most effective tone of voice is welcoming and not rushed or harried. Library management should encourage their staff to support reading by initiating conversations about books with colleagues and customers.

2 – Conversation or Interview

What is the readers' advisory interview?

The readers' advisory interview is an opportunity to connect with readers and match them with their reading, listening, or viewing interests. This interview shares some similarities with the reference interview. The readers' advisory interview, however, requires not one answer but a range of suggestions drawing upon a broad array of supporting tools and terminology. It is important to stress that the techniques used in readers advisory service can be practiced and learned. Staff should always remain neutral and non-judgemental about customers' reading

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choices. As Betty Rosenberg has reminded us, "Never apologize for your reading tastes."

What is the difference between the readers' advisory interview and a reference interview?

In both the reference and readers' advisory interview, the goal is to identify what the person wants or needs. Both types of interviews use open-ended questioning to help identify and narrow the initial query. A body of print, online, and local resources is available to support reference and readers' advisory searches. But unlike the RA inquiry with its range of potential responses, the reference interview often results in a specific answer. A customer seeking reference help often comes to a librarian with a general understanding of the direction of their research. A reader, on the other hand, does not typically know what she wants, a situation that can result in a variety of possible reading paths. Many readers may not even know how to articulate what they like. Unique to the RA conversation is a discussion of a reader's experience with a book. Staff identify factors that appeal to the reader and translates them into a range of suggestions.

How do you conduct the readers' advisory interview?

Staff converse with readers in order to find appropriate suggestions for them. Interview skills are used to clarify readers' interests in order to understand their needs. By listening to a customer, staff identify the elements of a story that are important to her (such as plot, characterization, setting and length). It is important to find the right fit between a reader and the books she want at this time in her life.

A customer might approach you with a question such as: "I'm looking for a good book." Remember that the term "good" is relative and individual. Good to one person might be a novel by John Grisham, and to another, a classic by Charles Dickens. This is why it is essential to engage customers in conversation and listen to what they like to read, listen, or view.

During the conversation, use open-ended questions such as the following to gather information:
- Tell me about a book (or film or audio recording) you have enjoyed
- Tell me what you enjoyed about this book
- Tell me about any favourite authors you have
- Tell me why you like this book or author
- Can you tell me more about. . .?

Open-ended questions allow the reader to articulate in their own words what they like (or do not like). Asking close-ended questions such as: "Do you like mysteries?" elicits a yes or no answer and does not invite the customer to engage in a conversation about their preferences.

Practice the following role-play situation with colleagues to gain experience in negotiating the RA interview. One of you can act as the staff person and the other, the customer. The person playing the customer reads through each scenario and begins the conversation with the question in quotation marks. Remember to let your colleague ask questions to draw out what you are looking for.

> Example #1
> You have just finished reading the *Kite Runner*. You were absolutely fascinated with the descriptions of pre-war Afghanistan. You would like to read anything else

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with this kind of setting. You are not interested in a modern day setting. You approach the staff person with this question: "I am looking for a book that describes life in Afghanistan."

Example #2

You like popular fiction and try to read what is on the bestseller list. In the past you have really enjoyed David Baldacci, John Grisham, and Robert Ludlum. You enjoy books that have a fast pace and are suspenseful, but you do not enjoy anything with an historical bent. You approach the library staff with this statement: "I'm looking for something good to read. I've checked your bestseller list but can't seem to find any of the books on the shelves."

In the role-playing activity, use both print and electronic readers' advisory tools, as well as any internal resources you have developed (such as booklists, read-alike lists, displays, and newsletters) to assist customers. Introduce them to readers' advisory tools and explain how they can be found (in the branch, at home, and from the library website). Many readers are delighted to learn about the existence of such tools. They love the fact that can henceforth explore them on their own. Continue the conversation with the customer as you work on the search.

3 – Actions to Offer Suggestions

Offer suggestions of titles and authors that the customer might be interested in. You can use their feedback to determine what they like. When you retrieve items, invite customers to accompany you. Provide a selection of books but do not overwhelm them with too many choices. Be sure to let them know that they do not have to borrow all your suggested material. Customers will reject some suggestions; they need to feel that they can do this freely without compromising the interaction. Leaving books on tables or shelves for them to review works well. Give customers time to review the books in private so that they do not have to explain to you the reasons they are not interested in particular books.

4 – Closing and Follow-Up

To wrap up the conversation, return to the customer after they have had time to review the selections. Ensure that they are satisfied and offer more assistance if necessary. Review results from electronic and print research and provide any other information that you think they might find useful (for example, titles in a series or other related authors). Encourage her to let you know what she liked or did not like the next time she visits. This feedback will enable you to continue to help her.

Encourage and develop an ongoing relationship with your customers. As they become more comfortable with you, and with talking about books and reading, the reading relationship will develop.

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Understanding appeal

5 – Identifying and using appeal factors

Why is it important to be familiar with appeal factors?

Given the thousands of books published each year, it is no easy feat to match readers with the stories they enjoy. It is rare for readers to speak in terms of appeal terms; they are far more likely to talk about what they liked about a book ("I could not put it down" or "I love books set in New York"). Your job is to translate these preferences into appeal terms that can be applied to other reading suggestions.

In the 1990s, Joyce Saricks, Nancy Pearl, and other librarians started noticing that readers were more interested in the particular "feel" of a book than the subject or genre. The "feel" of a book is reflected in the appeal factors, those features that capture the essence of what is enjoyable about a particular book.

Appeal factors have now become an essential feature of readers' advisory services. They provide a formal structure that make it easier to offer effective service to leisure readers. The concept of appeal factors can be applied to the entire collection, regardless of format.

How do appeal factors differ from subject headings?

Subject headings indicate the topic(s) of a book. Appeal factors, on the other hand, are those features of a book that draw readers to it, features such as the pacing or frame of a story. Most novels are driven by one or two appeals. We can recognize these appeals by thinking about the strengths of a particular book, the elements we would emphasize if we described the book to someone else.

Nancy Pearl identifies story, character, setting, and language as the main appeal factors in a book:

1. Story: The twists and turns of the plot dominate. Characters and settings may not be well-defined.
2. Character: The characters in this type of book "are three-dimensional and seem to step off the page." Plot and setting may not be well defined.
3. Setting. Detailed descriptions of time and place are prominent. Settings can be geographical or historical, and are key to understanding characters and themes.
4. Language: The quality of the writing is the most noticeable feature. The use of language is "evocative, unusual, thought-provoking or poetic."

Pearl calls these appeal factors "doorways" into the world of fiction; readers can enter a story through one of these four doorways. Her *Now Read This* set of books are organized by the four appeal factors. She also identifies a secondary appeal factor for each story.

Are there other approaches to appeal factors?

Joyce Saricks identifies a slightly different set of appeal elements:
- Pacing: Some readers are attracted to fast-paced novels; others, leisurely.

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- Characterization: Factors such as types and numbers of characters, their importance in the novel, and point of view all dictate character appeal.
- Storyline: Questions such as whether the story emphasizes people or events, is action-oriented or psychological define storyline appeal.
- Frame: Frame appeal includes the setting, atmosphere, background, and tone of the novel.

The database, Novelist, uses the following four appeal factors:
- Storyline
- Pace
- Tone
- Writing style

The British website, Whichbook, offers readers paired appeal factors from which to choose. Users move a slider to the appropriate place on a continuum of paired opposites:

Happy	Sad
Funny	Serious
Safe	Disturbing
Expected	Unpredictable
Larger than life	Down to earth
Beautiful	Disgusting
Gentle	Violent
Easy	Demanding
No sex	Lots of sex
Conventional	Unusual
Optimistic	Bleak
Short	Long

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It is also important to remember that elements can also limit appeal, for example: violence, sex, profane language, or style of writing.

In her book, *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*, Saricks applies a different framework to appeal elements by grouping major appeals together and applying them to large genre groups. Her landscape group, for example includes Westerns, Fantasy, and Historical

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Novels. Such a framework allows readers' advisors to easily cross genres when making suggestions.

What are the advantages of focusing on appeal factors?
- Appeal element rather than subject areas usually determine if a reader likes or dislikes a book.
- Appeal factors are reader-centric rather than book-centric.
- Focusing on appeal factors shifts the interview to the customer's interests not the readers' advisors' personal favourites.
- Recognizing appeal factors helps us talk about books we do not personally like.
- Thinking in terms of appeal factors helps us introduce readers to books in other genres.
- Appeal factors free us from the limitations of our own personal reading.

What is "a vocabulary of appeal elements" and where can you find one?

Joyce Saricks has developed a vocabulary of appeal elements, words that can be used to describe pacing, characterization, story line, and frame. As you read books, consult reviews, and listen to readers, keep these terms in mind. The following are representative examples from Saricks's vocabulary:
- Pacing: breakneck, leisurely paced, measured, relaxed
- Characterization: detailed, lifelike, quirky, recognizable, series (characters), vivid, well drawn
- Story Line: action oriented, complex, episodic, multiple plotlines, plot twists
- Frame and Tone: detailed setting, bittersweet, exotic, heartwarming, small town, suspenseful, upbeat
- Style: conversational, graceful, flamboyant, polished, sophisticated, unpretentious, poetic

The database, NoveList, is searchable by appeal factors. NoveList also provides a convenient list of searchable terms, for example:
- Storyline: action-packed, character-driven, intricately plotted, issue-oriented, plot-driven, world-building
- Pace: fast-paced, relaxed pace
- Tone: funny, gruesome, haunting, menacing, nostalgic, reflective, steamy, violent
- Writing Style: accessible, descriptive, experimental, lyrical, richly detailed, thoughtful, witty

How do you incorporate questions about appeal factors into a readers' advisory interview with a customer?

Asking the reader to tell you about a book she has enjoyed should elicit clues to appeal factors. Listen carefully to these clues and either think of books that match these appeal factors or use a readers' advisory tool to find suitable books. Provide some suggestions (if appropriate, a mix of fiction/non-fiction and a variety of formats) and describe each one in terms of appeal. Do this fairly concisely so you do not lose the reader's attention.

Here is an example from Neal Wyatt's article "The RA Conversation" (in NoveList's RA Toolkit):

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"You might enjoy *Garden Spells* by Sarah Addison Allen. It is a comforting and enchanting book set in North Carolina about two sisters who have unusual powers. The language is lovely and it moves along nicely. It is a great feel-good book."

How do you improve at identifying appeal factors?

As with anything else, practice helps develop skill in recognizing and using appeal factors. You should learn from every interaction you are involved in.

As an exercise, make a list of the last five books you have read and attempt to identify what did or did not appeal to you about them, using appeals vocabulary. Try to explain what it was that you liked about each book. Think about whether it reminded you of any other books.

It is useful to keep a log of titles that you have read and, as you become more adept at identifying appeal, make notations in your list. This can take whatever form you find most useful: a notebook, spreadsheet, or a bookshelf websites such as GoodReads, Shelfari or LibraryThing. The latter sites allow you to mark books that you have read and assign them to specific "shelves," a practice which you can use to note appeal factors and other aspects of books.

How can you advise people in a genre that you do not read?

Use resources such as Novelist to assist you in areas where you have little experience or personal interest. You will not always be able to stay within your own comfort zone when assisting readers.

You can also rely on your interactions with others to help increase your knowledge base.
- As part of your regular staff meetings, it may be helpful to include a book-sharing session in which everyone must talk about (in a concise way) the reasons a person might enjoy a particular title.
- Do not forget that you can also learn from the readers you encounter. Your conversations with them help you recognize the shared appeal factors of books you had not considered before.
- Learn from your mistakes – you may recommend titles which readers did not like. Ask them why by using questions focussed on appeal factors.

Always consider how titles fit into what you have already encountered through book clubs, book reviews, and interactions with colleagues and readers.

Do the appeal factors change for non-fiction?

Just as with fiction, what appeals to a person about a non-fiction book can be key to their enjoyment of it. Selecting a title to read is a very personal choice and a large number of factors come into play. Whether looking for entertainment, education, or enlightenment, people want to enjoy their non-fiction reading.

As Burgin and Shearer note in *Non-Fiction Readers'* Advisory, some appeal factors are the same in fiction and non-fiction. But in non-fiction, these appeals need to be expanded upon or approached differently.

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How are appeal factors applied in non-fiction?

In *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Non-fiction*, Neal Wyatt describes four intertwining appeal factors that influence a reader's choice of reading. These elements overlap with those identified by Nancy Pearl and Joyce Saricks.

Appeal
- Pacing: how it feels to move through the story
- Characterization: types of characters and how readers respond to them
- Storyline: tells a narrative, teaches, presents research
- Detail: degree or quality of description, including graphical elements
- Learning/experiencing: learning from the experience of others
- Language: importance of writing and style
- Setting: impact of location on reading experience
- Tone: Emotional reactions experienced by the reader

Narrative Context
- Using the devices of storytelling to capture the reader's interest
- Character, dialogue, setting, plot, and scene

Type
- Memoir, biography, letters, educational, investigative
- The type of book acts in non-fiction as subgenre does in fiction

Subject
- What the book is about
- Note that when reading non-fiction for pleasure and not just for information, subject is not always the main consideration. Readers may gravitate toward a particular author or type of book rather than what the book is about.

Appeal factors in graphic novels and manga

What is a graphic novel?

Graphic novels are book-length stories told using text and image in sequence, what many refer to as comics. They can be bound collections of single issue comic books (often found with the superhero genre) or original stand-alone works. Graphic novels can have a single creator or multiple creators crafting the art and story. They can be completely original stories or stories featuring licensed characters and properties.

What is manga?

Manga is the Japanese word for "comics" and has come to describe all comics created in Japan. This medium is read by almost all ages in Japan. After a surge of popularity, many series have been and continue to be translated into English but maintain the traditional "unflipped" format, one that reads from right to left. Usually a sole creator begins and ends any manga series. Sometimes, there is collaboration between a manga storyteller and a manga artist (e.g. *Bakuman*). Series are published in large comics anthology magazines like *Shonen Jump.* The most popular series are later published in a series of books. Popular manga series

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often are transformed into anime or live-action shows. Recently, popular manga have been adapted into traditional prose novels.

Do the appeal factors change for graphic novels?

There are many similarities between the appeal of graphic novels and that of traditional-format narratives.

How do the appeal factors apply to graphic fiction and manga?

Pace
As with other forms of literature, the pacing and tone of graphic novels and manga can vary from fast and thrilling to intimate and contemplative. However, pacing is determined not only by the content of the story but also by the style of artwork, number of captions, amount of dialogue on the page, and layout of individual panels.

Characters
Graphic novels and manga feature a wide range of characters including archetypal or iconic characters as well as more nuanced and personal ones. These genres explore complex character relationships. Graphic novels reveal character to readers through visual appearance, dialogue, and action.

Story
The popular perception of graphic-novel narratives has traditionally focussed on action and thrills but many graphic novels explore sophisticated stories featuring complex topics and issues. Stories in graphic novels can be firmly rooted in various literary genres. They can be a mash-up of genres, a memoir, or personal narrative. The superhero genre is often seen as the dominant type of story but the format continues to diversify.

Setting
The setting in graphic novels varies greatly depending on the associated genre – everything from the ordinary, mundane world to realms of pure fantasy. When setting is represented visually, tone or mood is also established fairly quickly, and more opportunities are available for an immersive reading experience.

Are there unique appeal factors for graphic novels?

- Art medium – block print, watercolour, digital, pen & ink
- Colour versus black & white
- Lettering – size and style
- Visual style – cartoonish, realistic, clear line
- Layout – traditional left to right and top to bottom or alternative layouts
- Image/text balance
- Fanbase **–** licensed character, established fanbase, etc.

What are readers' advisory challenges for graphic novels?

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Developing the skill set
It can be challenging for the uninitiated readers' advisor to develop the skills for this format. The unique elements that apply to graphic novels and manga can pose challenges for readers' advisors, but can be overcome by dedicating time to exploring the format. As with other literature, there are graphic novels for all genres and topics. It is important to recognize that graphic novels are not all the same and that a fan of one type of graphic novel may not enjoy others.

Staff discomfort with the genre
Another challenge can be staffs' personal bias or discomfort with graphic novels. This discomfort produce an unwillingnessto become familiar with the genre.

Limited traditional resources
Unlike most traditional-format literature, there are currently only a few major readers' advisory guides on graphic novels and manga. Be sure to seek out alternative means of learning about graphic novels through such resources as websites, listservs, comic book shops, and allies.

Reticence of customers
In speaking with customers, you may find that what appeals to them might be found in graphic novels. However they may be hesitant to try the new format. They also may be unaware that a variety of graphic novels exist, assuming that graphic novels consist only of the superhero genre.

Mature images and possible objectionable themes
Some people might be offended by the mature nature of the images and content in some graphic novels. It is important to take note of the ratings of these materials. It is also important to have read some of the titles or series before making recommendations.

What are some examples of genres or styles that exist for graphic novels/manga?

Action/Adventure
300 by Frank Miller
Scott Pilgrim series by Bryan Lee O'Malley

Biography
American Splendor by Harvey Pekar
Paying for it by Chester Brown

Crime/Mystery
100 Bullets by Brian Azzarello
Sin City by Frank Miller

Fantasy
Flight series edited by Kazu Kibuishi
Gate 7 series by Clamp

Historical
Maus by Art Speigelman

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Louis Riel: a Comic Strip Biography by Chester Brown

Humour
Archie by Various
Darth Vader and Son by Jeffery Brown

Juvenile
Chi's Sweet Home series by Kanata Konami
Bone series by Jeff Smith

Memoir
Fun Home by Allison Bechdel
Vietnam America by G. B. Tran

Non-Fiction
Logicomix by K. Apostolos
Palestine by Joe Sacco

Realism
The Song of Roland by Michele Rabagliati
Blankets by Craig Thompson

Romance
Nana series by Ai Yazawa
Library Wars series by Kiiro Yumi

Superhero
Watchmen by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons
X-men Dark Phoenix Saga by Chris Claremont and John Bryne

Science Fiction
Transmetropolitian by Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson
King City by Brandon Graham

Supernatural/Horror
The Walking Dead series by Robert Cookman and Charlie Adlerd
Locke and Key by Joe Hill and Gabriel Rodriguez

Yaoi
Only the Ring Finger Knows by Satoru Kannagi
Gravitation series by Maki Murakami

Where can you learn more about graphic novels?

No Flying, No Tights
http://noflyingnotights.com
An in-depth resource for librarians about comics and graphic novels

Comic Book Resources

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http://www.comicbookresources.com/
Dedicated to the coverage of comic book-related news and discussion

Newsarama
www.newsarama.com
The place for comic book news, previews, and reviews

The Comics Journal
http://www.tcj.com
Daily magazine about comics, providing coverage and reviews of the comic world

ICv2 **: Inside Pop Culture**
http://www.icv2.com
Daily coverage of the pop culture products industry, including comics, graphic novels, manga/anime, games, and toys, including data on comic and graphic-novel top sellers

Manga Book Shelf
http://mangabookshelf.com/
A multi-blog network on English translated manga, featuring news, discussions, and reviews

6 – Recommending books in alternative formats

Why is a selection of formats important in readers advisory?

A selection of formats is important for several reasons, including accessibility, convenience, privacy, and the storytelling experience.

Accessibility
Offering a variety of formats is an important aspect of accessible and equitable library service. According to the PALS survey from Statistics Canada, up to ten percent of Canadians have difficulty reading print due to a disability. Disabilities that make it difficult to do this include vision loss, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities that make it hard to hold a book or turn pages. For customers with print disabilities, libraries play a crucial role in providing access to materials in alternate formats. Providing alternate formats makes your library services more accessible.

Convenience and multi-tasking
Readers may prefer some formats for the sake of convenience. For example, e-books are often handier than print books for transit riders and commuters. E-readers allow readers to bring dozens of books on vacation without filling up a suitcase. Audio books are convenient for multi-taskers, commuters, and long drives.

Privacy
No one can read the cover of an audio book or e-book. Some people may choose to read or listen to their "guilty pleasures" or items on sensitive topics in these formats to ensure greater privacy.

Storytelling experience

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Audiobooks can provide an intimate and captivating storytelling experience. Many people enjoy the sense of oral storytelling that audiobooks can offer.

What format considerations should be discussed with customers?

During the RA interview, library staff should determine what the customer would like to listen to or read, raise questions about the format that the customer is interested in, and discuss the special considerations involved in each one.

E-books
- What is the type of reader or device being used (Kobo, iPad, Playbook, Sony Reader, etc.) and is it compatible with the e-books the library provides?
- Does the customer need training on downloading titles and transferring them to the reader?

Audiobooks
- Where and how will the customer read the audiobook? In a car, at home on audio equipment, or on a mobile device?
- What format is compatible or preferred by customer? CDs may not be an acceptable format for someone who is listening while commuting. Some car audio systems will not play MP3 discs. Some portable devices are not compatible with certain downloadable files.
- Will the customer listen alone or with a group? If the audiobook will be played in a car on a family trip, the subject, content, and language will likely be factors to consider in the suggestion of titles and authors. Some readers find strong language or graphic content more problematic when it is spoken out loud than when read silently in a text.
- Is the customer eligible to use the library's collection for people with print disabilities? Or is she confined to material in the general collection?
- Is the audiobook abridged, and are abridged versions acceptable to the customer?

Other considerations include:
- Managing customer expectations – every print title available in the library will not necessarily be obtainable in alternate formats. If the format is important to the customer, staff may need to suggest a greater variety of titles in order to accommodate the format preference.
- Eligible customers may use the adaptive technology devices available in some libraries to access materials (for example, DAISY players).

Do the appeal factors change when the format changes?

Format can affect the appeal factors for a book in many ways, depending on the characteristics of the format in question and the reader's needs and preferences.

E-books
> **Pacing**
> - With no visual indication of progress through a book (pages remaining), readers may not have the same awareness of the flow of the story.

Tone
- The layout of the page can affect the tone of the story. Large blocks of text on a page indicates a description-rich story, one intended to be read in a leisurely manner. Short paragraphs with ample dialogue can indicate the presence of snappy or quick-witted characters. If the visual cues are not there, will the reader tire of the story more quickly?

Display
- E-ink technology creates a reading experience comparable to reading a print book. Backlit screens are similar to reading on a computer. Eye strain may be a concern with backlit screens.

Resolution
- Technology layers, such as touch screens, add to the viewing panel.

Device size and weight
- Just as some readers prefer hardcover to paperback and vice versa, the size of a device can impact reading experience and time spent reading.

Navigating within the book
- Without the ability to easily "browse," the reading experience can be impacted. It may be harder to check references or skip backwards to reread a particularly striking passage.

Audiobooks
- Special appeal factors for audio books include the production value of the audiobook and the characteristics of the narrator (male vs. female narrator, the narrator's accent, author vs. actor narration).
- You might also consider how appeal factors impact the reading experience of an audiobook. For example, are long descriptive narrative passages dangerous to listen to while driving because they might put the reader to sleep?

How do you promote a variety of formats in your library?

Be aware of format when planning and delivering readers' advisory services and include a variety of formats in these services. Specific ways to highlight the variety of formats you offer include the following:
- Keep formats in mind when planning programs such as book clubs and "community reads." Select books that are available in multiple formats to ensure options for readers and accessible programs.
- Advertise your formats. Include all available formats in booktalks, booklists, and displays.

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- Reach out to community organizations that work with people with print disabilities, letting them know about the variety of formats available. Relevant organizations might include CNIB, the Learning Disabilities Association, seniors groups, and long-term-care homes.

What are some additional sources of free e-books?

There are a wide range of websites offering free downloadable e-books, many of which are compatible with most e-reader devices. Examples of notable free e-book websites include:

Many Books
- http://manybooks.net/
  There are 29,000 free e-books available for Kindle, Nook, iPad and most other e-readers.

Project Gutenberg
- http://www.gutenberg.org/
  Project Gutenberg offers over 38,000 free e-books. They can be downloaded or read online.

Book Lending
- http://www.booklending.com/
  Book Lending is a site that matches lenders and borrowers of Kindle e-books. To participate, you must first register as a user on the site or connect with the Facebook Connect service.

Get Free e-Books
- http://www.getfreeebooks.com/
  This site brings both authors and readers into the world of free e-books. Authors with free e-books benefit greatly from the large community of readers, and the readers in return have ample materials to read.

Free-eBooks.net
- http://www.free-ebooks.net/
  Free-eBooks.net is maintained by a group of bibliophiles whose mission is to promote literacy and share authors' messages with the world. Titles include fiction, non-fiction, business, and lifestyle; all are by lesser-known authors.

Open Library
- http://openlibrary.org/
  The Open Library project features over 1,000,000 works of classic literature available for download in its Accessible Book Collection, and over 10,000 e-books available to borrow in its online Lending Library.

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The Online Books Page

- http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/
  This website makes it easy to access books that are freely available over the Internet.

JustFreeBooks

- http://www.justfreebooks.info/
  JustFreeBooks searches the content of more than 700 websites, including gutenberg.org, wikibooks.org and archive.org. Readers can find numerous free books: public domain texts, open books, audio books, ad-supported books, and more.

Inkmesh

- http://www.inkmesh.com/
  This search engine makes it easier to find free e-books and compare e-book prices for the Kindle, iPhone, Sony Reader, Nook, and other devices.

Smashwords

- http://www.smashwords.com/
  Smashwords is an e-book publishing and distribution platform for e-book authors, publishers, agents, and readers.

Participating in the conversation in alternative ways

The purpose of this section is two-fold: to provide ideas on how to integrate readers' advisory in the services and tools you already own, and to implement a dialogue with customers about reading. Providing a passive RA service (i.e. answering RA inquiries through Ask a Librarian, RA items in electronic newsletters, or read-a chapter-a-day service) is not good enough. Library staff must be proactive in starting the conversation and/or giving customers a forum where they can participate in a reading conversation with us.

With the increased use of smart phones and handheld portable devices, many of our customers are connected 24/7 to the Internet and access the library without entering our physical space. This trend results in many missed opportunities to engage in RA conversations. Therefore, it is critical that we use our online resources to reach customers where they are and chat with them about their pleasure reading. Many online tools that can be used, including social media, websites and the library's catalogue. Some resources that your library already owns may have to be RA enhanced or expanded and others created. Begin by performing an RA audit, looking at your current programs and services, and identifying where to implement readers' advisory elements. Next, look at your social networking tools and other online tools to see how to dialogue with customers and build an RA community. Ideas and questions to consider can be found below.

7 – Social media and digital resources

Are you using blogs to create RA discussions?

A growing number of libraries are using blogs to promote readers' advisory in a more interactive, affordable, and accessible way. The following are some examples of innovative library blogs:
- Toronto Public Library's Book Buzz (http://torontopubliclibrary.typepad.com/bookbuzz/)
- Waterloo Public Library's WPL Reads (http://wplreads.wpl.ca/)
- Haliburton County Public Library's Library Lowdown (http://haliburtonlibrary.wordpress.com/)
- Calgary Public Library Readers' Nook Blog (http://calgarypubliclibrary.com/blogs/readers-nook)
- North Vancouver City Library's Top Shelf Blog (http://nvcltopshelf.wordpress.com/)
- Halifax Libraries' The Reader (http://www.thereader.ca/)
- Seattle Public Library. SPL hosts two blogs: Push To Talk (http://blog.spl.org/yablog/), a blog written for (and mostly *by*) teens, and Shelf Talk (http://shelftalk.spl.org/), a general blog. Shelf Talk is also featured as one of the "Reader Blogs" on the Seattle Post-Intelligencer's website (http://blog.seattlepi.com/shelftalk/), which doubled its overall readership. These blogs feature many reading-related articles, including several lists in which the general public have participated as co-creators (for example, http://shelftalk.spl.org/2009/02/24/viewing-history-with-a-tightly-focused-lens/).
- Williamsburg Library's Blogging for a Good Book (http://bfgb.wordpress.com/)
- Christchurch City Libraries Blog (http://cclblog.wordpress.com/)

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Some of these sites are from "Getting Connected: Tech Tools for Reader's Advisory" by David Wright and Abby Bass.

Are staff accessing collaborative sites for readers' advisory?

Consider the following sites:

Wikipedia
Wikipedia was one of the first Web 2.0 tools librarians embraced because of its collaborative nature. Information on authors and books can be found in Wikipedia. Staff can add to this information too.

Wikis
Some libraries have created their own RA wikis as a staff training and ongoing development resource and, to a lesser extent, a public RA tool. That said, many libraries have moved away from wikis as more collaborative tools are developed.

Goodreads
RA staff can use GoodReads to gauge the popularity of a title using the star rating feature. Reader comments can add insight into different aspects of a work. The "my books" feature allows staff to track what they are reading and share this information with others. The explore link allows users to examine booklists, sign up for ARCs, read author interviews, and join groups with the same reading interests.

Intranets
Intranets are designed for company collaboration, file sharing, knowledge exchange, and team efficiency. Libraries can use their Intranet to conduct readers' advisory training and allow collaboration between RA staff in different locations.

Are you using content communities?

Consider the following content communities:

Youtube
Libraries can upload RA event/program videos, book trailers, and promotional videos to their library's Youtube channel. Inviting comments is a great way to begin a dialogue with community members and potential customers. Comments may provide meaningful feedback and evaluation of RA programs and services. This service also provides a powerful way of showing people that the library is more than books; it is about stories in all manifestations.

Pinterest
This online pinboard can be used to organize and share a love of stories. Booklists may be pinned and linked to a library's catalogue. Pinterest can gather together RA programs from other library websites. Consult the useful article, "Pinterest as a Readers' Advisory Tool" by Lynnanne Pearson. Also visit the Cuyahoga County Public Library's Pinterest page as an example of RA in action: http://pinterest.com/cuyahogalibrary/

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Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Google Plus) and Micro blogs (Twitter)
Social networking sites and micro blogs provide libraries with powerful ways to reach and communicate with their local communities and beyond. They provide platforms for conversations and sharing rather than just one-way broadcasting of messages. Readers who use social networking sites cultivate relationships with one another and share reading experiences.

Facebook
Facebook is one of the most effective tools readers' advisory staff can use to engage communities in RA conversations. Libraries are just beginning to use these tools in collaborative and meaningful ways, allowing readers to express their thoughts and opinions. Readers can also co-collaborate with staff to create lists and fill gaps in specific areas of the collections. Through their Facebook page, Seattle PL does an excellent job of introducing questions that lead to the creation of collaborative lists:

They compile these lists in their catalogue, re-post to directing customers, and thank them for their input. Another idea is to host RA Days in which you ask customers to tell you the last title they enjoyed and provide them with suggestions for further reading.

Twitter
Many libraries in Ontario use Twitter to engage customers in conversations about what they are reading. The Burlington Public Library's RA Twitter feed @BPLNextBest is one example of a library that uses questions to stimulate conversation:

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The following example from the Ottawa Public Library is also meant to spark conversation:

RA Twitter Topics can include:
1. What you are reading?
2. New in the library this week
3. Awards
4. Reading in library book club
5. What are you reading?
6. Author event
7. Book news

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Other ideas can be found in Susan Brown's article, "What We Tweet When We Tweet about Books."

Are you engaging customers through the library catalogue?

Library catalogues with social networking capabilities help build an RA community. They allow customers to: find others with similar tastes (including RA staff); create lists for book club groups; find read-a-like lists, tag, rank, comment and share books; consult reviews and trailers; and easily access author sites and book-club reading guides. Much of this can be done through socially based library interfaces (like Bibliocommons) or through integration of library catalogues with RA specific sites (like GoodReads or Novelist). To help nurture an RA network, you need to create a library app or mobile version of your catalogue. Use a simple interface and a large search box that is easy to handle on a small screen.

Are you using the library website to begin the RA dialogue?

Library websites are a great starting place for readers who are looking for their next great read; however, most libraries are not using them to their fullest potential. Is your readers' advisory section visible on your homepage? Does it have a link to your Ask a Librarian, Ask ON, or IM service and does it indicate that both reference and readers' advisory questions may be asked? Can customers easily find RA databases, suggestion lists, and programs? Do you try to connect staff with your customers by using staff picks' lists or staff blogs? The Calgary Public Library's Reader's Nook section of their website is a good example.

8 – Personalized reading lists

Do you offer a personalized reading list service?

Individualized lists of suggested books for customers based on their reading history have existed for some time. These can be informal suggestions in the regular course of a readers' advisory conversation but may also include a form-based questionnaire filled out by the customer. Library staff use this questionnaire to create an electronic or printed list of reading suggestions for customers.

What kind of questions should you include in the form?

It is best to avoid library terms; instead, use everyday language. If you confuse customers, they are unlikely to provide useful answers.

Consider these sample questions:
- Are you interested in a fiction or non-fiction list or a combination of both?
- Who are your favorite authors?
  - This question can be helpful in identifying a style of writing. It can also identify authors to avoid on the list (since the customer is already well aware of them).
- List the titles and authors of three books you have really liked. What did you like about them? (If you have trouble identifying favourite books, you may list movies or TV shows instead.)
- List some books and authors you do not like and tell us what you did not like about them.
- What is the most important focus of the book for you? (characters, issues, actions,

relationships)
- What genres/subjects do you prefer? List examples for readers to check off.
- Are there any particular places or eras you enjoy reading about?
- Indicate any preferences for the following:
    ◦ Gender of lead character
    ◦ Length
    ◦ Pacing (fast paced, gradual development)
    ◦ Coarse language, sexual themes, violence (avoid, include, no preference)
    ◦ Format (hardcover, paperback, large print, e-book, audiobook)
- How would you like to receive your completed list? **(**email, mail, in-library pick-up)

Be sure to ask for the customer's full name, library card number, phone number, and email address (if applicable).

Where can you find examples of forms?

Waterloo Public Library
http://www.wpl.ca/readers-corner/personalized-reading-list/

Edmonton Public Library
http://www.epl.ca/services/personalized-book-list/get-a-fiction-list

Williamsburg Public Library
http://www.wrl.org/books-and-reading/adults/looking-good-book

How will customers complete the form?

Online submission
Most libraries create an online form that can be filled out and submitted electronically. This is the most efficient type of submission, as long as you ensure that the online form is directed to an email address that is checked regularly to ensure you meet your turnaround target. You should feature the form prominently on your website and promote it on any social media sites that your library participates in.

Print
You will also need to develop a print version and display copies prominently at all locations of your library. To facilitate the return of the print forms, you may consider placing a ballot box close to the entry-forms display. In addition, you should also create a PDF version of the print form and make it available online to allow people to print, complete by hand, and submit by mail or in person.

What is a reasonable turnaround time for these lists?

Depending on staffing, you may want to allow a turnaround time of a week or a week and a half maximum. Remember that you want to keep readers engaged, so you should not keep them waiting too long.

Do not try to do it all yourself. If you do not have dedicated RA staff, put together a team to help create the reading lists. Try to involve staff members who have a variety of reading preferences or a number of staff members who each read in different genres, a process that will help with

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the variety of submissions you will get. You could assign this activity as a performance goal for individuals in order to enhance their readers' advisory skills.

How many times can someone submit a form?

You may wish to set a limit on how many requests a customer can submit within a specified time period. Voracious readers might read through your initial list of recommendations quite quickly and be eager for more. You may choose to do a pilot project for a few months with regular customers and then expand to the wider community once you have perfected the details of the service and honed your skills.

What should you include in the list?

Aside from the list of recommended titles, you should also include a brief description of each book and why it was selected, citing appeal factors that the customer may have indicated in the questionnaire. You may also want to include cover art. For electronic lists, you should include links to your online catalogue to facilitate placing holds.

It would be wise to include a statement explaining that, while the library staff will do their best to make appropriate reading selections based on the information provided, there is no guarantee that readers will like everything that is suggested for them. Invite them to complete another form to help you make more and potentially better suggestions.

How many recommendations should you provide on each list?

Set a reasonable goal for how many titles you and your team can handle. Most libraries aim for 5-8 titles per list. The Seattle Public Library successfully created the "Your Next 5 Books" service in 2011; you may want to follow this model. Remember that you are aiming to generate interest in the service and by extension, your library's collection.

What are the benefits of providing personalized reading lists?

Developing a service such as this can help you get to know your customers, provide an opportunity to hone your skills in pairing books and readers, and stimulate conversation about reading choices. These form-based questionnaires increase the likelihood of finding material the customer might enjoy. They can be especially helpful in selecting materials for homebound customers.

Standardized forms allow time to review a customer's needs, so staff can delve more into their readers' advisory toolbox and arrive at better suggestions.

Consider also that it might be easier for some people to put their interests down on paper than express them verbally. Just as we may be put on the spot by RA requests, they may also feel the same about our reading questions. Given time to consider questions on the form and think about answers to them, customers may be able to provide better insight into their interests.

It goes without saying that this service can increase use of your collection, especially back-list titles that are no longer popular but might be perfect matches to a customer's taste.

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9 – Integrating RA into your library programming and services

Are you engaging customers with book clubs or other RA related library programs?

Book clubs and RA related programs help introduce participants to books and other materials in the library collection. They also help create ongoing relationships and conversations about books between library staff and among readers.

>   **Online book clubs**
>   Online book clubs are growing in popularity due to Oprah's Book Club 2.0, and other offerings by *Good Reads*, *Chatelaine*, and *The Globe and Mail*. Libraries have always been leaders in engaging readers through book clubs. By extending this service to mobile users, commuters, and/or remote communities we can build meaningful relationships. Digital access to e-books and e-audiobooks make it possible to purchase multiple licenses to titles and, in some cases, may reduce or even negate the need to have physical copies of the title on hand. As well, customers and library staff can participate in online forums when they have the time to do so. Libraries can also host online clubs for staff at different branch locations in order to enhance their RA skills. Toronto Public Library's virtual book club, Book Buzz, http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/bookbuzz/ is a useful library model to consult. See also the 2012 RA in a Day presentation on online book clubs: http://www.accessola.org/OLAWEB/OPLA/RA_Day_Conference_Resources.aspx.

>   **One book one community program and non-traditional book clubs**
>   One Book programs are essentially immense book clubs. RA staff view them as opportunities for the community to participate in discussions and connect with one another. Programs can be organized around the themes of the book which can be incorporated into programming for all library-age groups. Online components such as contests and forum nights with the author can also be incorporated.

>   Non-traditional book club programs, like a BYOB (Bring Your Own Book) can highlight titles that appeal to readers of all ages (*Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*). Other clubs can engage traditional non-users at a local pub/LCBO (*Fifty Shades of Grey*) or attract a particular segment of readers, such as business people at a company or school (*The Big Short*). A book club gaining in popularity is a library-sponsored cookbook club where community members gather in a local restaurant to discuss the best new titles published in the season.

How can libraries incorporate RA elements into outreach activities?

Outreach can be an effective way to dialogue with the community about reading. RA services can be incorporated into one-time events such as reading festivals (i.e. Word on the Street, Love of Literacy) or private speaking engagements. They can also be recurring events that occur on a regular basis in your community (i.e. book clubs at pubs, coffee shops, LCBO). RA services and programs should be an essential component of all outreach displays. Takeaway materials can be incorporated into children's, teen's, and adult outreach events. Readers' advisory is an important way to build and strengthen community connections. For further information, consult the partnership & outreach section, in the second module of this toolkit.

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How can we learn from other readers? Personal and professional
Library staff members generally have a passion for reading. We are in the story business and want to share that love of story with anyone who wants to engage in the conversation. We share our opinions, show our respect for other readers' tastes, and enjoy learning what appeals to them. This love of reading spills over into our personal lives and is an essential part of who we are – readers. As readers we also want to connect with other readers, not just as professionals, but in a personal way too. Readers' advisors can learn from each other and from other readers; we need to continually capitalize on these opportunities.

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Appendix: <u>Bibliography and learning resources</u>

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