
Proverbs, Maxims, and True Sayings for Reference Librarians, Revised

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1. Nothing is ever simple.
2. Happiness is finding the answer in the first source you check. (Rare.)
3. The number of times you are cut off, put on hold, or transferred is directly proportional to the brevity of your deadline.
4. The specific volume of a set you need is the only one that is not on the shelf and if you're looking for the August 1938 issue of a particular magazine, your library's run will start with September 1938.
5. No one finds answers on Mondays.
6. The only person who can help you is:
 - a. on vacation
 - b. tied up in a meeting
 - c. on a six months leave
 - d. not taking calls this afternoon
 - e. retired
 - f. deceased.
7. Corollary to #5 and #6: Never call anyone on a Friday. They are all:
 - a. out of town
 - b. gone for the day
 - c. at lunch—for the rest of the afternoon
 - d. no longer working there.
8. Impossible dream #1: being two days ahead of your deadline.
9. Impossible dream #2: reaching the correct government office on the first try. Corollary: A search is generally over when the umpteenth government office refers you back to the first one you called, a maneuver known as the tight reference loop.
10. Serendipity is finding an answer to a question when looking for something else.
11. Dismay is when you've exhausted every conceivable source, and the patron requests that you continue the search.
12. The most promising citation retrieved in a database is usually in Bulgarian.
13. A NEXIS searcher and his money are soon parted.
14. Rush questions always come in threes.
15. Important phone calls are returned the instant you've stepped out of the office.
16. The depth of despair is calling the acknowledged expert in a particular field only to discover that it was that person who submitted the question.
17. Frustration is discovering that the perfect citation you have just found is a blind reference, and appears nowhere in the source cited.
18. Joy is having an impossible question cancelled before you begin working on it; gloom is getting a cancellation on a question for which you have just found the answer after four hours of searching.
19. Rapture is finding a catalog entry for a whole book on an obscure subject and *the book is on the shelf*.

Originally collected by Sally Dumax, Resources Librarian at SCAN (Southern California Answering Network), and published in the September/October 1979 (tenth anniversary) issue of *Scannings* this list was revised and reprinted in the September/October 1984 (fifteenth anniversary) issue of that publication. The list received wide dissemination among California librarians, and comes to us through a reprint distributed by BARC, the Bay Area Reference Center (now defunct). SCAN is now the State of California Answering Network.

20. The material promised from New York has not arrived because of:
- a. a dock strike
 - b. floods in the Midwest
 - c. a postal strike
 - d. a blizzard in the Rockies
 - e. all of the above.
21. Misery is having the patron find the answer after you didn't.
22. A patron's gratitude is not necessarily related to the length, difficulty, or success of the search.
23. Some of the best answers you find are to questions you will never be asked. ■



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