Readers' Advisory and *NoveList*

How to use **NoveList** to *consistently* and *efficiently* curate *high-quality* RA recommendations.

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WHAT IS READERS' ADVISORY?

Readers' Advisory (RA): *Finding* and *recommending* books to meet patron's *specific needs* in a *specific moment*

It's like **archery**, and library staff are:

- Shooting blind
- Must create and refine the actual target

SHOOTING BLIND

There are over 2 million books in PLCS' catalog

There is also a *high probability* the patron wants a book that you have no interest in

Thus, you honestly do not know the market for that type of book

You are blind: you don't know the books in our catalog that meet this specific criteria

YOU USUALLY HAVE TO CREATE THE TARGET

You need a good *search target* to aim for

You need to "encircle" the **probable** books from the 2 million+ **possible** books in our collection

You want a search target that is *not too precise* and *not too broad*

You want to get on the board, you do not need to hit the bulls-eye

WHY DO YOU HAVE TO "CREATE" THE TARGET?

Often, a patron who comes the help-desk **wants a personalized touch**

And they'll usually start off with a requests like:
> "I'm looking for a good book?"
> "I want a good mystery novel!"
> "I want a book like XYZ!"
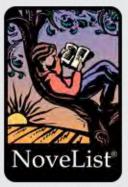
The first two are too broad.

The third is getting there, but what if you do not know book XYZ?

Your questions are your sword to *cut away all the non-essentials.*

NOVELIST AS A HELPING HAND!

What: NoveList (combination of "Novel" and "List") is an *electronic database* that *catalogs detailed data for 150,000+ English fiction books*

When used in conjunction with *probing questions*, you can **zoom in on relevant books** for patrons

AT THE HELP DESK:

People who come to the help-desk want **personalized service**

They can access NoveList, Amazon reviews, GoodReads, etc. at home.

Why come into the library?

You have the opportunity to have a dialogue to continually zoom-in and out of possible recommendations until you find ones that **feel "just right"**

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING:

You want the majority of your recommendations to be both *effective* and *efficient*

Effective: Getting in the ball park of what the patron wants

Efficient: Not having to read every book in the catalog

Having a tool that can *reliably* analyze book content beyond LCSH

HOW TO USE NOVELIST

Let's walk through using NoveList in a few scenarios! ○

I'M LOOKING FOR A GOOD BOOK!

This search target is too broad.

One of the most *efficient* questions to *narrow your target* is:

"**Please give me the title of a similar book you want**."

Other iterations:

"What is your favorite book?"

"What novel can you read again and again?"

WHY IS THIS QUESTION SO GOOD?

"I read to encounter new worlds, and new ways of looking at the word."
— Nancy Pearl, *Book Lust*

Because *books contain within themselves entire worlds.*

Like music is more than just the musical period, a book is more than its LCSHs

Asking for a book title is asking five different questions in one:

What kind of pace do you like?
What kind of characters do you like?
What kind of plots do you like?
What kind of genres do you like?
etc.

It is *efficient.*

NOVELIST'S SELLING FEATURE IS

Each NoveList book record has a brief description and "**Appeal Terms**"

It translates *intuitive* (feeling) reading *experiences* into cross-comparable words

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people *will never forget how you made them feel.*"

— Maya Angelou º

If you do not have the *personal experience* of reading a book, NoveList does a good job of giving you **the essential emotional states**

NOVELIST'S CURATED "READ ALIKES"

Started by an algorithm, checked by a human

Uses the Appeal Terms assigned to a book to generate **a list of books with permutations of those terms**

Each "Read-alike" book has a list of "Reasons"

Showing the patron the list and walking through them together will **add a human touch**

SELECTING YOUR OWN APPEAL TERMS

There are tons of Appeal Terms, too many to remember

Appeal Terms are also *subjective* (we want that!)

For example a book might not have an appeal term I think it should have…

Use them as **guidelines**

And also use them to help patrons *clarify what they want*

Why did they like this certain book in the first place?

CREATING YOUR OWN SEARCHES

Go broad!

It is easier to work with a long recommendation list than a shorter one

From the book's page, *start with*:

1. Select two to three parameters
2. From different Appeal Term sections

It is like match-making. **Everyone has a type**, and this type usually transcends simple genre / subject

WHY WE READ NOVELS

Jia Tolentino is a culture critic at The New Yorker.

Here are her thoughts on a book she recommends: *The Emperor's Children* by Claire Messud (2006). ⚲

"As a treat to myself, I reread this 500-page novel every summer, and every time **I feel totally swallowed up in it**, **as if the book were soaking me with golden light**. There's so much pleasure in the plotting, the emotional acuity, the satire, the language itself. It also makes the best use of September 11 of any work of fiction I've ever read."

FURTHER LEARNING

NoveList is an extensive database

We scratched the surface

The best way to know a software is to use it!

NoveList has wonderful Learning Resources for all types of learning:

- Short video course ○
- PDF Cheat sheets ○
- Training slides ○