

REFERENCE POLICY

A reference transaction is defined as an information contact which involves the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources by a member of the library staff. It includes direct and instructional services. Direct service provides the patron with the information requested, while instructional service is designed to teach the patron independent use of library resources. Reference service, whether direct or instructional, provides accurate and prompt information to the public.

Reference service will be provided at all times that the library is open. The libraries will: provide personal assistance without discrimination to library users seeking information; select, acquire, and organize sources of information to meet the needs of library users; ensure that library users receive a consistent level of service; and present programs and tours in the library and in the community on reference services, library use and reference sources. All reference questions are treated confidentially.

Reference staff members, whether professional or para-professional, serve as the link between resources and the patron. As such, it is important that the staff member be:

- Knowledgeable about library materials and services
- Open and approachable; friendly but professional
- Able to communicate effectively with people
- Discreet in the handling of questions which might be confidential or sensitive
- Able to exercise good judgment both in the interpretation of policy and in the handling of exceptional situations

The needs of each library user are taken seriously and treated with the utmost respect.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DESK SERVICE -

A. Priorities

- Service to the public receives priority over any other duties. Library users should be made aware that the primary purpose of a reference librarian is to assist them.
- In-person requests for service receive priority over telephone requests.
- Although the Library's primary responsibility is to patrons within the NEGRLS service area, there should be no discrimination against other patrons for basic reference service.

B. Referrals to Other Agencies

- Referrals to other agencies may be made when appropriate. At no time may staff refer the patron to individual practitioners--physicians, attorneys, mental health professionals, etc.

C. Sources

- To give the most accurate and authoritative answers possible, staff members should avoid personal opinions, philosophy, or evaluations; rather they should rely upon information based on accurate printed or online sources or learned from a reliable authority. The opinion of staff members, even when requested, should not be given as fact. The source of an answer should always be cited.

D. Instruction and Orientation Services

- Instruction and orientation services in library use are an integral part of library service and may range from basic instruction on how to use the computer catalog or reference tools to more formal assistance such as tours designed to increase the patron's knowledge of the library's materials and services.

TELEPHONE REFERENCE - Telephone reference should be used for short, factual information questions which do not require extensive reading or interpretation on the part of staff members. If the answer to a telephone question seems too involved to relate easily over the telephone, this should be explained to the patron and the suggestion made that the patron come to the library.

MAIL, FAX AND ELECTRONIC MAIL REFERENCE - It is the library's practice to respond to all reasonable reference inquiries received by mail, FAX, or electronic mail. Fax, mail, and electronic mail requests are defined as short, factual informational questions which do not require extensive reading or interpretation on the part of staff members. If the question becomes too involved or time-consuming, the staff member should explain the limitations on such service and suggest that the patron visit the library for further assistance.

The patron may request that the response to the question be made by fax, mail, electronic mail, or telephone. The nature of the question may determine the form of response.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS -

1. School Assignments - Questions regarding school assignments will be treated as any other request for reference assistance. For definitions of types of reference queries see this section, generally. Every effort should be made to satisfactorily answer a student's questions and provide the sources for information and the instruction needed to use those sources. If every effort has been made by the reference staff member and the student to locate information

without results, the student will be encouraged to return to the teacher for further instructions or an altered assignment. A note to this effect may be given to the student if the reference staff member feels it is justified.

2. Book, Antique and Art Appraisals - Patrons may be referred to appropriate reference sources or to consultants or experts. Staff members should never give a personal appraisal regarding the value of a patron's possession.

3. Compilations and Extensive Research - Requests for and/or completion of lengthy research is not considered a traditional role of the public reference librarian. Research and reference differ in terms of time required, sources employed, and ease of determination of search strategies; research is the more involved of the two. Patrons needing extensive compilations (bibliographies, lists, statistics, etc.) or research should be directed to the appropriate resources and offered as much assistance as staff time allows.

4. Medical, Legal and Tax Questions - The library does not provide advice in the areas of medicine, law, and taxes. If legal information can be found in printed sources, it is provided. However, complicated legal searches should not be undertaken, nor should personal interpretations of legal matters be offered. Concerning medical information, brief definitions and descriptions from authoritative published sources may be provided. These sources should be quoted verbatim with no personal interpretation. The patron should be informed of the source from which the information is taken. Under no circumstances should a staff member offer advice in medical, legal, or tax areas, regardless of how commonplace the knowledge seems to be. If more information is required, the patron should be encouraged to examine the library's collection or be referred to another source.

ORIENTATION/TOURS -

Library orientation tours, bibliographic instruction, and online demonstrations are offered to all adult groups and to student groups of junior high school age and above.