

REFERENCE POLICY

Introduction

Reference Services Defined

Reference Standards and Ethics

Types of Reference Services

References

Resolution 2016-6

REFERENCE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Reference services are vital to the mission of the Warren County Library to provide high quality, cost-effective, modern library services to all qualified residents. The library strives to provide accurate, current, complete, and unbiased information in a timely and courteous manner. The goal of reference services is to guide individuals to materials for educational, informational, recreational, and cultural purposes.

REFERENCE SERVICES DEFINED

The State of New Jersey defines reference services as “the response to user needs by either mediated question handling or non-mediated access to information. A mediated reference transaction involves the use, recommendation or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, or referral to such sources elsewhere, by a member of the reference/information staff. A non-mediated reference transaction is the use of resources without the assistance of reference/information staff.” (NJAC 15:22-1.2)

Reference services include assisting with the catalog and library computers, research assistance, database and online assistance, reader's advisory assistance, interlibrary loan, referral services, and instruction in library use.

REFERENCE STANDARDS AND ETHICS

It shall be the policy of the Warren County Library to follow the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association and the Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers from the Reference and User Services Association. Reference services are provided to all individuals without regard to gender, age, race, religious beliefs, and other protected categories under New Jersey and Federal law. Customers need not be Warren County Library cardholders to use reference services and materials. All reference queries are kept confidential in accordance with New Jersey state law (N.J.S.A. 18A: 73-43.2) and the Warren County Library's Privacy Policy.

It is recommended that staff follow the Reference and User Services Association techniques for reference interviews:

- Visibility/Approachability - Smile, make eye contact, and extend a friendly greeting.
- Interest - Give the customer your full attention. Maintain eye contact.
- Listening/Inquiring - Listen actively to customers. Paraphrase back their inquiry. Verify your understanding of the question is correct.
- Searching - Consult library resources. Keep customer updated as to progress. Offer referral when appropriate.
- Follow-Up - Verify the question has been answered completely. Inquire if there are any further questions.

The following reference services will be offered in this order of priority:

- In-person queries by those who come into the library
- Queries submitted by phone
- Bibliographic instruction and library orientation
- Queries submitted by email and social media
- Queries submitted by mail

All requests for reference assistance are considered legitimate. Information will be provided based on accurate print and non-print resources or from a reliable authority. Even when requested by customers, the staff's opinions or interpretations of information are not given as fact. Information will be provided without making judgments as to its moral or aesthetic worth. Staff shall not offer their personal opinions on politics, religion, social issues, etc. to the public. Complete citations will be provided for the resources used to answer the question. While working at a public desk, service to the community takes precedence over any other job duties.

TYPES OF REFERENCE SERVICES

These are typical reference services provided by staff:

Research

- Research assistance involves the in-depth coverage of a subject. The level of research assistance varies based upon the scope of the library's collection, the complexity of the query, the time frame in which the information is needed, the number of current customer queries, and staffing levels.
- When appropriate, staff will guide and refer customers to resources that answer their queries. However, staff will not evaluate or interpret that information.
- Lengthy and extensive searches of reference materials, databases, the Internet, periodicals, and bibliographic sources are not considered a traditional role of the public reference librarian. Thus, customers needing lengthy research will be directed to the appropriate resources and offered as much assistance as staff time allows. Extensive searches may also be referred to the Newark Public Library, which provides a fee-based research service.

Ready Reference

- When a customer asks a question of a common nature, the staff will identify the appropriate resource to answer the question and report the information to the customer.
- These searches are quick and typically are answered within 5 minutes.

Item Requests

- When the customer seeks a known title, staff will identify if the library owns it.
- If the item is available at another branch, staff will assist the customer in placing an electronic hold on it.
- If the item is not available in the Warren County Library System, staff will offer to request the item through interlibrary loan.
- If the customer has a partial citation for a title, staff will make a reasonable effort to verify the citation using standard reference materials.

Requests for Medical, Financial, Tax, and Legal Information

- Staff will provide information from published resources, but not advice, recommendations, personal experience, or opinions on these topics.
- Staff will not interpret the information provided. The library staff member is not a physician, lawyer, financial advisor, or counselor.
- Customers are encouraged to consult with professionals in these areas and to not just rely on the library's resources.

Requests for Information on Commercial Services and Products

- Staff will refer customers to information and reviews from published resources on these topics. However, staff will not offer advice, recommendations, personal experience, or opinions on these topics.
- Staff will not interpret the information provided.

Local History and Genealogy

- Staff will provide general assistance in genealogical research and guidance in locating materials within the library's local history and genealogy resources.
- Staff will consult standard resources and indexes in order to answer queries. However, staff members are not trained genealogists and thus cannot trace complete family histories or provide in-depth research services for local history and genealogy requests. In general, 30-45 minutes is considered a reasonable amount of time to research local history and genealogy questions.
- Obituary requests will be searched when the source is indexed or a date of the death is provided.
- When appropriate, staff will recommend additional resources and/or refer individuals to other libraries, agencies, and local history and genealogical organizations.
- If requested, staff will provide contact information for local professional researchers who offer their services for a fee.

Reader's Advisory

- Staff will provide reading recommendations for both fiction and non-fiction titles based on criteria the customer and staff have established. Such recommendations will be made without personal bias.
- Staff will also provide passive access to reader's advisory services through booklists, displays, bestseller lists, genre labels, and shelf arrangement.

Instruction

- Customers will be assisted in the basic use and evaluation of print materials, microfilm, and electronic databases.

- Customers will be assisted in the basic use of the computers, copier, scanner, fax machine, and microfilm reader.

Computer Questions

- Staff will assist customers with basic computer questions. However, staff cannot offer individual in-depth training, technical assistance, or solve compatibility issues. In general, 10-15 minutes is considered a reasonable amount of time to assist with computer questions.
- Staff is limited in their ability to assist individuals in solving problems with their own personal computers and electronic devices.

Referrals

- If it is not possible to find the requested information within the Warren County Library's resources, referrals to other agencies, libraries, and organizations may be required for further assistance.
- When making a referral to another agency, complete contact information (i.e., name of contact, phone number, address) should be provided to the customer.

Staff members attempt to answer all questions. However, reference services do not include:

- Completing assignments
- Compiling bibliographies
- Offering appraisals of books, antiques, collectibles, and art
- Editing and proofreading documents
- Checking a long list of citations
- Tutoring services
- Translations

REFERENCES

Code of Ethics of the American Library Association

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics>

Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

<http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehaviora>

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