

REFERENCE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

REFERENCE SERVICES DEFINED

REFERENCE STANDARDS AND ETHICS

TYPES OF REFERENCE SERVICES

References

RESOLUTION 2016-7; RESOLUTION 2020-14; RESOLUTION 2024-12;

REFERENCE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Reference services are vital to the Warren County Library's mission to provide high-quality, cost-effective, modern library services to all qualified residents. The Library strives to provide the highest level of service to all Library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources, equitable service policies, equitable access, and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests in a timely and polite manner. Reference services aim to guide individuals to educational, informational, recreational, and cultural materials.

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 using one or more information sources or referral to such sources elsewhere by a reference/information staff member. A non-mediated reference transaction is using resources without the assistance of reference/information staff. (N.J.A.C. 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 inquiries are received, and service is rendered in several settings: on-site, via telephone, electronically, or by mail.

Reference services do not include completing assignments, compiling bibliographies, appraisals of books, antiques, collectibles, and art, editing and proofreading documents, checking a long list of citations, tutoring services, or translations.

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, whether they are Warren County cardholders or not, regardless of gender, age, race, religious beliefs, and other protected categories under New Jersey and Federal law. The Library protects each customer's right to privacy with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted. Thus, 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.

Staff should 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 their inquiry back to verify your understanding of the question is correct.
- Searching - Consult Library resources. Keep the customer updated as to progress. Offer referral when appropriate.
- Follow-Up - Staff should seek feedback on whether they answered the question adequately and inquire if there are any further questions.

Staff should provide reference services 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 electronically
- Queries submitted by mail

Staff will respond to all information requests, providing information from accurate print and non-print resources or a reliable authority. Staff members will distinguish between their personal convictions and professional duties and shall not allow their personal beliefs to interfere with providing access to information resources. Staff will provide information without judging its moral or aesthetic worth. Even if requested by customers, staff opinions or interpretations of information are not given as fact. Staff shall not offer their personal views on politics, religion, social issues, etc., to the public. Staff will provide complete citations for the resources used to answer the question.

TYPES OF REFERENCE SERVICES

These are typical reference services provided by staff:

Research

Research assistance involves in-depth coverage of a subject. The level of research assistance varies based on the Library's collection, the complexity of the query, the time 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. Staff will direct customers needing lengthy research to the appropriate resources and offer as much assistance as time allows. Staff may also refer customers with extensive searches to the Newark Public Library, which provides a fee-based research service.

Ready Reference

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

Item Requests

- When the customer seeks a known title, staff will determine whether our Library owns it. If our library system owns the item, staff will assist the customer in placing a hold on it using our online catalog. Staff will consider purchasing if the item is unavailable in the Warren County Library System and published in the past twelve months. Otherwise, staff will consider requesting 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 refrain from offering advice, recommendations, personal experience, or opinions. 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 not rely solely on the Library's resources.

Requests for Information on Commercial Services and Products

- Staff will refer customers to information and reviews from published resources; however, staff will not offer advice, recommendations, personal experience, or opinions.
- 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 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. Thirty minutes is a reasonable time to research local history and genealogy questions.
- Staff will search for obituaries if the source is indexed or the customer provides a date of the death.
- When appropriate, staff will recommend additional resources and 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 fiction and non-fiction titles based on the customer and staff's established criteria. Staff will make recommendations 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

Staff provide customers with instruction and assistance in the basic use and evaluation of print materials, microfilm, and electronic databases.

Computer Questions

Staff will assist customers with basic computer questions, depending on staff availability; however, staff cannot offer individual in-depth training, technical assistance, or solve compatibility issues. Ten to fifteen minutes is a reasonable time to assist with computer questions.

Staff assistance is available to users of the Library's public computers. However, staff are not available to assist users with the public computers in the study rooms, conference rooms, and meeting rooms.

For liability reasons, staff cannot answer financial, legal, or medical questions. For privacy reasons, staff cannot fill out online forms, type in login information, or compose personal documents for customers.

Staff is limited in their ability to assist individuals in solving problems with their personal computers and electronic devices.

Referrals

If the requested information is unavailable in Warren County Library's resources, staff may refer customers to other agencies, libraries, and organizations for further assistance. When referring the customer to another agency, staff should provide the contact's name, phone number, and address.

Disclaimer

The Library disclaims any liability or responsibility arising from using the Library's reference services.

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/guidelinesbehavioral>

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