

INF-1 Priorities for Reference Service

Supersedes: March 11, 2003

Policy Statement

The Camden County Library provides reference services to assist and direct all members of our community in their search for materials to fulfill their learning, recreational, and informational needs. Reference services include access to print, non-print and electronic media; reference assistance; reader's advisory assistance; informational displays; and programming.

Regulations

1. Reference services are provided without bias or judgment to all who request information.
2. Staff provides complete, accurate, appropriate, impartial and prompt answers to reference requests.
3. A trained staff person with a title of library associate or higher provides reference service.
4. Information requests are considered confidential. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of both the information request and the requestor:
 - Information requests are not discussed outside of a professional context.
 - Extended reference question forms are destroyed once no longer needed.
 - Information is given only to the requestor unless given permission otherwise.
5. Reference requests may be submitted in person, by phone, by e-mail and through QandA NJ.
6. Information may be provided verbally, by fax, by phone, by mail, and electronically. Sources for the information will be cited.
7. In order to provide effective service to all patrons in an equitable manner, certain priorities and limits have been established:
 - Assisting customers takes precedence over other staff duties.

- To insure that customers do not have to wait too long for service, generally no more than 10 minutes will be spent with a customer while others are waiting. If the question cannot be answered within that time, the staff member will offer to continue the search and contact the customer with the information later.
 - Reference service is limited to five reference questions per day, and the number of copies made to twenty pages per day.
 - Service priority is given to in-person customers, when both in-person and phone requests are received at the same time. However, staff will complete a telephone/online conversation already in process before attending to an in-person request.
 - Based on the length and complexity of the question, phone and e-mail customers may be advised that their inquiry merits the on site use of library materials.
8. Questions are referred to appropriate libraries and organizations if an answer is not found using our own resources.
 9. Customers are directed to appropriate reference sources regarding medical, legal, and taxation questions. Staff are not qualified to provide advice or interpretation for such questions.
 10. Customers are directed to appropriate price guides or to a certified appraiser for questions about the values of works of art, books and, other objects. Staff will not give appraisals or evaluations of such items.
 11. Customers are directed to appropriate buying guides and other resources for questions regarding consumer product information. Personal recommendations for products are not given.
 12. Customers needing help with the translation of materials in foreign languages, proofreading, or calculations of mathematical problems are directed to appropriate referral sources since these questions are beyond the scope of our expertise.
 13. To protect privacy and personal information, staff do not assist customers by creating email accounts or filling out online forms.
 14. We provide suggestions and assistance in selection and locating fiction through use of Reader's advisory resources and personal knowledge.
 15. Reference collections are selected to be well rounded, up to date and provide information from varying points of view. Materials may be in various formats including print and electronic. Materials are chosen and weeded in accordance with the library's collection development policy.

16. The purpose of a reference collection is to assure customer's access to reference tools at all times that the library is open. Therefore, reference materials do not circulate.
17. A current ID (library card, driver's license, student ID) will be held when materials designated "Ready Reference" are taken away from a public service desk.
18. Staff provides instruction and guidance on the use of reference resources in all formats.
19. Staff serves as proctors for students who take exams outside of the classroom setting. Proctoring is done in accordance with the library's proctoring policy (GOS-9).
20. Services to New Jersey Library Network members will be provided in accordance with the provisions of the New Jersey Statewide Supplemental Reference Services contract.
21. Reference transaction statistics are collected on a daily basis. The data collected is used to help evaluate use of reference services.
22. Concerns regarding the reference service received by a customer or about the reference policy should be directed to the branch manager or supervisor on duty. Concerns that cannot be resolved at this level shall be referred to the appropriate Associate Director.

Procedures

1. Overview of a reference transaction
 - 1.1 A reference interview is used to ascertain the customer's specific information need.
 - 1.2 If the customer is in the library, the customer is provided with a factual answer, or taken to appropriate print or electronic resources and instructed in their use.
 - 1.3 If the customer is not in the library and a factual answer can be ascertained, the source of the information will be cited and provided. If an answer requires extensive reading and/or research, appropriate print and electronic resources are suggested by phone, by mail or electronically and the customer is advised to visit the library.
 - 1.4 When completing a transaction, staff asks if the customer has found the needed information or has located enough information to continue researching on their own.
- 2 Extended reference transactions

- 2.1 If a transaction cannot be completed within 10 minutes, staff will use their professional judgment and offer to pursue a question further if an answer may be reasonably found.
 - 2.1.1 Such questions will be written on the appropriate question form.
 - 2.1.2 Include information giving details of question, contact information for the customers, resources checked, and information located.
 - 2.1.3 Follow instructions in local branch procedures for filing and working on questions.
 - 2.2 Contact customer with answer citing source.
 - 2.3 Destroy question form once no longer needed.
- 3 Reference Statistics
- 3.1 Statistics on the number of reference transactions per day are kept at each service point.
 - 3.1.1 A reference transaction is defined as any informational query other than an author/title search in the library's catalog, or a directional question.

Guidelines

1. Excellent reference services include:
 - a. Encouraging customers to contact the library when they have an information need;
 - b. Asking probing questions to determine the real information need;
 - c. Locating information that meets the information need;
 - d. Confirming that the information need has been met.
2. Staff should make every effort to ensure that customers feel comfortable approaching them with informational requests. Key in this is approachability. Willingness to provide assistance is reflected by appearing alert, friendly and interested.
3. See the procedures manual for each branch for specific procedures on how reference services are provided at each location.