

Reference Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PHILOSOPHY OF REFERENCE SERVICE

The basic mission of the Monroe Township Free Public Library is to identify, build awareness of and positively respond to the information, educational and recreational reading, viewing and listening needs of all its users. To help accomplish this mission, the Library provides a Reference Department with the following goals:

1. To provide accurate, efficient and courteous assistance and information required or requested by users, whether in person or by telephone, fax or letter.
2. To facilitate access to and optimum use of the Library's resources.
3. To select, acquire and organize sources of information to meet the current and anticipated needs of Library users and prospective users.
4. To supplement the Library's resources through interlibrary cooperation and utilization of external information systems.

B. PURPOSE OF POLICY MANUAL

The purpose of this policy manual is to present written guidelines for the provision of reference service to insure a consistent standard of service of the highest possible quality.

1. USE

This manual is intended for use as (a) a reference guide for both the current Reference staff and those being trained, (b) a basis for evaluation of staff and a description of services offered by the Reference Department and the extent to which they are provided, including any priorities or limitations.

2. AVAILABILITY

This manual, or any appropriate section of it, is made available to Library users upon demand, whenever questions arise concerning the scope of reference service the Library provides.

3. REVIEW AND REVISION

This manual is reviewed each year before October 1 by the Reference staff and Library Director to insure that policy and practice are in conformity and that changes are made as required.

II. SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

A. GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. STAFFING OF REFERENCE DESK

a. LEVEL OF STAFFING

The Reference Desk is staffed at all times by two professional librarians and at least one additional professional librarian or a library school intern or trained paraprofessional. Additional personnel are scheduled to staff the Desk during periods of identifiably high use. However, when no users require assistance, staff may work on other assignments, examine new reference materials or read professional literature.

b. ATTITUDE AND MANNER

Service to the public is the primary responsibility of the Reference staff on duty at the Reference Desk. Staff treats the requests of Library users with respect and demonstrates at all times a willingness to assist users in fulfilling their information needs.

c. SHIFT CHANGES

Upon completion of a reference shift, staff will refer incomplete reference searches to the next staff members on duty, and clear the Desk of materials used.

2. PRIORITY IN HANDLING INQUIRIES

In general, the Reference staff gives priority to in-person requests over telephonerequests in accordance with the guidelines set forth in paragraph CI below. In the event of a lengthy reference search, staff may provide a patron with materials to get started, then return to the Reference Desk to assist other patrons, going back to the first patron as soon as feasible. Generally, it is practical to dispense with quick requests first, returning to in-depth questions as time allows.

B. IN PERSON REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICE

1. REQUESTS FOR MATERIALS

a. LOCATING MATERIALS IN COLLECTION

Reference librarians assist users in finding entries for desired materials in the Public Access Computer(PAC) and in locating these materials on the shelf. The reference librarian assists in the use of reference books, indices, bibliographies, vertical files, CD-ROMs, microforms, and computer searches.

Under no circumstances are the identities of current or previous borrowers of materials provided to users or others, except in accordance with the Library's policy on Confidentiality of Library Records.

b. INTERLIBRARY LOAN REQUESTS FOR MATERIALS NOT IN COLLECTION

The Reference staff offers to obtain, through Interlibrary Loan (ILL), up to two items per user visit for Monroe Township patrons only. Librarians initiate these services in accordance with the Library's Collection Development Policy and the NJ Network Interlibrary Loan protocols.

ILL books circulate for two weeks with no renewals. If a charge is imposed by the lending library for ILLs, patrons will be asked to pay the charge prior to finalizing the request.

Patrons will be directed to other local area libraries having items requested if they wish to go there in person.

Staff will obtain photocopies of articles for patrons through ILL, using the same procedure as requesting books.

c. INTERNET SERVICES

see [Technology Policy](#)

d. SECURITY REFERENCE COLLECTION

Certain titles prone to theft or mutilation are placed in this collection. Users are required to check out items at the Reference Desk.

e. REQUESTS FOR PURCHASE

Items suggested for purchase by the Library will be accepted and passed on to appropriate staff for consideration in accordance with the Library's Collection Development Policy.

2. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The Reference Department may provide either specific information or guidance in locating sources of information. In accordance with the following guidelines, each reference librarian determines which inquiries can be handled to completion and which questions are best answered by providing guidance in selecting sources for the user to consult.

a. PROVIDING SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The Reference staff provides answers to "ready reference" types of inquiries, such as questions involving specific facts which can be readily determined from standard sources. This also includes directions, general information and Library policies and services.

b. PROVIDING GUIDANCE IN LOCATING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

For inquiries which require longer, more detailed answers, extensive searching or interpretation of materials, staff assists the user in selecting the most appropriate sources. For users unfamiliar with reference tools and library methodology, a librarian provides instruction in the use of those sources selected for the search.

3. SEARCH PARAMETERS

a. TIME LIMITS

The amount of time that a reference librarian can spend assisting individual users is necessarily limited by the needs of other users. Time limits vary according to the complexity of materials to be used, library experience of the user, number of other users needing assistance and number of Reference staff available to help users.

b. APPRAISALS

Although appraisals of rare books, coins, stamps, art works, antiques, etc. cannot be made, staff assists users in locating current market value information from printed and online sources or listings of dealers when available.

c. CONSUMER PRODUCT INFORMATION

The Library provides materials to assist patrons in making their own evaluation of products. The librarian may read specific information requested from the various consumer guides, but will make no recommendations.

d. RECOMMENDATIONS OF ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND OTHER REFERENCE WORKS FOR PATRONS' PURCHASE

Although the Library does not recommend specific titles for purchase, a librarian provides assistance in locating reviews and evaluations. Users are urged to inspect each title personally to determine if it meets their individual needs.

e. MEDICAL QUESTIONS

Staff refers patrons to sources and provides short factual information from the Library's resources, but cannot provide advice, interpretations or opinions.

f. LEGAL QUESTIONS

Staff locates sources and/or specific citations and assists users in using the law collection. However, advice, interpretations or opinions cannot be provided

g. GENEALOGICAL QUESTIONS

The Library maintains a basic collection of local history and genealogical materials. Staff assists users in locating and using items in the Library's collection, but cannot engage in genealogical research for individuals. Users are referred to other resources as needed.

h. TRIVIA AND CONTEST QUESTIONS

Staff provides answers to trivia, game and contest questions which require simple factual information from a standard source. However, those users who require lengthy searches because of the number or nature of their questions are offered guidance in locating likely sources for their answers. Staff takes no responsibility to guarantee correct answers.

I. TRANSLATIONS

Staff provides users needing translations with appropriate dictionaries as available in the Library's collections and assists users in locating a translator upon request.

j. STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

Student assignments are treated like any other requests for information unless staff is given special instructions by the teacher in advance. To help develop research skills, staff instructs the student in the use of the Library and its materials whenever possible.

If upon a thorough search of sources in the Library the reference librarian determines there is no information available for the assignment, the Student Assignment Form may be used. This form notifies the teacher that the student came to the Library and was unable to find materials. Copies of this form are available at the Reference Desk.

In the event a teacher notifies the Library that an entire class has the same assignment, the reference librarian should pull appropriate materials, make them temporary reference and place them at the Reference Desk.

k. READERS' ADVISORY

Reference librarians help users select materials either by using their personal knowledge of the collection or by directing users to appropriate subject bibliographies, catalogs and readers' guides.

4. REFERENCE REFERRAL SERVICE

When a request for information cannot be satisfied by the resources of the Library, it may be referred to the NJ Statewide Reference Center. The Reference Department may also refer users directly to appropriate agencies. However, the Reference staff does not mediate between users and these agencies.

C. TELEPHONE REFERENCE SERVICE

As part of its service to the public, the Reference Department takes requests for information by telephone.

1. PRIORITY TO IN-PERSON REQUESTS

The Reference staff gives priority to in-person requests over telephone requests. When staff is unable to respond to reference calls, staff is requested to take messages. Staff returns calls whenever in-person users are not waiting. If a user comes to the desk while a telephone inquiry is in progress, his/her presence will be acknowledged, and the telephone conversation will be concluded as quickly as possible.

2. LONG DISTANCE AND TOLL CALLS

The Reference Department does not give priority to long distance and toll calls. Return long distance and toll calls are made collect.

3. SEARCH PARAMETERS

The Reference staff provides telephone reference service for short, factual inquiries which do not require extensive searches, interpretation or the reading of long passages over the telephone. Sources consulted are cited. If research or interpretation is needed, staff cites sources of information, and users are invited to come to the Library to examine the materials.

a. TIME LIMITS

Because of the volume of both incoming calls and in-person requests and because of staff limitations, telephone reference is usually limited to five minutes per call.

However, when the Library is busy or when the librarian cannot readily locate the requested information, users may be asked to leave their names and numbers for the librarian to return their calls.

b. HOLDS

HOLDS are limited to two per caller.

c. GAME CONTEST, LOTTERY AND RACE RESULTS

Game contest, lottery and race results are provided by telephone.

d. MEDICAL QUESTIONS

Telephone reference for medical questions is limited to those questions which require only a short definition or description that can be quoted verbatim with no interpretation by the librarian.

e. LEGAL QUESTIONS

Telephone reference for legal questions is limited to reading specific short citations or definitions.

f. STREET ADDRESS DIRECTORY

Street address inquiries are limited to two per caller.

g. CONSUMER PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Product ratings and recommendations may be given by telephone when a printed source is readily available. If the information is lengthy or complex, the reference librarian cites the source of information, and the user is invited to come to the Library to examine the materials.

h. SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS

Up to three short factual answers per student can be given over the telephone. Long passages cannot be read.

D. DATABASE SEARCHING

1. READY REFERENCE SEARCHES

The Reference Department performs online searches of one or more commercially available databases to look for answers to clearly definable reference questions when the librarian determines that printed references available in the Library do not answer the question, that the answer may be available online and/or that significant time can be saved by performing a database search. Such ready reference searches are completed within one working day of receipt of the question.

E. SPECIAL SERVICES

1. CIRCULATION OF REFERENCE MATERIALS FOR USE OUTSIDE LIBRARY

In general, reference materials are maintained permanently inside the Library building so that they will be accessible to as many users as possible when the Library is open. Most reference tools cannot be taken from the building without causing severe inconvenience to other potential Library users. The reference needs of the majority are given priority over the needs of any individual. However, since some reference materials are in much less demand than others, these reference books and pamphlets may be borrowed for limited periods of time upon approval of the reference librarian or Library Director. Exceptions: Monroe Township employees may borrow any reference title, including a law book, provided that it is for official Township business and can be returned expeditiously. Any other exceptions must be approved by the Reference Supervisor or Library Director.

2. COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Refer to the Library policy manual on Public Notices, Petitions and Surveys for the practices regarding use of the Community Bulletin Board.

3. TOURS

a. GENERAL TOURS

Tours of the Reference Department may be arranged with the Head of Reference. General tours of the Library may be scheduled through the Library Director.

b. CLASS VISITS

All class visits by teachers from public and private schools in Monroe Township must be prearranged with the Library. Only one class at a time is permitted. If the class will be working on their own, then any librarian at the Information Desk may take the request and schedule the visit.

If a tour and instruction of some kind is required, the teacher must speak with the Youth Services Coordinator to make arrangements. When requested, the librarian will give a tour to a class highlighting the facilities and services of the Library, the location of reference and research materials and the use of computer equipment and microforms available to them. If necessary, the librarian will provide detailed explanations of the use of reference materials related to the specific assignment being worked on.

Formal instruction in the use of libraries and library materials is the responsibility of the schools.

Class visits are generally limited to Monroe public and private schools, but requests from teachers outside the Township for a class visit are decided on a case by case basis, depending on need and special circumstances.

4. INSTRUCTION IN THE USE OF REFERENCE MATERIALS

The Reference staff assists patrons in the use of the Library, including equipment such as copy machines, printers, computers, etc. Whenever a patron has difficulty locating a book, a staff member goes to the shelf with the patron.

Library tours and orientations are available by appointment with the appropriate staff. Student tours are arranged with the Youth Services Coordinator. Public catalog instruction is arranged with the Reference staff.

5. COMPUTER WORK STATION

see [Technology Policy](#)

6. MICROFORM WORK STATION

The Library provides coin-operated microform reader/printers for patron use. A large part of the periodical back files is on microfiche. The Reference staff will retrieve the specified microfiche for the patron and assist in the use of the machines.

7. PHOTOCOPIERS

The Library provides self-service photocopiers for public use on a first-come-first-served basis. If requested, the Reference staff instructs patrons in the use of the machines. No accommodations are made for double-sided copying, multiple copying and/or use of special paper.

8. REFERENCE BY CORRESPONDENCE

The Reference Department responds to questions received by mail and e-mail. Users writing from a distance are referred to their local libraries or other appropriate agencies unless the Department decides that their questions are best answered by the resources at the Library. Up to ten pages of materials may be sent to such users free of charge. In answering requests by mail, librarians conform to the search parameters outlined in this policy manual. Local homebound users are served in accordance with paragraph 12d below.

9. PUBLIC USE OF LIBRARY TELEPHONES

Library users are not permitted to use Library telephones.

* If it is an emergency a patron may use the Reference Desk telephone to call locally or to call collect on long distance and toll calls.

10. RESERVE COLLECTION FOR SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS

When notified of assignments involving large numbers of students, the Reference Department reserves materials to support assignments from Monroe public and private schools. These materials are chosen and made temporary reference by the librarian in charge of this service and are set aside in the Department for the duration of the assignment. Materials in this collection must be used in the Library.

11. SPECIAL NEEDS

Extraordinary personal services are available to patrons with special needs to provide equal access to the Library's resources, including assistance with the computer, microforms, photocopiers or retrieval of materials.

a. VISUALLY IMPAIRED USERS

The Library carries a large selection of Large Print Books, Books on CD, and Books on Cassette. Should patrons require special materials, the Library is able to arrange with the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped to provide equipment and materials. Forms for the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped are filed at the Reference Desk.

b. PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED USERS

The Library facility meets the requirements of the ADA as much as possible in the present location. The Library staff is available to assist with retrieving materials for those unable to do so.

c. HOMEBOUND USERS

The Bookmobile provides services to homebound patrons on a monthly basis.

12. PHOTOCOPY, FAX AND MAILING

Upon request, the Library will photocopy and fax, mail or hold for pickup up to two pages of materials.

III. SERVICE TO OTHER LIBRARIES

A. INTERLIBRARY LOANS

1. GENERAL GUIDELINES

The Library provides regional level service to Infolink member libraries as outlined in the Infolink Regional Services Procedures Manual.

The Library does not lend on interlibrary loan new books published in the last six months, nor does it reserve them if circulating or on order.

Books are lent for 28 days. There are no renewals.

2. PHOTOCOPY REQUESTS

Up to ten pages of materials may be photocopied and sent at no charge.

IV. REFERENCE COLLECTION

A. SELECTION AND RETENTION OF MATERIALS

The Reference Department adheres to the criteria for selection, maintenance and development of the collection set forth in the Library's Collection Development Policy. Reference materials are selected and retained for their utility, currency, quality, affordability and relation to the existing collection.

While the Library Director has primary responsibility for developing and maintaining the reference collection, every reference librarian who staffs the Reference Desk is responsible for making recommendations for updating and expanding the collection. Public recommendation of titles for purchase is encouraged.

B. CLASSIFICATION OF MATERIALS AS REFERENCE

The primary criterion for classifying any title as reference is utility in meeting the specific and recurrent information needs of users. Books may be purchased for both the reference and circulating collections, as deemed appropriate by the Head of Reference and Library Director.

C. SIZE AND GROWTH OF COLLECTION

The Library maintains the reference collection at a size deemed most manageable and useful to staff and public. Emphasis is placed on adding materials that expand or update rather than duplicate information already contained in the collection. The collection is continually reviewed to remove superseded, dated or extraneous materials.

V. EVALUATION OF REFERENCE SERVICES

The reference collection is periodically evaluated to assess its effectiveness in meeting the information needs of the Library's users.

Adopted June 17, 1996