

Monroe Township Public Library  
Reference Policy

I. Introduction

- a. Philosophy of Reference Service – The mission of the Monroe Township 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:
  - i. To provide accurate, efficient and courteous assistance and information required or requested by users, whether in person or by telephone, email, text, fax or letter.
  - ii. To facilitate access to and optimum use of the Library's resources.
  - iii. To select, acquire and organize resources to meet the current and anticipated needs of Library users and prospective users.
  - iv. To supplement the Library's resources through interlibrary cooperation and online/digital resources.
- b. Purpose of Policy Manual – The purpose of this policy manual is to present written guidelines for the provision of reference service to ensure a consistent standard of service of the highest possible quality.
  - i. Use – This manual is intended for use as:
    - 1. A reference guide for both the current Reference staff and those being trained.
    - 2. 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.
  - ii. 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.
  - iii. Review and Revision – This manual is reviewed each year before October 1 by the Reference staff and Library Director to ensure that policy and practice are in conformity and that changes are made as required.

II. Service to the Public

- a. General Guidelines
  - i. Staffing of Reference Desk
    - 1. Level of Staffing – The Reference Desk is staffed at all times by two professional librarians. When no users require assistance, staff may work on other assignments, examine new reference materials or read professional literature. Welcome Desk personnel may help staff the Reference Desk when necessary.
    - 2. 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.

3. 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. Relieving staff members should be prompt to facilitate the transition.
- ii. Priority in Handling Inquiries – In general, the Reference staff gives priority to in-person requests over telephone requests 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 person 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
  - i. Requests for Materials
    1. Locating Materials in Collection – Reference librarians assist users in searching for and identifying 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 materials, indices, bibliographies, vertical files, 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.
    2. Interlibrary Loan Requests for Materials not in Monroe Township Public Library or LMxAC Collection(s) – The Reference staff offers to attempt 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.
    3. Internet Services – See Technology Policy.
    4. Security Reference Collection – Certain titles prone to theft or mutilation are placed in this collection. Users are required to borrow these items at the Reference Desk.
    5. 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.

- ii. 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.
  - 1. 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.
  - 2. 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.
- iii. Search Parameters
  - 1. 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.
  - 2. Appraisals – Although appraisals of rare books, coins, stamps, art works, antiques, etc. cannot be made, staff assist users in locating current market value information from printed and online sources or listings of dealers when available.
  - 3. Consumer Product Information –The Library provides materials to assist patrons in making their own evaluation of products. The librarian may provide specific information requested from the various consumer guides, but will make no recommendations.
  - 4. 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.
  - 5. Medical Questions – Staff refers patrons to sources and provides short factual information from the Library’s resources but cannot provide advice, interpretations or opinions.
  - 6. 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.

7. Genealogical Questions – The Library maintains a basic collection of local history and genealogical materials and digital resources. Staff assist users in locating and using items in the Library’s collection, but cannot engage in extensive genealogical research for individuals. Users are referred to other sources as needed.
  8. 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.
  9. Translations – Staff provides users needing translations with appropriate dictionaries and/or digital resources as available in the Library’s collections and assists users in locating a translator upon request.
  10. 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.
- iv. Reference Referral Service – When a request for information cannot be satisfied by the resources of the Library, it may be referred to the New Jersey 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.
- i. 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.
  - ii. 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.
    1. 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.

2. Holds – Holds are limited to two per caller.
3. Game Contest, Lottery and Race Results – Game contest, lottery and race results are provided by telephone.
4. 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 interpretations by the librarian.
5. Legal Questions – Telephone reference for legal questions is limited to reading specific citations or definitions.
6. Street Address Directory – Street address inquiries are limited to two per caller.
7. Consumer Product Recommendations – Product ratings and recommendations may be given by telephone when a reliable resource 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.
8. School Assignments – Up to three short factual answers per student can be given over the telephone. Long passages cannot be read.

d. Special Services

- i. 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 Supervisor 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 Library Director.
- ii. 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.
- iii. Tours
  1. 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.
  2. Class Visits – All class visits by teachers from public and private schools in Monroe Township must be pre-arranged with the Youth Services Department.

- iv. Instruction in the Use of Reference Materials – The Reference staff prepares materials to guide patrons in the use of library resources, including digital resources. 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.
- v. Computer Work Station – see Technology Policy.
- vi. 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 the use of special paper.
- vii. Reference by Correspondence – The Reference department responds to questions received by mail or 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 xi3 below.
- viii. 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.
- ix. 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, microfiche, photocopiers or retrieval of materials.
  - 1. Visually Impaired Users – The Library carries a large selection of Large Print Books and Books on CD, as well as ebooks and digital audiobooks. Should patrons require special materials, the Library is able to arrange with the New Jersey Library Talking Book and Braille Center (TBBC) to provide equipment and materials. Forms for the New Jersey Library Talking Book and Braille Center are filed at the Reference Desk.
  - 2. 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.
  - 3. Homebound Users – At Home Services and Bookmobile staff provide service to homebound patrons on a regular basis.
- x. Photocopy, Fax and Mailing – Upon request, the Library will photocopy/scan and email, fax, mail or hold for pickup up to two pages of materials.

### III. Service to Other Libraries

#### a. Interlibrary Loan (ILL)

- i. General Guidelines – 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. Renewal requests must be approved by the Head of Interlibrary Loan Services or the Assistant to the Head of Interlibrary Loan Services.
  - ii. ILL Photocopy Requests – Up to ten pages of materials may be photocopied/scanned and sent via email or mail 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 reference and circulating collections, as deemed appropriate by the Head of Reference and Library Director.
  - c. Evaluation of Reference Materials – The reference collection is periodically evaluated to assess its effectiveness in meeting the information needs of the Library’s users. The collection is continually reviewed to remove superseded, dated or extraneous materials.

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Revised October 17, 2005

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