

Middleton Public Library Reference Services Policy

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I Goal Statement and Philosophy of Service

- (A) The primary goal of reference service is to ensure the optimum access to information resources through interaction with library users as follows:
 1. Provision of personal assistance by library staff
 2. Provision of formal and informal instruction in the use of library resources
 3. Provision of access to a wide range of information through print, electronic, and online resources, and the use of interlibrary loan and document delivery networks.
- (B) The library patron is the most important person in the library. Service provided to patrons is not an interruption of work but is rather the purpose of it.

II The Reference Collection

- (A) Reference materials are purchased in order to provide assistance with general, rather than specialized, information needs.
- (B) Specific criteria for the selection of reference materials are set forth in section IV (F) of the library's Collection Development Policy. Special emphasis in this area is placed on the timeliness of the materials. The library regularly purchases revisions of standard materials.
- (C) Any item catalogued for the reference collection ("R") does not circulate. There are no exceptions. The library will purchase circulating copies of certain popular and affordable reference titles.
- (D) The library offers free access to the Internet from a number of public work stations. The Internet offers access to ideas, information, and commentary from around the world that can be personally, professionally, and culturally enriching. However, not all resources on the Internet are accurate, complete, or up-to-date. Library staff assumes responsibility only for the information provided on its home page. We do not monitor, have no control over, and do not accept responsibility for material from other sources on the Internet.

III **Guidelines and Responsibilities**

- (A) A reference service user is a library patron of any age or circumstance who chooses to make contact with a library staff member at the reference desk.
- (B) All inquiries will be handled courteously.
- (C) Staff members will not make value judgments as to the importance of any question. Questions deemed inappropriate for the reference desk will be referred to the appropriate sources.
- (D) Reference questions will be responded to in the order received. In the cases of conflicts or time restraints, priority service will be given to in-person requests. Telephone requests will be noted, and calls will be returned as promptly as possible.
- (E) All answers given by staff shall be verified by legitimate documentation and the sources used shall be noted to patrons.
- (F) Staff are expected to do as much as possible with the available resources and within a reasonable time frame to answer patron requests. Possible limitations are discussed in section VII.
- (G) If it is not possible to answer the request to the patron's satisfaction with the library's materials, the following actions may be taken:
 - 1. Use interlibrary loan service
 - 2. Refer patrons to library electronic resources and databases.
 - 3. Refer patrons to library public instruction handouts and classes.
 - 4. Make phone calls to local sources of information.
 - 5. Refer patrons to other resources outside the library.
- (H) Confidentiality is to be maintained. Patrons and their questions will not be discussed beyond a professional context.
- (I) Questions concerning library policy should be answered by referring to written policy statements. If this does not satisfy the patron, he or she should be referred to the Library Director.

IV **In-Person Reference Service**

- (A) Staff at the reference desk will maintain an alert and visibly approachable attitude.
 - 1. Any work done at the desk should not become a barrier to public service.
 - 2. Staff should not appear too busy to be interrupted.
- (B) An atmosphere that is conducive to an efficient reference interview should be maintained.
 - 1. Privacy should be provided as best it can in order to encourage the patron to state specific information needs.
 - 2. A low speaking voice is generally appropriate. If necessary, a reference interview may be moved to a more private area.

- (C) Active assistance should be provided
 1. Staff should follow-through with service to the patron.
 2. Basic instruction in the use of resources should be provided as needed.
 3. Whenever possible, patrons should be accompanied to the source of information rather than directed to it, or, in the case of computer searches, they should be shown how the information was retrieved.
- (D) Reference staff may help promote individual reading and independent learning interests by introducing materials that meet and develop topics suggested by patrons.

V **Telephone Reference Service**

- (A) Service is usually limited to supplying the kind of information that is readily available, does not require extensive searching, and may be accurately imparted over the telephone.
- (B) Ready reference service will be provided for questions that can be answered over the telephone within a reasonable amount of time while the patron waits.
- (C) Callback service will be provided for questions that require more than a reasonable amount of time to answer.

VI **Electronic Reference Service**

- (A) Staff will utilize the Internet and other electronic information sources in the same way that print sources are used to answer questions and find information. The staff will both instruct patrons in the use of the Internet and other electronic resources as well as refer to these sources as part of a complete reference search strategy. As with print sources, it is not possible for the staff to offer extensive searches or lengthy instruction. The library offers free classes on a scheduled basis.
- (B) Reference questions may be emailed to the library. As with telephone requests, responses will be emailed back within the workday, if possible.

VII **Mail (Postal) Reference Service**

- (A) Mail reference service is generally not within the scope of the library's reference service program. Mail inquiries will not be accepted from anyone living within the South Central Library System service area.
- (B) Staff will attempt to answer mail inquiries received from outside the South Central Library System with available local resources. Preference will be given to requests for information

specific to Middleton. Generic requests, i.e., questions that can be answered with the resources available at most public libraries, or requests that involve extensive searching will not be honored.

1. Genealogical requests will be referred to the State Historical Society Library.
2. Unusual requests will be referred to the Library Director.

- (C) Requests that require the photocopying of more than ten pages must be accompanied by payment. The cost is ten cents per page.

VIII **Special Approach Reference Questions**

- (A) Evaluations and ratings
1. Assistance is provided to patrons in locating the appropriate sources of information and, if necessary, directions on how to use them.
 2. For telephone requests, staff may read a summary evaluation of a specific product, citing the source of the information. Staff may give brand names and model numbers of products and may quote car prices.
 3. Personal opinions are not appropriate in this area.
- (B) Values of art works, coins, stamps, and other collectibles.
1. Undocumented appraisals of the values of such items are not given.
 2. Staff will refer patrons to standard antique and collectible price guides, when appropriate.
- (C) Critical analyses
1. Personal critical analysis, interpretations, or judgments of the merit of literary works are to be supplemented with published critiques whenever possible.
 2. All personal evaluations should be identified as such.
- (D) Medical, legal, statistical, and technical information
1. Material of any type related to these fields (including tables, charts, equations, laws, regulatory or tax information, legal and medical definitions) are not to be interpreted by staff.
 2. In the case of telephone requests, information may be read over the phone, including the citation of the source, but patrons must interpret the information. Patrons should be advised to read the material for themselves.
 3. Staff should feel free to state that they do not have the specialized knowledge to interpret material for conclusive answers.
- (E) Compilations and literature searches: Staff does not prepare extensive compilations, bibliographies, lists, and the like for patrons, nor are exhaustive literature searches undertaken.
- (F) Translations: Staff will supply oral translations for patrons for reference-related topics, as time and schedules allow.
- (G) Tax forms
1. The library makes available reproducible tax forms provided by the federal Internal Revenue Service and the state Department of Revenue.

2. The library staff is not qualified to offer assistance in tax form preparation or to interpret tax laws. Appropriate referrals to other agencies may be suggested.

IX Other Responsibilities of Reference Staff

- (A) Staff at the reference desk oversees the use of the library's public computers, printers and scanners on the lower level.
- (B) Staff will assist patrons in using the photocopier, public fax and microfilm reader/printer.
- (C) Non-staff telephone use
 1. A phone is available for patron use in the vestibule of the library, but staff may give permission to patrons to use a library telephone if the situation warrants it.
 2. Except in emergency situations, telephone requests for paging and/or searching for people will generally not be honored.
- (D) Quiet area/Study rooms
 1. Staff may request that fewer people work together in one area if the situation warrants it or suggest that they use one of the library's study rooms.
 2. Individuals or groups of up to five may sign up to use the library's study rooms.
- (E) Proctoring
 1. The reference staff may serve as proctors for students in accredited extended degree programs.
 2. Students must schedule exams in advance.
- (F) Circulation functions: Reference staff will generally refer such questions to the circulation desk.

Adopted March 8, 1984
Amended April 14, 1992
Amended August 12, 1997
Amended December 12, 2001
Amended July 8, 2003
Amended March 8, 2005
Amended February 9, 2010
Amended June 8, 2010
Amended August 13, 2013
Amended September 9, 2014