

Tyler Public Library
Policy

TITLE: **Reference Services Policy**

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AUTHORIZED BY: Tyler Public Library Board

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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; and
3. Provision of access to a wide range of material through bibliographies, indexes, databases, and the use of an interlibrary loan network.

(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) Emphasis in this area will be placed on the timeliness of the materials.

(C) Any item cataloged for the reference collection ("REF" or "REFDESK") do not circulate. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Reference Librarian. The library will purchase circulating copies of certain popular and affordable reference titles.

(D) Purchase of items will depend on reference budget and community need.

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 for the purpose of obtaining information.

(B) All inquiries will be handled courteously.

(C) Value judgments will not be made by any staff 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 is expected to do as much as possible with the available resources and within a reasonable time frame.

(G) If it is not possible to answer a request with the library's materials to the patron's satisfaction, the following actions may be taken:

1. Use interlibrary loan service.
2. Make phone calls to local sources of information.
3. Refer patrons to other resources outside the library.
4. Guide patrons to the "Suggest to Buy" form on the Library's website.

(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 City Librarian.

IV. In-Person Reference Service

(A) Staff 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. To the extent possible, privacy should be provided 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. 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.

(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 one minute while the patron waits.

(C) Callback service will be provided the same day for questions that require more than one minute to answer.

(D) Limitations on telephone reference service include:

1. When providing directory assistance, including criss-cross information, no more than three names, addresses and/or phone numbers will be given per call.

2. In providing criss-cross information, staff will give "nearby" names and phone numbers of individuals only in special or emergency situations.

VI. Electronic Reference Service

(A) Staff will utilize the Internet and other electronic information sources in the same way print sources are used to answer questions and to 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, nor lengthy instruction. A limit of three searches will be allowed per day.

VII. Mail (Postal) Reference Service

(A) Mail reference service is not within the scope of the library's reference service program. Special exceptions can be made by the Reference Librarian on a case-by-case basis.

1. Genealogical requests will be referred to the Local History Room on the third floor. There is a two hour search limit for staff members assisting with genealogical research. This will be done by staff or volunteers. Anything further will be referred to the East Texas Genealogical Society.

(B) Requests that require photocopying must be accompanied by payment of ten cents per page.

VIII. Special Approach Reference Questions

(A) Contest questions

1. Such questions may be deemed low priority. Staff may evaluate each request and determine if the library has the time or resources to assist with these questions.

2. Reference for patrons participating in prize contests that involve more than simple answers will be limited to supplying the materials and explaining how to locate the information.

(B) School assignments

1. Such questions involving in-person reference shall be handled in the same manner as any other question.

2. Generally, it is not library policy to answer school-related questions over the telephone. The following exceptions are noted:

(a) When the question falls under the guidelines of Section V: Telephone Reference Service

(b) When the question is a small part of a much larger task

(c) When the question involves checking a bibliographic citation

(d) When the question involves whether or not the library has enough material available to make a visit worthwhile

(C) 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.

(D) 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.

(E) 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.

(F) 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) is 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. Staff should refer patrons to the Smith County Law Library or the UT Health Medical Library for further assistance in law or medical questions.

4. Appropriate requests will be referred to the State Reference and Loan Library.

(G) Compilations and literature searches: Staff does not prepare extensive compilations, bibliographies, lists and the like for patrons, nor are exhaustive literature searches undertaken.

(H) Translations: Staff does not supply translations for patrons. Per the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA,) on request, the Library will coordinate making a sign language interpreter available to assist a patron who is deaf or hard of hearing. If a sign language interpreter is not immediately available, then the library will make arrangements to have one available at a certain date and time and will communicate same to the patron.

(I) Tax forms

1. The library makes available online 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.

3. Staff may print forms for patrons at 25 cents per page.

IX. Other Responsibilities of Reference Department Staff

(A) Photocopier: Reference desk staff will be primarily responsible for offering assistance.

a. Reference desk staff will send off faxes that are requested. If a staff member should feel uncomfortable with a fax being sent, they can contact their supervisor.

(B) Quiet study areas

1. Staff may request that fewer people work together in one area if the situation warrants.

2. In general, four people or fewer at one table is optimum. The librarian in charge may make exceptions for group study.

(C) Proctoring

1. The full-time library staff may serve as proctors for students in accredited extended degree programs, according to availability.
2. Students must schedule exams in advance.
3. Students are responsible for ensuring that exams are mailed to the library in a timely fashion. Students may also email the Reference Librarian their tests as needed.
4. Library staff are not responsible for any issues that may arise with the test.

All policies will be reviewed annually by staff, and significant changes will be brought to the Library Board.