

Hopkinton Town Library
61 Houston Dr.
Contoocook, NH 03229

Reference Policy

OBJECTIVE OF REFERENCE SERVICE

It is the objective of Reference Service to effectively meet the goals of the library's mission statement by bringing the library's resources and the community together in a variety of ways. Whatever the question or information need, the staff will search the library's collection of books, periodicals, the Internet, online databases, and pamphlets to find the answer. The staff is trained to utilize print, technology and the Internet to the fullest possible extent to carry out this mission. If an answer cannot be found in the library's collection, the staff will contact other libraries, agencies and resources to meet the user's information needs.

Reference service will be provided whenever the library is open. The Reference Desk will be staffed at all times by trained librarians who will provide quality service to all users. The staff will provide the best service possible through the resources available and through collaboration with fellow staff members who have specialized knowledge and skills.

PURPOSE OF REFERENCE POLICY

- To describe the services and resources offered
- To set standards and guidelines that ensure excellence in reference service.
- To provide a philosophical framework for staff that confirms the library's commitment to excellence in reference service.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

- To provide personal assistance without discrimination to library users.
- To select, acquire, and organize sources of information, both traditional and electronic, to meet the changing needs of library users.
- To identify and promote the information needs of potential users in the community.
- To cooperate with community agencies and organizations in their efforts to serve the community and to utilize the expertise of those agencies to obtain the best information in order to completely answer a patron's question.
- To ensure that library users receive a consistently high level of service.
- To present programs which teach the use of the library and its resources.
- To identify a patron's specific informational needs through a reference interview and then proceed to fill those needs by using the resources available, including the expertise of colleagues and referral to other organizations.
- To utilize services contracted by the New Hampshire State Library for specialized reference service.

REFERENCE STAFF

Reference staff members serve as the link between resources and the patron. As such, it is important that staff members be:

- Highly knowledgeable about traditional reference sources and proficient with electronic resources and the technology needed to access those resources.
- Knowledgeable about the town of Hopkinton and its government.
- Open and approachable; friendly but professional; impartial in dealing with all patrons.
- Able to communicate effectively with all library users.
- Discreet in the handling of questions that might be confidential or sensitive.
- Able to exercise good judgment both in the interpretation of policy and in the handling of exceptional situations.
- Able to instruct the public in the use of print and electronic resources.
- Able to evaluate the Internet for authority, accuracy, currency, and content.
- Skilled in the interviewing process in order to help the patron formulate their specific question and make the patron comfortable in the transaction so they will return for further help if their specific need has not been met.
- Take the responsibility to seek continuing education opportunities especially workshops provided by the New Hampshire State Library, and any other workshops and conferences approved by the Library Director.

New staff members will receive orientation to Hopkinton Town Library and to the New Hampshire State Library (NHSL) and the New Hampshire Automated Information System (NHAIS). Continual training is necessary in order to provide the highest level of service. Participation in workshops and attendance at meetings on a local, state, and national level is encouraged.

LIBRARY USERS

Library users are all people seeking information whether in person, by telephone, by fax, by mail, or by email. Reference service is available to all persons without discrimination. The needs of the library user are taken seriously and treated with the utmost respect.

The Library is committed to protecting the privacy of its staff, donors, customers, and other contacts (See complete Privacy Statement Policy at www.hopkintontownlibrary.org or ask a reference librarian.) The Library's privacy policy is clear: The Library will not collect personal information about you or your activities when you visit our website or register for a program or use our resources.

This confidentiality extends to information sought or received, and materials consulted, borrowed, or acquired. It includes database search records, circulation records, interlibrary loan records, and other personally identifiable uses of library materials, facilities or services.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DESK SERVICE

Priorities

Service to the public receives priority over any other duties. Library users should be confident that the primary purpose of a reference librarian is to assist them.

The public is served on a first come, first served basis. People calling the library are helped in sequence. Callers will be asked if they would like to wait, to call back, or to be called back before being put on hold. Patrons approaching the desk will be informed that they will be helped as soon as possible.

Reference Staff members are on-call during scheduled off desk time to assist at the reference desk when needed.

Recording

Statistics are noted daily and gathered on a monthly basis.

Incomplete Reference Transactions

Although every effort is made to complete questions immediately, some can remain at the end of a shift or day. Unfinished questions are turned over to incoming staff. A patron will be advised if more than one day is needed to complete the question or if the question has been referred to another source. Staff members will consult with colleagues if they need assistance with a puzzling or difficult question

Referrals to Other Libraries

If needed materials are located at another library, the staff member will verify that the resources are actually there.

Sources

To give the most accurate and authoritative answers possible, staff members will avoid personal opinions, philosophy, or evaluations; rather they will rely upon information based on accurate printed or online sources. The opinion of staff members, even when requested, will not be given as fact. The source of the answer will always be cited. Medical, legal, and tax information will in no way be interpreted or opinions given.

Instruction and Orientation Services

Instruction and orientation services in library use are an integral part of library service and may range from basic instruction on how to use the computer catalog, online databases, or Internet.

More formal tours are offered to school groups, organizations or libraries in order to increase the knowledge of the library's materials and services.

Time Limits

No two reference questions are alike; therefore, no special time limits can be placed on an actual question. The amount of time devoted to a question is at the discretion of the reference librarian.

SPECIFIC REFERENCE DESK SERVICE GUIDELINES

A reference transaction is defined as an informational contact, which involves the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, by a member of the library staff. Reference interviewing techniques will always be employed to determine the specific need of the patron. Direct service provides the information requested, while instructional service is designed to teach independent use of library resources. Reference service, whether direct or instructional, provides accurate and prompt information to the public.

In-Person Reference

Basic Assistance: Reference staff members will assist patrons at every level of the Reference transaction, if the patron so desires. This may require accompanying the patron to the computer catalog to explain its use, or physically locating the materials for the patron. In the event that the staff member is unable to accompany the patron to the stacks area, it is important to remind the patron to check back with the reference desk if the material cannot be located.

Priority: If a patron has a time-consuming request, it may be necessary to get him/her started and make sure a follow-up is done to continue the patron in the process. Additional staff will be summoned if necessary or during break time.

Telephone Reference

Telephone reference will be handled in the same sequence and manner as in-person inquiries. Book checks will be done to confirm that titles are on the shelf and will be held at the circulation desk. If the desk is busy or if multiple titles are requested, staff will offer to call the patron back to let him/her know we have found and are holding the titles. If the answer to the question seems too involved to relate easily over the telephone, this will be explained and the suggestion made that the patron come to the Library.

Callers from out-of-state will be asked to call back at a prearranged time if the librarian is busy.

When a staff member must transfer a call, the caller will be told where the call is being transferred and why.

Fax, Mail, Email Requests

It is the library's practice to respond to all reasonable reference inquiries received by mail, fax or email. If the question becomes too involved or time-consuming, the staff member will explain the limitations of the service and suggest that the patron visit the library for further

assistance. Suggestions of Internet sites, which maybe helpful in answering a patron's question can be a good referral especially when dealing with email requests.

SPECIFIC REFERENCE QUESTION GUIDELINES

School Assignments

Questions related to school assignments will be treated like any other request for reference assistance. Every effort will be made to satisfactorily answer a student's questions and provide the sources for information and the instruction needed to use those sources. If a student has a printed school assignment, it is helpful to ask permission to copy the assignment and pass it on to the children's librarian so she can set some books aside for the assignment or contact the teacher for further explanation.

If staff has used a good resource for the assignment they will pass the resources on to the next shift rather than rely on them to redo the search. If every effort has been made by the reference staff and the student to locate information without results, the student will be encouraged to return to the teacher for further instructions or an altered assignment. A note to this effect may be given to the student if the reference staff member feels it is justified.

Contest Questions

Contest questions will be approached with the same guidelines and time limits as any other type of reference question. However, contest questions are often designed to be interpreted in more than one way and have more than one answer that seems to be correct. The staff will not interpret contest rules.

Consumer Evaluations

The staff will help patrons locate objective consumer product information by showing how to consult the indexes to Consumer Reports and related magazines, buying guides, and/or general periodical indexes. Short published consumer ratings will be read over the phone; however, in depth consumer information must be read at the library. The staff does not offer personal opinions recommending one product over another.

Book, Antique and Art Appraisals

Patrons will be referred to appropriate reference sources or to consultants or experts. Staff members will never give a personal appraisal of the value of an object.

Genealogical and Local History Questions

Staff members will provide general assistance in genealogical research, and guidance in locating items in our Local History Room Collection. Patrons may accompany staff to the Local History Room to choose resources and may remain in the room. Patrons calling long distance will be requested to mail or email their request to the Library. Research will be done and referrals to the New Hampshire Antiquarian Society or other appropriate organization may be given.

Compilations and Extensive Research

Requests for and/or completion of lengthy research are not considered a traditional role of the public reference librarian. Patrons needing extensive bibliographies, lists, statistics, or research will be directed to the appropriate resources and offered as much assistance as staff time allows.

Medical, Legal and Tax Questions

The library does not provide advice in the areas of medicine, law, and taxes. Under no circumstances will a staff member offer advice in medical, legal, or tax areas, no matter how commonplace the question seems to be. Complicated legal searches will not be undertaken nor will personal interpretations of legal matters be offered. Referrals will be made to the New Hampshire Law Library.

Brief definitions and descriptions from authoritative sources will be provided in response to requests for medical information. These sources will be quoted verbatim with no personal interpretation. The patron will be informed of the sources from which the information is taken. Every effort will be made to use authoritative, current online sources when using the Internet.

Specific tax forms and publications will not be suggested. Patrons need to know the number of the forms they need. If more information is required, the patron will be encouraged to examine the library's collections or be referred to another source.

Mathematical Calculations

Patrons needing mathematical calculations will be referred to sources containing the formulas or tables necessary for them to complete their calculations

Loan of Reference Materials

Reference materials may not be checked out.

Instructional Classes

Classes are offered by Hopkinton Town Library staff for instructional use of the library catalog, electronic resources, and Internet searching.

Adopted by the Trustees of the Hopkinton Town Library on December 14, 2005