

## ***Racine Public Library***

### **REFERENCE SERVICES POLICY**

#### **Purpose of the Reference Services Policy**

This policy defines the goals and philosophy of reference services at the Racine Public Library. This policy also identifies for patrons the levels of service which the library provides, based on the resources available.

#### **Goals of the Reference Services**

To provide high quality, consistent assistance to patrons seeking information, materials, reader's advisory service, or guidance in the use of the library.

To acquire resources appropriate to the community's needs in order to satisfy the majority of requests, using materials available in the library or available electronically using Internet.

To refer the question or patron to appropriate outside sources if the request cannot be answered using the library's resources.

To provide current information by continuously updating the library's collections, acquiring new titles and subscription electronic resources, within budgetary limits.

#### **Ethics, Confidentiality, and Impartiality in the Reference Transaction**

The library serves patrons of all ages and circumstances, with sensitivity to their particular needs. The library staff understands that the basic function of reference services is to provide information, not opinion. The library staff provides information in an impartial and businesslike manner, even when contrary to personal beliefs.

The library staff keeps all requests for information and resulting patron records confidential, in accordance with the Wisconsin Statutes on confidentiality of library records. When referring a question, the library will provide the patron's name to an outside source only if necessary, and if this source also offers a guarantee of confidentiality.

The library and staff subscribe to the American Library Association's *Statement on Professional Ethics*, 1981.

#### **Availability of Service**

Basic reference service is available to all walk-in patrons, regardless of residency. Ready reference service is provided by phone to all callers without regard to residency. More in-depth telephone reference service is available only to residents of the Lakeshores Library System area (Racine and Walworth Counties). For more in-depth service, the

staff refers patrons who reside outside the Lakeshores System to their home libraries and/or suggest additional approaches, which these patrons might pursue on their own.

RPL card holders, or card holders from other Lakeshores Library System member libraries, may obtain materials and information from the Racine Public Library free of charge through the established interlibrary loan network. The library provides reference service, by e-mail, mail, or by phone, to out-of-state residents who contact the Reference Desk, only if the material involved is unique to the Racine Public Library and does not circulate, such as the archival collections for Racine history. The library charges \$40 per hour for this service, prorated in 15-minute increments, plus \$.15 per page for photocopies.

Out-of-state residents seeking genealogy information are encouraged to borrow our microfilmed newspapers through interlibrary loan for use at their local library, or to contact the Racine Heritage Museum (which provides genealogical research for a fee) and the Area Research Center at UW-Parkside.

### **Staffing**

Reference service is provided by qualified staff in both the Adult Services and Youth Services Departments during all hours the library is open. There are librarians on duty in the Adult Services Department and Youth Services Department during all service hours.

### **General Reference Services**

#### Priorities for Service

The library staff gives priority to in-person requests when both in-person and telephone requests are received simultaneously. Staff may complete a telephone conversation in progress before attending to a patron who is waiting at the desk. However, if a phone conversation becomes lengthy, the staff may ask to return the call, or have the caller hold, while we assist patrons who are waiting at the desk.

#### Time Limitations

The library staff does not place time limitations on searches, since reference questions vary in complexity, and patrons differ in their needs for personal assistance. However, if a patron has a complex question, and/or needs to be introduced to many sources, the staff will help the patron begin the search, help other patrons who are waiting, then check back on the first patron's progress. Sometimes it is necessary to help several patrons concurrently.

#### Types of Information Services

**Ready Reference** questions can be answered quickly by trained staff using identifiable sources such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, almanacs, directories, Internet search engines, etc. Some examples are word spellings, zip codes, definitions of words, a company address, and holdings information ("do you own *Mein Kampf*?") The reference staff answers ready reference questions by telephone, via email and in-person.

**Search Questions** require more than a quick answer. Although the source of information may not be readily apparent, it will be clear to the reference librarian what type of search strategy and what type of sources (print and/or electronic) to use. An example of this type of question would be “how many rose windows are there in the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris?” The reference staff accepts this type of question via the telephone, via email or in person.

If, in the course of the search, the staff discovers that finding an answer entails a great deal of reading, or unindexed sources, the staff gathers the sources and asks the patron to complete the search (coming to the library if not already in the building). If finding an answer entails scanning many web pages produced by using an Internet search engine, the staff will recreate the search on a public computer so that a patron who is in the library may do the scanning. If a patron is contacting the staff from outside the library and has Internet access, the staff will explain to the patron how to recreate the search. If the patron does not have Internet access, he or she will need to come to the library to use the public workstations.

**Research Questions** require the gathering and synthesis of extensive information from various sources. Term papers and other reports are examples of this type of question. The reference staff guides the patron in his/her search, suggesting search strategies and sources, and explaining the use of appropriate reference and indexing tools.

**Instructional Service** to patrons is both direct and indirect. The reference staff shows patrons who prefer to work independently how to use the computer catalog, periodical databases and other library sources, if they request instruction. As indicated above, patrons also are given instruction in use of library resources if the staff needs their help to complete a search.

Patrons also receive instruction indirectly as they observe the staff using the resources of the library. When appropriate, the staff explains to patrons they are helping what they are doing, in order to encourage independent use of the library.

Trained staff teach regularly scheduled classes on a variety of personal computer topics, including the use of Internet browsing software. One-on-one assistance in the use of Microsoft Office products, Internet browsers and other software products available on the library’s public access computers is provided on a very limited basis. The amount of assistance available at a particular time will vary, depending on the level of reference desk staffing and the demands on the staff’s time.

**Internet Assistance** is provided to help patrons develop search strategies for locating information in free, publicly-available web pages and databases as well as in online databases that are paid for by the library, Lakeshores Library System or the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The reference staff will not enter personal

data for patrons who are conducting transactions at web sites requiring this type of data entry, but they will provide navigational assistance to the best of their ability.

**Readers' Advisory Service** is provided to help patrons access the fiction collection. Since fiction is shelved alphabetically by authors' name, and subject heading for fiction in the catalog are a relatively recent innovation (and, therefore, quite limited), special reference tools are often needed to locate specific types of fiction. The reference staff consults these tools and suggests titles, and/or instructs the patron in the use of these tools, as appropriate to each situation.

### **Special Categories of Information**

#### Legal, Medical, and Financial Questions

The staff provides information by telephone if it is very brief and can be read in its entirety. The reference staff provides assistance in the use of the collection to patrons who are at the library. Staff does not offer opinions or interpretations, nor do the librarians attempt to abstract or condense information given over the telephone or in person. Sources are given and quoted verbatim. Since current information in these areas is especially crucial, the staff also encourages patrons to consult professionals rather than relying on printed sources alone. Although the staff makes every effort to obtain the most reliable resources for the collection the library does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of its sources.

#### Contest/Trivia Questions

The library does not assume the responsibility for finding contest answers nor of guaranteeing their correctness. Patrons who come to the library are assisted in finding probable sources for answers. In the case of an identifiable contest or quiz question received by telephone, the patron is encouraged to come to the library.

Non-contest trivia questions are treated like any other reference question. The reference staff provides answers to easily researched questions. Although patrons are asked to do their own research for questions of a more detailed or complex nature, the staff makes every effort to lead them to the appropriate resources.

#### Appraisals

The library has a collection of price guides providing an indication of market value for collectibles and antiques. In the case of a telephone request, the staff provides information from standard printed sources if the object is easily identifiable. If the object cannot be readily identified from a verbal description, the patron is encouraged to come to the library to consult the available guides. The library does not assume responsibility for determining the value of an object.

#### Homework Questions

Generally, the staff does not do the reference work required for school assignments, but gives students instruction in the use of library tools, and guides them in their search for

material. The staff will answer the occasional ready reference question over the phone. However, if the assignment consists of a lengthy list of ready reference questions, the student is encouraged to come to the library to do the research.

Bookmobile staff encourage students who need resources beyond those available in the bookmobile collection to go to the Main Library. If requests for student assignments are sent to the main library, the reference librarian does the students' work, and this defeats the general policy stated above.

#### City Directory/Criss-Cross Information

Information from the City Directory and the Criss-Cross is public information, and is given by telephone and in-house, including nearby listings.

#### Stock Price Quotations

The reference staff provides a maximum of five stock price quotations per patron, per day, if they are available in hard copy sources or online. Patrons requiring additional prices, or prices available only on microfilm, need to come to the library to do their own searching. The reference staff will direct patrons to the appropriate resources.

#### Checking for Obituaries

The reference staff will check for an obituary requested by a local patron only if the date of death is known. Otherwise, the patron must come to the library to do the research.

#### Genealogical Questions

The library has basic materials relating to genealogical research, and the U.S. Census materials for Racine County. The reference staff acquires materials through interlibrary loan and makes appropriate referrals. The library staff does not do genealogical searches.

Generally, the staff does not check reading lists or bibliographies against library holdings. The staff will check up to five titles for an individual. For longer lists, the staff teaches the patron how to use the catalog so that the patron may do the checking.

#### Mathematical Computations

The library will provide mathematical formulas, but will not compute the answers.

### **Electronic Reference Sources**

#### Government-Produced Electronic Resources

The Racine Public Library is a partial state government depository, which means the library receives selected items free (for example, state, and local government documents), and is expected to provide public access to them to anyone who requests it. The state government now distributes some of this information via the Internet. The library provides Internet access to government web sites.

### Commercially Produced Electronic Resources

In addition to the products which the library receives from the government, the library purchases a subscription to a commercially produced online database for locating information about business establishments. This may be used by the public as well as the reference staff. However, the library's licensing agreement permits patrons to copy only a limited amount of information (either to USB device or on paper). If a patron needs an extensive mailing list, the staff can refer him/her to appropriate sources for purchasing such a list.

The library also provides access to commercially produced online databases that are paid for by the Lakeshores Library System and the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

### **Email Responses to Reference Questions to Patrons**

If the librarian determines it is more efficient to email a couple of pages rather than relay information through some other means, there will be no charge to the patron.

This policy supersedes all previous reference policies and rules issued by the Racine Public Library.

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