

SUBJECT: TYPES OF REFERENCE QUESTIONS

EFFECTIVE: MARCH 1, 2010

SUPERSEDES: AUGUST 1, 2006

REVIEW: 2 YEARS

1. PURPOSE:

A. Definition of Reference Service

- (1) Reference service provides personal aid to customers searching for information for any purpose. Reference service begins by identifying the information need and then meeting that need using the resources available in the library or by making a referral to other resources in other libraries or agencies, if necessary.
- (2) Reference service includes both direct and instructional services. Direct service provides the customer with the specific information requested, while instructional service teaches the customer independent use of library resources.

2. POLICY:

A. Types of Service Provided:

- (1) **Material Requests** – Determining the availability and/or locating specific items requested by customers.

Typical Material Requests:

- “Do you own a copy of *David Copperfield*?”
- “Is a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* on the shelf?”
- “Can you borrow a copy of *Who Owns the Sun* for me from another library system?”

- (2) **Ready Reference** – Answering brief, routine factual questions, typically within five minutes - using basic, readily available sources such as almanacs, dictionaries, encyclopedias, Frequently Asked Questions, etc.

Typical Ready Reference Questions:

- “What is the current population of Florida?”
- “Who was the thirteenth President of the U.S.?”
- “Who was Dale Mabry?”

- (3) **Standard Reference** – Providing answers to more complex and time-consuming questions that may involve more than one concept and/or consulting multiple sources.

Typical Standard Reference Questions:

- “I’m relocating to Phoenix. How does the cost of living compare to Tampa?”
- “I need a biography over 100 pages long on a woman scientist.”

- “I need three different sources of information on the Holocaust.”

- (4) **Bibliographic Instruction** – Teaching customers how to independently use library materials such as the library catalog, specialized reference sources, electronic databases and bibliographic tools. Bibliographic instruction may take place one-on-one or be incorporated into library tours or group presentations. It may include the use of User Guides, and instructional flyers, brochures, and signage.

Typical Bibliographic Instruction Questions:

- “How do I use the library catalog to find cookbooks?”
- “How can I locate current magazine articles online?”
- “How do I use the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* to find a critical analysis of Hemingway’s writing?”
- “How do I mark articles to send to the printer?”

- (5) **Readers’ Advisory** – Suggesting or recommending particular titles or authors to readers based upon familiarity with the collection, bibliographies, reading lists and other Readers’ Advisory tools, both in print and online.

Typical Readers’ Advisory Questions:

- “How can I locate mysteries with New Orleans as the locale?”
- “What other authors write like Stephen King?”
- “What is a good book on Florida gardening?”

- (6) **Referrals** – Directing a customer to another library, agency or specialist when the resources at hand do not provide the required information.

- (7) **Operational/Directional Service** – Giving customers information that facilitates the use of the library building or equipment.

Typical Operational/Directional Questions:

- “Where are the restrooms?”
- “How late are you open?”
- “Can you give me directions to your branch?”

- (8) **E-Government** – E-Government is the use of technology, particularly the Internet, as a means to deliver government services and to facilitate the interaction of the public with government entities.

Typical E-Government Questions:

- “How do I get to the AccessFlorida Website?”
- “How do I make an appointment at an Immigration office?”
- “How do I file for unemployment compensation?”
- Can you help me find the Property Appraiser’s Website?”

- (9) **Technology Instruction** – Teaching library customers how to independently use online and computer-based resources such as the Internet, the library catalog, subscription databases, and productivity software provided by the library (ex: word processing). Technology instruction also includes the use of

electronic equipment provided by the library such as photocopiers, printers, assistive devices and microfilm/fiche reader-printers.

Typical Technology Instruction Questions:

- “How do I make the photocopier/printer work?”
- “How do I place a hold from my home computer?”
- “How do I download an e-book or e-audio book from the library’s Website?”
- “Can you show me how to set up an email account?”

B. Specific Question Guidelines:

- (1) When a customer’s question requires calculation, interpretation, or value judgments, reference staff is limited to providing sources from which the customer can draw independent conclusions.
- (2) School assignments and contest questions will be treated like any other reference question.
- (3) Library Services reserves the right to set limits to specific reference services offered based upon such factors as demand for service, availability of resources, etc.
- (4) Staff does not conduct research for customers. Research is defined as, but not limited to, answering complex questions encompassing the in-depth use of a single source or the comparison and synthesis of many sources. Staff does not answer these questions directly, but offer customers bibliographic instruction with the goal of enabling them to conduct their own independent research.

Typical Research Questions:

- “Can you compile my family’s genealogy for me?”
- “What world economic conditions caused the Great Depression?”
- “What foundations offer grants to minority small business owners?”

3. PROCEDURE:

A. Specific Question Guidelines: Limitations to answering specific types of reference questions apply as follows:

- (1) **Appraisals** of old books, manuscripts, paintings, antiques, collectibles, etc. are left to experts, not library staff. Customers are referred to appropriate reference sources or to consultants or experts. Staff should never give a personal appraisal regarding the value of a customer’s possession.
- (2) **Book Purchase Recommendations:** Staff does not recommend specific reference titles (such as encyclopedias or dictionaries) to customers for purchase. Guidance in locating reviews, selected lists and other means of evaluation is provided. Staff can show a variety of titles to customers for their own comparison.

- (3) **Business & Financial Advice:** Staff does not provide customers with business, investment or financial advice. Staff can provide assistance in identifying useful sources of information.
- (4) **Calculations & Computation:** Mathematical calculations, problem solving or manipulation of data contained in reference sources are not performed by staff. If customers do not understand the process involved in making computations, staff can offer sources that provide explanations. Calculators are not provided for customer user.
- (5) **City Directory & Criss-Cross Telephone Service:** The library provides Hillsborough County city directory and criss-cross information to Hillsborough County residents.
 - a) Only one item of information can be searched per call. "Nearby" listings will not be given.
 - b) Non-Hillsborough County residents can request city directory or criss-cross information from their local library through interlibrary loan.
- (6) **Consumer Evaluations:** Staff does not make recommendations and/or value judgements for any item. Staff can help customers locate objective product information by showing them how to consult indexes, buying guides and online sources.
 - a) Short published consumer ratings may be read over the telephone. Longer articles or consumer information can be faxed to the customer.
- (7) **Homework Questions:** School assignments and homework questions are handled in the same manner as other reference questions. If no material is available in the library's collection to answer the question a *To the Teacher* form letter may be completed by the assisting staff for the student to submit to the teacher.
- (8) **Foreign Language Translations:** Translation of foreign language phrases and idioms are not given by staff unless they are proficient in that language or the phrase appears in a source.
 - a) Pronunciations, beyond giving diacritical marks, are not made unless the staff member is proficient in the language.
 - b) Translation of words in non-Roman alphabets are not given unless staff is proficient in that language.
 - c) A list of Hillsborough County employees with foreign language proficiencies is available at each agency and on MERLIN.
- (9) **Legal Questions:** Staff will assist in locating sources of legal information but cannot interpret or explain material. Staff is not able to provide advice pertaining to legal matters, services or forms.

- a) Specific citations and definitions can be read verbatim over the telephone if they are brief. Longer citations can be faxed, or the customer can be advised to visit the closest agency owning the source.
 - b) If more information is required, customers are referred to legal directories, the Hillsborough County Law Library, a Lawyer Referral Service, Bay Area Legal Services, etc.
 - c) Staff does not perform legal research for customers.
- (10) **Medical Information:** Brief definitions and descriptions from authoritative published sources may be provided. These sources are quoted verbatim with no interpretation on the part of the reference staff.
- a) If more information is required, customers are directed to other material in the library and in subscription databases, or referred to outside sources such as their personal physician, the Shimberg Health Sciences Library at USF or a Physicians Referral Service.
- (11) **Patents, Trademarks and Copyrights:** Staff does not provide customers with advice concerning patents, trademarks, or copyrights, nor do they conduct patent or trademark searches. Customers are referred to the patent depository at USF Tampa Campus Library's Government Documents Department.
- (12) **Tax Forms and Preparation:** Forms and reproducibles are provided at some agencies at the discretion of the agency or branch supervisor.
- a) Current information on IRS offices, Web accessible forms and toll free numbers can be found on the Tax Information section of the Library's Website.
 - b) IRS forms for 10 previous years are available at the John F. Germany Public Library.
 - c) Staff does not provide tax advice or assist customers in completing their returns.
- (13) **Online Forms and Applications:** Library staff can provide limited assistance and computer instruction for customers completing online forms and applications (ex: e-government forms, job applications).
- a) Staff can assist customers in finding e-government materials that pertain to specific topics in order to enable customers to make informed decisions.
 - b) Staff can assist customers with the basic functions of the computer (i.e. keyboard, mouse, etc.), the Internet and productivity software provided by the library (see Technology Instruction above).
 - c) Staff cannot advise customers as to which forms or applications they specifically need to obtain government services.

- d) Staff cannot enter data and/or submit completed forms or applications for customers.
- e) Library Services is not responsible for the content found on other government agencies' Websites, for any failure of transmission of online applications or forms to other government agencies, or for the accurate submission of forms or information. Library Services cannot guarantee that other government agencies receive forms or information submitted from library computers or act on them appropriately. No agreement or contract is created between the customer and the library staff or Library Services department.

4. AUTHORITY:

Pursuant to Section 5(1) of Chapter 84-443, Laws of Florida, the Library Board has the duty and the responsibility, among others, to serve in a recommending capacity to the Director of Library Services and to the County Administrator in respect to all matters pertaining to the public library.

Approval Signature:

Joe Stines
Director of Libraries