

Calhoun County Public Library System

Reference and Information Services Policy

The reference staff at Calhoun County Public Library System endeavors to provide accurate information and materials in response to requests from library users in an efficient, courteous, and timely manner. In order to ensure that quality service is provided, only staff trained in providing reference service will work at the reference desk. Questions are generally answered in the order received, with priority given to questions asked by patrons who are in the library.

Services available through the reference desk include information services (answers to specific questions, call number and ownership of a specific book, recommendations on subject materials); instruction on the use of the library and library materials (indexes, online services, catalog, reference tools); bibliographic verification of items requested (title, author, publisher, ISBN, price); reader's advisory (suggestions on books to read, videos and DVDs to view, recordings to hear); referral to community services; and assistance in locating materials.

Before responding to a reference request, staff must understand the question completely. When answering specific information questions, staff will always cite the source of the answer. Personal beliefs, opinions, and experience are generally not acceptable sources of answers to reference questions but, if given, will be appropriately identified as such. Staff will accompany the patron to the location of the desired materials in the library and confirm that the information meets the patron's need. If a patron's question cannot be completely met through the library's resources, staff will refer the patron to a more appropriate resource to obtain the desired information whenever possible. Staff will attempt to provide accurate contact information for other agencies when referring a patron but cannot make the actual phone call on behalf of the patron.

Telephone reference service and service provided through technologies, such as online chat sessions, are usually limited to supplying readily available information that does not require extensive research and that can be accurately imparted over the telephone or in brief written passages. Extensive research that requires selection of appropriate material, interpretation of data and sources, or analysis of information, is best performed by the patron, although library staff is available to offer guidance. Detailed information, especially that which is subject to analysis or interpretation, will not be relayed over the telephone. Samples of available materials can be gathered and held for patron pickup. Staff cannot photocopy material to be mailed except under circumstances authorized by the library director (such as for disabled patrons who cannot come to the library, for other libraries, etc.).

Telephone reference questions that can be answered quickly (within two or three minutes), without affecting service to patrons in the library, should be handled while the patron waits on the phone. Questions that require more time to answer, or that are received while other patrons are waiting in the library, will be handled as callbacks. All callbacks will be cleared by the end of the day or the patron will be notified of the delay. Privacy and concern for accuracy of information will be considered when leaving messages on answering machines or with another household member.

Additional care and caution will be exercised when providing legal, medical, or consumer information. To avoid misunderstandings, it is preferred that patrons visit the library to review this type of information, rather than receiving the information over the telephone, or that patrons be directed to reliable online resources to view and interpret the information for themselves. Reference staff will provide definitions, quote material verbatim, and direct patrons to information sources but will not offer advice or opinions, condense or abstract information, or suggest a course of action or diagnosis. Staff will provide the source and copyright date for legal and medical information.

All requests for reference information are confidential. Reference staff may consult with one another when necessary to serve the patron or consult with staff at other libraries, agencies, and organizations. Questions are tallied for statistical purposes and may be compiled to assist in staff training. In all cases, patron confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.

Library Board Approved 3/10/11

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