

MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT

I. MISSION STATEMENT

Mount Prospect Public Library exists to:

- Connect people to information, resources and opportunities for enrichment and leisure
- Provide and sustain a book culture through literary knowledge and interactive experiences
- Promote and support education and lifelong learning
- Build community

II. REFERENCE SERVICE MISSION STATEMENT

Mount Prospect Public Library offers reference services: (1) to meet the informational, recreational, educational, and cultural needs of the community; (2) to provide referral to appropriate agencies, organizations, and other parties whenever Library resources are insufficient to meet those needs; (3) to provide access to reference collections; and (4) to assist the public in utilizing the Library's resources.

III. SERVICE PHILOSOPHY

Within the limits defined by this document, Mount Prospect Public Library seeks to provide reference and information services to all individuals seeking such services, regardless of the nature of the request, the medium by which the request is received, the medium by which the information is retrievable, or the individual making the request.

IV. PURPOSE OF REFERENCE POLICY STATEMENT

The Mount Prospect Public Library reference service policy statement is designed to: (1) describe the reference services offered by the Library; (2) delineate the extent to which these services are provided and to describe any limitations upon those services; (3) describe the duties of the reference staff; (4) outline service priorities; and (5) set standards for reference services. In addition, this statement will help provide continuity of service by serving as a training aid for new Library employees.

V. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document, reference staff refers to all Mount Prospect Public Library employees offering reference and other informational services at a public service desk, whether professional or paraprofessional.

Reference patrons are all individuals seeking information, whether in person, by telephone, by letter, or by electronic means.

MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT

Reference transactions are information consultations in which Library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs.

Reference work includes reference transactions and other activities that involve the creation, management, and assessment of information or research, resources, tools, and services.

Reference resources are print and nonprint materials including, but not limited to, books, periodicals, audiovisual materials, online databases, CD-ROM products, Internet sites and files, and other independently published or internally generated documents or records, which are used to aid patrons.

VI. REFERENCE FUNCTIONS

Reference service may be defined as direct personal aid to library patrons in the acquisition of information and in the use of the Library and its resources. This service may be offered to patrons within the library building, over the telephone, by letter, or electronic media (fax, TDD, Internet e-mail, instant message, etc.). It may involve the direct provision of information to the patron, the provision of assistance to patrons attempting to acquire information, or instruction in the use of the Library and its resources. It may also involve the actual creation of informational resources, when necessary, to meet the needs of the Library's community.

Reference services includes readers' advisory services to provide guidance and direction in the use of popular materials. Reference functions are performed at the following service points: Research desk, Fiction/AV/Teen desk, and Youth Services desk.

Names of users and the transactions which occur between users and the staff are confidential and not discussed outside a professional context.

VII. GENERAL SERVICE GUIDELINES

A. Complex reference questions

Reference staff are encouraged to consult with their colleagues on all difficult reference questions.

B. Computer assistance

Reference staff are available to assist patrons using the public access computers. Reference staff provides limited computer instruction. Patrons in need of further computer instruction are referred to classes taught at the Library and at other places in the community. Reference staff are able to

**MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT**

answer basic questions about applications (such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint). For advanced questions about applications, patrons are referred to appropriate books and web resources. Staff are available to help patrons identify reliable sources, formulate search queries, and use specific services. Patrons with lengthy or involved questions are encouraged to make an appointment with a librarian for one-on-one assistance.

C. Equipment

Staff are familiar with available equipment and are willing to assist patrons in its use. Patron inquiries requesting service of, repair of, or instruction in the use of library equipment receive the same level of service as any other inquiry.

D. Fee-based searches

Reference librarians may conduct searches on behalf of patrons in fee-based databases at their discretion. The Library will cover a nominal fee for searching of fee-based databases, but more expensive or in-depth database searches will need to be conducted and paid for by the patron.

E. In-house referrals

Patrons are referred to another department when their questions have a higher likelihood of being answered there. The staff person who handles the original inquiry should speak to the staff person in the other department to explain the nature of the call and to explain what sources have already been checked.

F. Incomplete reference transactions

Reference staff are responsible for researching the questions they receive. Questions which cannot be answered by the end of the staff person's desk shift may be referred to other staff if time-sensitive, or will be worked on during the staff person's off-desk time. The patron is given a time by which a response will be made.

G. Library orientation and use instruction

Library staff are available during all hours the Library is open to instruct patrons on the use of any equipment or reference material on the premises. Instruction is presented with the aim of assisting patrons to become self-sufficient in the access and use of information. Written material such as pathfinders, booklists, and bibliographies are available to

MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT

assist patrons in the use of various material and equipment. Arrangements may be made ahead of time for group instruction.

H. Priorities

Reference service, readers' advisory service, instruction in the use of library materials, and general information assistance are offered during all hours the Library is open. This assistance is available to any patron who inquires in person, by telephone, by letter, or by electronic means.

Service to the public receives priority over other tasks performed at the public service desks. The public is assisted on a first-come, first-served basis. Telephone messages are taken from callers if staff is too busy to answer telephone information requests promptly. When the public service desks are busy, time spent with patrons may be limited.

I. Reference by Appointment

Patrons may make an appointment with a reference librarian for a one-on-one research or instructional consultation. Common topics include research assistance, job searching, genealogy research, and database instruction. Appointments may be made in person, via phone, or online. Appointment requests submitted via the "Reference by Appointment" online form will be answered within 48 hours. Sessions are generally held at the Research desk and last up to one hour. When a request is received, the librarian taking the request will make an appointment if the time requested falls within the librarian's scheduled time. Requests may be referred to another librarian depending on the topic and time requested. This service is limited to Mount Prospect residents.

J. Proctoring exams

Exam proctoring is limited to Mount Prospect residents. Appointments for proctoring may be made in person, via phone, or online. Appointments for proctoring must be made well in advance of the test date. If the institution requires that only one person administer the test, the test taker must be able to take the test during the chosen librarian's scheduled hours. Staff is unable to administer tests that require close supervision. For tests requiring close supervision, patrons will be referred to Harper College or Oakton Community College. Staff can proctor both print and online tests, but are not able to install any software or disable any features of the Library's network to accommodate test requirements. There is no charge for proctoring service, but students may be required to reimburse for postage if not already provided by the institution.

**MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT**

K. Referrals to other libraries or agencies

Patrons may be referred to other libraries or agencies when needed information does not exist in the Library and cannot be located by other reasonable means. Referrals are made to agencies or libraries that are likely to own the resources needed by the patron; reference staff telephone to verify the availability of the needed resources whenever possible.

When making referrals to other libraries or agencies, staff invite patrons to re-contact the Library for additional assistance, if necessary. Referrals are made in accordance with state and library system guidelines.

L. Sources

Reference staff provide patrons information that has been confirmed through reference resources. When answering questions, staff cite sources whenever possible. Staff who, through personal knowledge or expertise, possess the specific information sought by patrons, nevertheless need to confirm the accuracy of that information before providing it to a patron.

Staff does not express personal opinions, philosophies, advice, or evaluations to patrons.

M. Telephone, e-mail, and instant message services

The Library's telephone reference service offers assistance on questions requiring short, factual answers, and not needing extensive reading or interpretation of library materials. Whenever telephone inquiries cannot be answered promptly, the patron is offered the choice of being placed on hold or being called back. When the answer to a telephone reference question is too involved or complex to relay clearly, staff will explain this to the patron and suggest that the patron come into the Library for further assistance. Calls recorded on the Library's voicemail will be returned as soon as possible the same day. Every attempt is made to answer the call before it goes to voicemail.

TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf) reference questions are accorded the same level of service as any other telephone inquiry. Telephone calls via the TDD are recorded on an answering machine and are returned as soon as possible on the same day.

E-mail questions are answered within 24 hours. When a question requires additional time to answer, patrons are informed of the status of their question via e-mail. The e-mail inbox is checked several times each day.

MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT

Questions received via instant message (IM) are treated like phone questions and are answered in the order received. Priority will be given in the following order: people in the Library, phone questions, and IM questions. The Library reserves the right to refuse to answer questions that are offensive and/or inappropriate in accordance with the Library's rules of conduct. If the questioner does not abide by these rules, the session will be terminated and the screen name may be blocked.

N. Time limits

The primary function of reference staff, while at a public service desk, is direct service to patrons. However, the necessity of providing equitable service to all patrons precludes the possibility of spending unlimited time with any individual patron.

The time spent on providing reference services to an individual patron may be limited when patron demands for staff time interfere with, or risk interfering with, the provision of services to others. Similarly, at the discretion of reference staff, the number of questions per patron answered at any one time may be limited if other patrons are seeking assistance or when an excessive amount of time is being spent answering an individual's multiple questions.

VIII. GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Mount Prospect Public Library is a United States government documents depository library. While the Library continues to receive a small amount of paper material, the majority of the published output of the United States federal government is now only available electronically. The tangible materials are housed in the non-circulating Reference collection, the circulating Dewey collection, and a very small percentage is filed by Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) classification system. Assistance in the use of the government documents collection in paper and electronically is available to the public during the Library's regular operating hours and is provided by Research Services staff.

IX. LIMITATION OF SERVICES

Mount Prospect Public Library affirms Article V. of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights:

"A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."

Reference services offered by Mount Prospect Public Library will not be abridged or denied solely on the basis of the subject of the patron's inquiry, nor will they be

**MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT**

abridged or denied solely on the basis of the medium of patron contact, whether in person, by letter, by telephone, or by other electronic means.

Reference services offered by Mount Prospect Public Library may be limited when the provision of such services impairs, or risks impairing, the provision of reference services to others due to excessive demands for staff time, available materials, or equipment. Reference services may also be limited when meeting the reference inquiry involves the expenditure of Library funds or is a service designated by Library policy for residents only (e.g., interlibrary loan).

Excluding those circumstances mentioned above, reference services offered by Mount Prospect Public Library are not abridged or denied solely on the basis of the patron's community of residence.

X. SPECIAL SITUATIONS

The general policies, stated above, provide guidance in the following specific cases.

A. Bibliographies / booklists / literature searches

Reference staff prepares bibliographies, pathfinders, and other bibliographic guides to assist patrons with their informational and recreational reading needs. Bibliographies are not prepared on behalf of individual patrons because of the amount of staff time and resources involved in such efforts. Patrons needing to compile bibliographies and booklists are shown appropriate resources and offered as much assistance as staff time permits. Bibliographies or booklists may be provided for an organization upon approval of the department head.

B. Consumer evaluations

Staff will assist patrons in locating objective consumer product information by showing them how to consult the index to Consumer Reports and related magazines, buying guides, online resources, and/or general indexes which may lead to product evaluations in other periodicals. Staff does not offer personal opinions or recommendations of products.

C. Correspondence

The Library accepts reference inquiries irrespective of the medium of delivery. The department head will determine the appropriate response to reference inquiries received in the mail.

Because of the time and expense involved, staff are not obligated to mail materials to patrons. Reference staff may, however, mail materials to a

**MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT**

patron whenever, in their professional opinion, a letter represents the most appropriate and effective way to respond to a reference inquiry.

D. Directory and Criss+Cross Directory requests

Staff may provide addresses and telephone numbers to the public, in person or over the phone, where the name of the individual, company, or organization is known. Staff may also provide reverse look-ups by phone number or address. This type of information is available from telephone books, print directories, electronic products, and the Internet.

A print address and telephone number Criss+Cross Directory for Chicago's near north suburbs is available at the Research desk. Nearby information is not provided over the telephone by staff.

E. Fax requests

The Library accepts reference inquiries irrespective of the medium of delivery.

Because of the time and expense involved, staff are not obligated to fax materials to patrons. Reference staff may, at their discretion, fax materials to a patron whenever a fax represents the most appropriate and effective way to respond to a reference inquiry.

F. Genealogical research

Reference staff provide general assistance in genealogical research, guidance in locating items in the collection and online, and help in obtaining resources through interlibrary loan. Staff and/or volunteers may conduct limited genealogical research for patrons.

G. Legal, medical, investment, or tax questions

In the instance of legal, medical, investment, or tax reference questions, staff may only guide the patron to the material available on the topic of interest. Staff may not evaluate or interpret the information provided nor may staff define the meaning of the terms, offer investment advice, select income tax forms, or serve as a surrogate for a professional in any of the fields listed above. If all materials within the Library are beyond the understanding of the patron, the patron will be advised to consult with his or her professional from the above listed fields for additional information or advice.

**MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT**

H. Ongoing searches for jobs, focus groups, or housing

Library staff does not provide daily or ongoing searches for jobs, focus groups, housing, or other search topics based on specific criteria. Library staff will assist patrons in setting up a search and may conduct the initial search but cannot conduct searches on behalf of patrons at set intervals, either in person or electronically. Reference staff may sit with patrons one-on-one and help them to learn to conduct required ongoing searches of specific resources on their own.

I. Photocopy requests

Because of the time and expense involved, staff are not obligated to photocopy materials for patrons. Reference staff may, at their discretion, photocopy materials for patrons when photocopies represent the most appropriate and effective way to respond to a reference inquiry.

J. Puzzles, contests, quizzes

Contest questions are guided by the same definitions and time limits as any other reference question. Some contest questions may have one or more correct answers, and it is up to the patron to interpret the contest rules and regulations.

K. School assignments

Students seeking reference assistance are accorded the same level of service as any other patron.

L. Stock quotations

Patrons seeking stock quotation information in the Library are directed to appropriate printed, online, or microform sources. The number of stock quotations a patron may be given over the telephone (or through other electronic media) may be limited, based on the policy above.

M. Valuations

As stated above, reference staff provides patrons information that has been confirmed through reference resources. It is not possible for staff to confirm positively the identity or authenticity of any collectible. Staff therefore never provide appraisals of the value of any object or item. Staff directs patrons to reference or online resources that list such values whenever possible.

**MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT**

Valuations are not given for books or other materials donated to the Library.

Patrons seeking used car prices are shown reference and online resources providing such information. Prices may be given to patrons over the telephone or electronically, provided that the source of the information is cited.