

Berkeley Public Library

Reference Policy

INTRODUCTION

The Berkeley Public Library provides materials and services to help community residents obtain information to meet their personal, educational and cultural needs and serves as a learning and educational center for its residents.

The delivery of reference and information service is central to the Berkeley Public Library's mission and commitment to serving the needs of its community.

This policy is intended to provide broad overall guidance to those who deliver reference service. The delivery of reference service requires the Library staff to be knowledgeable, approachable, sensitive, courteous, and efficient. Quality reference service depends upon effective interviewing, attentive listening, and connecting customers with resources that will answer their information needs. Every request for reference assistance is considered legitimate.

This policy recognizes the need to maintain flexibility in the delivery of reference service. It is appropriate to adapt service to meet individual customer needs. Berkeley Public Library reference and information services should satisfy customer's information needs either by using sources on hand, or by referral to resources located elsewhere. Personal opinions are not a part of reference assistance.

REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES DEFINED

Reference service is the assistance given to customers in pursuit of information.

A reference question is defined as an informational contact, which involves the knowledge, recommendations, interpretation or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, by a member of the library staff.

Reference includes providing help with the catalog and library computers, reader's advisory service, database and online assistance, bibliographic verification, interlibrary loan assistance, referral services, research assistance, school assignments, consumer information, and individual and group instruction.

ACCESS

The Berkeley Public Library will provide reference service to all its customers on an equal, nondiscriminatory, and nonjudgmental basis without regard to the race, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, background, appearance, or personal view of the customer making the inquiry or the subject matter being researched. With few exceptions, customers do not need to be registered Berkeley Public Library cardholders to use Library facilities or reference materials and services. A current Berkeley Public Library card may be required in order for the customer to use certain library resources including the Library's public-use computers and to access the Internet.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF REFERENCE QUERIES

The Library recognizes that its records identifying the names of library users with specific materials, computer database searches, interlibrary loan transactions, reference queries, requests, or other specific uses of the library are confidential in nature.

This information will be disclosed only upon the request or consent of the individuals or groups whose library privileges are directly affected or pursuant to a court order that shows cause and is in proper form as required by local, state or federal law.

Library staff will immediately refer the request for information on reference transactions to the Director, who is the designated Library Information Officer. The Director, upon receipt of a court order, shall provide such information as allowed by law.

Staff is expected to honor the confidentiality of reference questions. Failure to do so is grounds for dismissal.

REFERENCE INTERVIEW

The reference interview is used to help define customer needs and to answer customer questions. Staff will begin reference transactions with verification of customer needs. The structured discussion that follows should clarify questions to be answered and the best way to provide the customer with information requested. Staff will provide a full citation of the resources used or recommended to the customer. Staff will also make referrals to other RAILS libraries or outside agencies as needed. The reference transaction will conclude with verification that the information need has been met.

PRIORITY OF SERVICE

The Berkeley Public Library responds to all requests for reference and information services whether made in person, by telephone, mail, fax, or electronic means. Individuals present in the building take first priority for service over telephone calls or other communications.

LEVELS OF REFERENCE ASSISTANCE

Research

Research assistance involves the in-depth coverage of a topic. The level of research assistance provided varies according to the availability of staff, the staff and customer's knowledge of the subject, the volume of other customer requests, the depth of the collection, the complexity of the question and the time frame in which the information is needed.

Lengthy research for individual customers which requires extensive staff time to collect data from multiple sources, including bibliographic searches, electronic searches, copying of materials and collating items, is not normally provided as part of the Berkeley Public Library's research assistance.

Referral

In providing reference service, staff will consider the Library's entire collection and staff as resources. Information and materials can be shared via fax, photo duplication, lending for circulation to users or in-house usage, and telephone or e-mail service. Questions beyond the expertise of a staff member, or beyond the resources of that library unit, will be referred to the Director.

If it is not possible to find the information within the sources available through the Berkeley Public Library or RAILS Library System, other libraries, agencies and community resources will be consulted.

Instruction

Berkeley Public Library offers basic instruction in the use of bibliographic and reference tools, whether print or electronic. This instruction may be provided to individuals or groups. Staff will instruct customers on how to use the tools and technologies needed to meet the customer's information needs. For instruction requiring more than 10 minutes of staff time, patrons will be required to schedule a one-on-one appointment with a librarian in advance.

TYPES OF REFERENCE SERVICE

Library staff attempts to answer all questions. However, some limits have been established for types of questions and services beyond the scope and expertise of the public library.

A. Appraisal of Books and Works of Art

Published price guides for art works, antiques, rare books, coins, stamps, currency and other collectibles are available for customers. Staff will not provide appraisals of such works. While library staff may offer listings of appraisers or vendors, personal recommendations will not be made.

B. Directory Information

Staff may provide addresses and telephone numbers to the public, where the name of the individual, company or organization is known. This type of information is available from telephone books, print directories, electronic products, and the Internet. However, when the customer seeks "reverse information" (where the customer has a phone number or address, but not the name) or "nearby" information (where the customer has an address and wants to know who lives next door), staff does not provide the answer over the telephone. If the appropriate directory is in the collection, customers will be advised to visit the library. If the library does not have the desired directory, staff may refer the customer to an alternate source.

C. Computer Questions

Staff will provide customers with basic orientation to computer hardware and electronic products available on the Library's computers. Library staff is available to assist users with basic machinery problems and answer simple questions regarding the electronic products. However, in general, library staff cannot provide individual in-depth computer training, technical assistance or solve compatibility problems. When further information is needed, staff will refer customers to pertinent manuals, other library resources, and the computer classes offered through the Library.

E. Medical, Legal and Tax Questions

Staff may respond to medical, legal or tax questions by reading directly from the cited source or inviting the customer to use the Library's resources in person. Staff must not offer advice, interpretation, recommendation, opinion or personal experience, which is the domain of trained legal, medical, or financial professionals.

Questions involving intellectual property (law that involves patents, trademarks, and copyrights) may be addressed by offering the customer assistance with the tools needed for a preliminary intellectual property search. Staff cannot perform the search for the customer or advise the customer regarding intellectual property matters.

Staff may suggest that the customer contact an attorney or medical practitioner, an appropriate government agency or nonprofit organization, or other libraries.

F. Mathematics Questions

Staff helps customers in locating mathematics or scientific formulas, but they do not attempt to solve problems or equations.

G. Tutoring Assistance

Staff does not provide private tutoring. Referrals to appropriate literacy providers or community agencies will be offered. Tutors may arrange to meet with students in library space, as it is available.

H. Editing

Staff does not critique or edit customer manuscripts or resumes for job seekers. Referrals will be made as appropriate.

I. Translations

Staff responds to customers' requests for translations of words and phrases by using appropriate sources. Staff translations of text material that would require considerable time or that are beyond the level of staff expertise will be handled via appropriate referral.