

Reference Services

This policy defines the goals and philosophy of reference services at the Sherrard Public Library District. 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.

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 within budgetary limits.

Confidentiality and Impartiality

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. 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.

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. Staff answers ready reference questions by telephone, email and in-person.

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

Instructional Service - Both direct and indirect. Staff shows patrons who prefer to work independently how to use the online catalog and other library sources. Patrons also receive instruction indirectly as they observe the staff using the resources of the library. When appropriate, staff explains to patrons they are helping what they are doing, in order to encourage independent use of the library.

Internet Assistance - Provided to help patrons develop search strategies for locating information in free, publicly-available web pages and databases. 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.

Reader's Advisory Service - Provided to help patrons access the library collection and find potential items of interest. Staff may conduct a non-judgmental assessment of the personal preferences of the reader through a series of questions, focusing on reader likes and dislikes with regard to a number of factors, including subject, reading level, genre, writing style, the level of characterization, plot elements, storyline, pace, tone, frame, and setting. The hoped-for outcome of this interview is the identification of appropriate suggestions, also called "readalikes."

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.