

Section I. Purpose

The purpose of the Reference Policy is to assist library staff in providing a welcoming environment for patrons to receive accurate and detailed answers to a wide range of questions. This policy is intended to provide instruction on how to best utilize the various technology and library resources necessary to fulfill the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs of the diverse Nobles County Community.

Section II. Access and Scope

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

1. The Nobles County Library provides reference service to all its patrons on an equal, nondiscriminatory, and nonjudgmental basis without regard to the race, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, appearance or personal view of the patron making the request.
2. Each request is given serious consideration and library staff will not make value judgments about the value or worth of a request.
3. Patrons do not need to be registered at the Nobles County Library to use reference materials or reference services within the Library.
4. Library staff will use a reference interview to help define patron needs.

Section III. Priority of Service

The Nobles County Library responds to all requests for reference and information services whether made in person, by telephone, postal mail, fax, or electronic means. The following priorities of service will be utilized:

1. 1st Priority – requests made by a patron in the Library and in person. In-person requests will be handled on a first-come first-served basis, although the nature of requests may require alternate handling at times.
2. 2nd Priority – requests made over the phone. Whenever possible, answers to questions will be provided during the telephone call. Questions not answered will be responded to within one day of receipt of the inquiry.
3. 3rd Priority – requests received by email, fax, or postal mail. Staff will respond to 3rd priority requests within two working days of receipt of the inquiry. Postal mail requests will be answered by the end of the second working day.
4. Nobles County Library patron reference requests will receive priority over requests made by persons living outside of Nobles County.
5. Patrons will be advised if their reference requests require longer response times or if their requests can be better handled by a different entity or institution.

Section IV. Limitation of Service

Library staff will attempt to assist with all inquiries. However, the following guidelines and limits have been established for services and queries beyond the resources, scope, expertise and mission of the library:

1. Library staff will not utilize the ILS database to provide personal information on library patrons in response to inquiries.
2. Medical, financial and legal questions – Definitions, descriptions, and resources can be provided, but staff will not offer opinions, interpretations, or attempt to abstract or condense information.
3. Homework assignments – Library staff will help find resources or recommend tools to complete the assignments, but staff will not help in completing the actual assignment.

Library staff will help search for appropriate and authoritative sources, and Library staff may provide instruction on proper information search techniques.

4. Genealogical research – The Library has basic genealogical materials and resources, but the Library does not undertake original research. Patrons will be offered the use of Ancestry Library Edition, interlibrary loan services and/or referred to the appropriate entities or institutions.
5. Tax questions – Patrons will be assisted in finding and printing tax forms. Patron requests for tax assistance or determination of appropriate forms to file will be directed to the IRS or a tax service.
6. Computer, device, and internet questions – Library staff will provide basic instruction to utilize the Library’s computers, devices, and internet resources but will not provide complete training and literacy.
7. Copying services and scanning services – Library staff will abide by the rules and regulations of the United States Copyright Act of 1976 and its provisions while copying or scanning library materials and/or patron materials.
8. Clerical services – Library staff do not provide clerical services such as, but not limited to, completing forms and applications, composing letters/emails, submitting online orders, and carrying out any nature of financial transaction.
9. The Nobles County Library is neither an academic nor a research library; therefore, some requests may require extensive or comprehensive searches of sources beyond the Library’s available resources. In such cases, staff will attempt to suggest other resources to the patron or seek consultation from the Library Director.

Section V. Confidentiality

1. The Library recognizes that its records identifying the names of library users with specific materials, computer database searches, interlibrary loan transactions, reference inquiries, requests, or other specific uses of the library are confidential in nature. All library staff is expected to maintain the confidentiality of reference questions from all patrons.
2. Reference requests 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 meets all the criteria required by local, state, or federal law.

Section VI. Liability

The Nobles County Library staff will make every effort to provide complete, current and accurate responses to inquiries. However, the Library does not guarantee the information or the sources it provides or makes available. The Library assumes no liability for any consequences or damages a patron may incur through use of the materials, reference services, or referral sources provided.

Section VII. Fees

The Nobles County Library will attempt to provide all reference services free of charge but costs incurred while completing a request may be billed to the patron making the request.

1. Patrons may be charged for ordering microfilm from out-of-state with the billing total not to exceed actual cost incurred by the library.
2. Patrons making reference requests by postal mail will be billed for printing fees and postage fees when the total cost incurred by the Library exceeds \$2.00.

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