



Bedford Public Library

Reference Services Guideline

Purpose

The Bedford Public Library is dedicated to supporting and empowering the lifelong learners of our diverse community by providing access to information, knowledge, and ideas as well as reference resources and services. These services include research guidance, homework help, reader advisory, interlibrary loan services, referral services, and assistance using the Library's computers, digital resources, and various technology.

Goals

- 1.1 Provide sufficiently trained and educated staff who can offer timely, accurate, and useful information to patrons.
- 1.2 Offer the same quality of service to all, regardless of age, race, gender, nationality, educational background, disability, sexual orientation, or any other criteria which may be the source of discrimination.
- 1.3 Create and take advantage of opportunities to educate and train patrons on all aspects of Library use in order to promote greater self-sufficiency and more effective utilization of the Library's resources.

Methods of Service

Desk Service

- 2.1 While at the service desks, staff will prioritize service to the public over any other duties. In-person reference will take priority over phone and digital reference. If there are multiple patrons needing assistance, requests that are directional or brief in nature may be given priority over lengthy or complex questions. Staff will set reasonable limits on the amount of time and level of response given to patron requests for information in order to ensure equal and fair access to library services for all patrons.
- 2.2 Library staff will conduct reference interviews to determine the information needs of the patron and will rely on reputable sources and professional judgment to determine the most accurate and authoritative answers. Source citations will be provided to the patron. The patron's reference questions will be kept confidential.
- 2.3 If the information requested by a patron proves to be beyond the scope of the resources available at the Library, or if the information requested is deemed to be so complex as to necessitate time-consuming research that will require reference staff to neglect the needs of other patrons or other key job responsibilities, the patron will, if possible, be referred to other libraries or agencies that might be able to provide more help.
- 2.4 Library staff will refer the patron to other appropriate sources, agencies, organizations, or institutions when the query cannot be answered to the satisfaction of the patron using Library resources.
- 2.5 Staff cannot guarantee the validity or accuracy of information retrieved from any resource.

Phone Service

- 2.6 Phone reference should take no more than 5-10 minutes and be limited to a reasonable number of questions. Staff will use best professional judgment in these cases. Reference questions of a more complex nature will be handled in person at the Library.

Email & Text Service

- 2.7 Email and text questions will be answered in the order in which they are received. Reference questions of a more complex nature will be handled in person at the Library.



- 2.8 Email and text questions are monitored and answered during operating hours, except for the last hour before close due to staff closing procedures.

Scope of Service

- 3.1 Staff does not give medical, legal, copyright, financial, or tax advice.
- 3.2 Staff cannot provide technical support or troubleshooting for personal computers or devices. Library staff members are not technology experts and may not be able to provide assistance with certain computer operating systems, software, or applications. Due to staffing and time constraints, staff cannot offer time-consuming or in-depth computer or software instruction.
- 3.3 Staff cannot offer job hunting or career advice beyond connecting the patron with helpful resources.
- 3.4 Staff never refers patrons to individual practitioners – physicians, attorneys, mental health professionals, or others.
- 3.5 The Library does not provide genealogy reference due to limitations of collection and electronic resources. Patrons will be referred to other libraries.
- 3.6 Library staff does not provide an appraisal of books, works of art, antiques, coins, stamps, currency, or other collectibles but will provide contact information for appraisal services derived from professional association directories.
- 3.7 Library staff does not provide translation services. Staff may make referrals to online translation services.
- 3.8 Beyond general reader recommendations, Library staff does not provide personal critical analyses, interpretations, or judgments regarding the merit of literary or other works.
 - 3.8.1 Through reader recommendations, staff will offer advice and suggestions for any reading material (fiction or nonfiction) as this is an essential service in a public library. Each patron’s reading tastes will be taken seriously and without judgement. However, when performing reader recommendation services, personal interpretation and suggestions are unavoidable.
 - 3.8.2 Service is to be provided in a manner consistent with the Library Bill of Rights, the American Library Association Code of Ethics, and copyright law.
- 3.9 Library staff does not provide typing, proofreading, editorial services, or image searches to library users.
- 3.10 Patrons conducting patent and trademark research will be directed to helpful resources. Staff does not conduct patent or trademark research for patrons.
- 3.11 Questions of an inappropriate nature, as determined by Library staff, will not be answered. Staff will not engage in conversation or debate of a personal nature, including (but not limited to) religious beliefs, political positions, or personal lives.
- 3.12 Patrons may not request to work exclusively with a particular staff member.

Use of Digital Resources, Databases, & Internet

- 4.1 Staff will instruct and/or guide patrons to its subscription-based online resources made accessible on the Library’s website. Staff will use professional judgment to determine when a fee-based database is the most appropriate and authoritative resource to answer the patron’s question.



Reference Materials

- 5.1 The Library holds a small collection of non-circulating reference materials in order to ensure access at all times that the Library is open.

