

REFERENCE SERVICES

Accurate and efficient reference service is provided in person, by telephone, and via e-mail (e-ref), to library users by professional librarians and trained paraprofessionals.

The Lawrence Headquarters Branch maintains an extensive reference collection. Its reference department is staffed by reference librarians to assist in-house patrons, answer phone questions and provide reference support services to reference staff in the branches. The Headquarters reference collection includes New Jersey specific materials, business, genealogy and local history items. The Township of Lawrence Historian's Office also maintains a small room at the HQ Branch. When the resources of the library cannot satisfy a request for information, it may be referred to other libraries throughout the state through library networking. Users are also referred directly to appropriate agencies; however, the reference staff does not mediate between users and these agencies.

Priority is given to in-person requests over telephone requests. E-ref requests are answered within 24 hours of the submission of the request. Staff assists users in looking up desired materials, using the computer catalog and in locating these items on the shelves. If the Mercer County Library System does not own the requested material, an attempt will be made to obtain the material through Interlibrary Loan (see section on ILL).

Staff provide answers to "ready reference" types of inquiries, including directions, general information concerning library services, and questions involving specific facts, which can be readily determined from standard sources. For inquiries that require longer, more detailed answers, or extensive searching or interpretation of materials, the staff assists the user in selecting the most appropriate sources and offers instruction in the use of these sources selected for the search.

The amount of time that a staff member can spend assisting individual users is necessarily limited by the needs of other users. Time limits vary according to the complexity of materials to be used, library experience of the user, the number of other users needing assistance and the number of staff available to help users.

Branch staff will assist users within the confines of the branch's collection. Staff will call or refer patrons to the Lawrence Headquarters for more extensive reference assistance. Staff cannot offer appraisals of rare books, coins, stamps, antiques, etc. Nor can they recommend specific titles for purchase on a given topic. A staff member will help the user locate printed sources, reviews and evaluations. Users are urged to inspect each title personally to determine if it meets their individual needs.

Staff can provide short, factual information to answer medical, financial, or consumer review questions or provide specific citations regarding legal questions and direct patrons to tax information in the library's resources. Advice, interpretations and opinions cannot be provided. The staff assists users in locating and using items in the library collection, but cannot engage in genealogical research for users. Staff can provide answers to trivia, game and contest questions that require simple factual information from a standard source. However, those users who require lengthy searches are offered guidance in locating likely sources for their answers.

Staff provide users needing translations with appropriate dictionaries as available in the collection. They will assist users in locating translators by request.

Staff can provide limited instruction on the use of personal computers and electronic devices, but cannot offer advice on repairs, software installation, or product recommendations. The

information and instruction offered by library staff is exclusively demonstrative in nature, and is intended to solely acquaint patrons with the operation of electronic devices in general, or the installation and use of applications, programs and related software. Actual implementation, modification, or use of any device, application, program, or other software shall be undertaken by the patron on the patron's own initiative, who shall be solely responsible for the consequences of any such use, modification or installation. The library system and its staff assume no responsibility for the functioning or consequences of any application, program, or other software installed or utilized by any patron, or for the interaction of such material with any electronic device.

School assignments are often designed to teach students to locate and interpret information. The staff provides guidance in locating and instruction in using, sources of information. Short, factual answers such as names, dates, or the spelling of a word are provided unless it appears that the intent of the assignment is to train students in the use of reference sources.

- **Telephone Reference Service:** As part of its service to the public, the staff takes requests for information by telephone and responds as time permits. As stated above, the staff gives priority to in-person requests over telephone requests. Telephone reference may be limited to three inquiries per day.
 - a) **Search Parameters:** The staff provides telephone reference service for short, factual inquiries that do not require extensive searches, interpretations, or the reading of long passages over the telephone. Sources consulted are cited. If research and interpretation is needed, the librarians will cite sources of information and invite users to come to the library to examine the materials.
 - b) **Holds:** Holds are limited to three per caller.
 - c) **Medical Questions:** Telephone reference for medical or drug questions are limited to those which require only a short definition or description that can be quoted verbatim without interpretation by the librarian.
 - d) **Legal Questions:** Telephone reference service for legal questions is limited to reading specific short citations or definitions.
 - e) **Street Address Directory:** Street address inquiries are limited to three per caller.
 - f) **Stock Quotes:** Stock quotes are limited to three per caller.
 - g) **Periodical Searches:** The staff will check three issues of a newspaper or magazine for requested information, as time permits.
 - h) **Product Information:** Product rating and recommendations may be given by telephone when a printed source is readily available and brief.
- **School Assignments:** Up to three short factual answers per student can be given over the telephone. Long passages cannot be read. **E-Reference:** MCLS staff can provide brief answers to factual reference questions and suggest sources to meet your information needs, via the internet. Response time is 24 hours from the time that a request is received, excluding weekend or holiday closings. When appropriate, the reference staff will email attachments in response to a query.
- **www.mcl.org:** The Mercer County Library System views the internet as another opportunity to serve its patrons, offering patrons, through our website, the most up to date information regarding our branches, programs and services, our online catalog and patron account access, and a host of electronic reference resources.