GREENVILLE COUNTY
Library
SYSTEM

GREENVILLE COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
REFERENCE SERVICE POLICY

In order to serve Greenville County as the best provider of guided access to quality resources for information, education and leisure, the Greenville County Library System (hereinafter "Library") is committed to providing quality reference service. Quality reference service is courteous, accurate, prompt, proactive, impartial, and confidential.

DEFINITION OF REFERENCE SERVICE

Reference service is assistance to patrons in finding information and effectively using Library resources and services. Reference service includes locating answers to questions of varying complexity; assisting patrons in searching the Library catalog, print sources, and electronic resources such as research databases and the Internet; providing reader's advisory, referrals and individual/group instruction; and assisting with the interlibrary loan process.

Reference service does not include performing mathematical calculations or filling out any form under another's name except those related to the Library. While staff assist students in finding resources to complete homework assignments, homework is ultimately the student's responsibility.

REFERENCE SERVICE AVAILABILITY

With few exceptions, patrons do not need to be Greenville County Library System cardholders to use Library reference materials and services. Library cards may be required to use Library computers and to access Library databases remotely.

Reference service is provided on a nondiscriminatory and nonjudgmental basis without regard to age, race, gender, appearance, disabilities, or personal views of patrons. The amount of time staff can spend assisting a patron is limited by the needs of other users. Time limits vary according to the complexity of the inquiry, the number of other patrons needing assistance, and the number of staff available.

PRIORITIES OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Library staff respond to requests for reference service in the following order of priority:

- Requests from patrons present at Library locations
- Telephone requests
- Real-time electronic requests
- Email requests
- Mail and fax requests

SERVICE DELIVERY AND QUESTION COMPLEXITY

Ready reference questions will be answered quickly by staff using sources such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, almanacs, directories, and Internet databases to provide brief, factual information. Examples include spellings, definitions, business and residential addresses and phone numbers, and library holdings information (for instance, "Do you own *Hamlet?*").

Search questions require more than a quick answer and often involve staff consulting several sources. An example of this type of question would be "How many rose windows are there in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris?" If the question cannot be answered quickly, staff may take the patron's contact information to provide an answer or referral after additional searching.

Research questions require the gathering and synthesis of extensive information from various sources. Term papers and other reports engender this type of question. Rather than conducting the research, staff guide the patron in his/her search, suggesting strategies and sources and explaining the use of appropriate reference and indexing tools. Patrons may be encouraged to come to the Hughes Main Library for assistance with questions that require extensive research.

Medical and Legal Questions

Staff members assist patrons in the use of library materials and resources to find medical and legal information. Staff do not offer interpretation, advice, opinions, or personal experience. They caution patrons about the completeness and timeliness of information in printed materials and databases; and they suggest that patrons consult medical or legal professionals for information that applies to their specific needs. Staff members may read brief information from authoritative sources over the telephone.

Genealogical Questions

Staff members provide assistance and guidance in the use of the genealogical and local history materials of the Carolina First South Carolina Room and of online genealogical resources. Staff conduct genealogical research only for very specific information that may be requested using the Library's Genealogical Records Search Request Form. Staff do not compile family histories for patrons. Staff may do a preliminary survey of the collection to help potential visitors determine whether the South Carolina Room has materials relevant to their research interests.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Library staff members do not discuss a patron's information requests in a way that identifies that individual without his/her permission except with persons acting within the scope of their duties in the administration of the Library System.

SOURCES

In order to provide information that is accurate and current, staff use reputable and authoritative sources chosen in accordance with the Library's *Collection Development and Maintenance Policy* in providing reference service. Staff cite the source of the answer; personal opinions and advice are not given.

As appropriate, staff go beyond the reference collections to use the resources of the Library System as a whole. To provide the information needed, staff also reach beyond in-house collections by utilizing external information sources, including authoritative Internet websites in accordance with the *Internet Use Policy*.

REFERRALS

Questions beyond the resources of a branch or other Library units are referred to the Information Services Department of the Hughes Main Library. Those that are beyond the resources of the Information Services staff may be referred to other agencies, organizations, experts, or libraries.