Crook County Library
Reference Service Guidelines

From the Crook County Library Strategic Plan 2014-17:

Goal 8: Youth, adults and seniors will connect to library resources and to fellow community members

A. Objective: Library users receive accurate and relevant information and instruction to help them meet their needs.

Overview

Crook County Library staff will provide knowledgeable, personalized assistance to help patrons find information, use library resources, and select materials from the library collection. Staff will seek to provide users with complete, accurate answers to their information queries regardless of the complexity of those queries.

Operating hours for reference service shall be determined by community needs and interests and the Library's financial and staff resources. A Roving Reference model will be used in which assigned staff will walk through all library areas proactively offering assistance to patrons.

Library staff will treat all patrons and their requests with respect and without value judgments. Assistance will be provided courteously and impartially to all, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or viewpoint.

No two reference questions are the same. Simple queries are usually answered quickly and fully. More complex questions may require the patron's participation in the information search, with staff providing assistance and instruction. Staff can serve as a research consultant, providing guidance and advice on the search strategy and process. Staff will need to limit the amount of time and level of response provided to a customer to about 15 minutes unless special circumstances apply.

Customers may request reference assistance by telephone, email, letter, or in person. Responses are provided in the most expedient and convenient way possible for the customer.

Crook County Library provides reference services to the residents of Crook County or visitors to the library. Requests received from people who reside outside the County are handled as time permits, or the customer is referred to his/her local library.

The Library follows the standards set by the *Code of Ethics* of the American Library Association *(Appendix A).*

Manner in Which Patrons Are Served

Privacy: All reference transactions between a Library patron, whether adult or child, will be considered confidential and will be discussed only in a professional context. Whenever possible, a low speaking voice or a location with more privacy should be used during the reference interview.

Service Attitude: Qualities of good public service include approachability, interest in helping patrons, sensitivity and courtesy. Service to the public when scheduled to provide reference takes precedence over other library activities. Library users should be aware that the primary duty of the person assigned to reference is to assist them. Staff members on duty will wear a badge identifying them as a library employee.

Instructing Versus Answering Requests: People come to the Library for information. It is the responsibility of reference staff to give patrons the choice of either having the information found for them by staff, or learning how to find it for themselves. No one should be required to learn how to use reference tools or the catalog, especially to find answers to simple questions. However, the reference transaction is a perfect venue to provide instruction to patrons on using the library's catalog, online resources, public computers, copy machine, or other tools if they are willing to learn.

Directing versus Accompanying Patrons to the Shelf: Whenever possible staff should go with patrons to locate materials. When this is not possible, staff should encourage patrons to return to them for additional assistance if they are unable to find the items they are looking for. In the event that the staff member is not able to immediately accompany the patron to the shelf, she/he should follow up as soon as possible in order to assure that the patron has located the required information or materials.

Source: To give the most accurate and authoritative answers possible, staff members should avoid personal opinions, philosophy, or evaluations; rather they should rely upon information based on accurate printed or online sources or learned from a reliable authority. The opinion of staff members, even when requested, should not be given as fact.

Reference Practices

Interview: Effectiveness in library reference service is dependent on the expertise of Library staff in accurately interpreting questions. Staff will conduct a thorough reference interview with each patron, following the RUSA *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers (Appendix B)*.

Photocopies: Staff may use their own judgment in providing up to 10 free photocopies from the Internet or library materials to fully meet the patron's reference need.

Priority: If several people need assistance at the same time, requests that are brief may be given priority over lengthy or complex questions that require longer to answer. If a patron has a time-consuming request which is delaying service to other patrons, the staff member should offer to complete the question at a later time. It may be necessary to work with several people at once – getting each started and then returning to make sure that they are finding their information. In case of conflicts priority service will be given to in-person requests. Phone messages can be noted and calls returned as soon as possible.

Reader's Advisory: Reference staff will help patrons seeking recommendations for books or other materials to suit their particular tastes and interests. In addition to relying on their knowledge and experience, staff may consult print or online resources.

Assignment-related Questions: Homework questions are treated the same as any other patron query, with one exception. Staff may want to gently discover if the intent of the assignment is to have students learn how to use the Library to conduct research. Staff will make an effort to interact directly with the student and not an accompanying parent. Staff who are unsure about the balance between answering the question and doing the homework for a student should confer with the Youth Services Librarian.

Legal Information: Legal questions will be treated like any other reference questions provided that the patron does not require legal advice or interpretation. Patrons can be shown the Library's copy of the Oregon Revised Statues and assisted with their use. Patrons can also be referred to a Legal Aid office nearest them.

Medical Information: Patrons should be assisted in locating information in the library collection or online, but staff should not provide medical advice, interpretation, evaluation, or assistance in self-diagnosis. Patrons should be encouraged to contact their physician, pharmacist, or other health care professional. Patrons will be introduced to online health databases, when appropriate.

Tax Information: The library participates annually in the tax form distribution program. Staff will assist patrons in locating forms which the library has on hand or in reproducible form when such a search does not require the staff person to make decisions on the behalf of the patron as to the correct form needed. Forms and publications are also available on the Internet. Library staff are not qualified to offer assistance in tax form preparation or to interpret tax law. Appropriate referrals to other agencies may be suggested.

Phone, Email or Mail Reference: This should be reserved for short, factual questions which can be answered in 5 minutes or less. If a reference question seems too involved, this should be explained to the patron with the suggestion that the patron come to the library. Requests received in this manner but not answered immediately should be completed within 24 hours. Staff may use their own judgment in faxing up to 10 free pages to fully meet the remote patron's reference need.

Interlibrary Loan: Staff should look up needed information in the OCLC "World Cat" database to determine whether the item may be available through ILL. If so, staff should proceed with established interlibrary loan procedures. The Library abides by the *Interlibrary Loan Guidelines for the United States (Appendix C)*.

Referral: Library staff will make every effort to locate and deliver needed information to the patron. When patron questions cannot be answered, or answered fully, staff may refer patrons to local or regional resources, agencies, or libraries. When making such a referral staff will try to contact the resources, agency, or library to verify the information is available.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES OF REFERENCE STAFF

- Directing patrons to locations in the library, such as the Large Print section
- Completing a session with a patron by placing holds on their behalf or checking materials out to them
- Assisting patrons in using the online catalog
- Assisting with public computer or printing issues
- Answering questions about library policies and procedures
- Monitoring and/or acting on Library Code of Conduct issues

STATISTICS

Reference statistics are kept by staff using the most current methodology. Statistics are totaled monthly and provided to the library director by the 5th of the following month. Occasionally, reference surveys may be conducted.

Appendix A: American Library Association Code of Ethics

Adopted by the ALA Council June 28, 1995

I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.

II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.

IV. We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.

V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.

VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.

VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.

VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Appendix B: Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers

Revised by MOUSS Management of Reference Committee and approved by the RUSA (Reference and User Services Association) Board of Directors, June 2004.

Introduction

The face of Reference Services has changed significantly since the original RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance were first published in 1996. Intended to be used in the training, development, and/or evaluation of library professionals and staff, the Guidelines have subsequently been favorably evaluated by the profession, and currently enjoy widespread acceptance as standards for the measurement of effective reference transactions.

The original Guidelines dealt primarily with face-to-face interactions between Reference staff and library users. Even at the time, however, the world of Reference was moving beyond the traditional Reference Desk. Email and online chat services have since become popular with both patrons and library staff, and are expanding in all types of libraries, from public to academic to school libraries and beyond. Although some of the statements in the original Guidelines can be applied to remote forms of reference, the lack of traditional visual and non-verbal cues produces a different type of library-patron interaction.

One constant that the shift away from in-person encounters has not lessened is the need for good communication skills. The Virtual Reference Desk recognized this and incorporated an "Interactive" component into their "Facets of Quality for Digital Reference Services," stating that "[d]igital reference services should provide opportunities for an effective reference interview, so that users can communicate necessary information to experts and to clarify vague user questions."

In all forms of reference services, the success of the transaction is measured not only by the information conveyed, but also by the positive or negative impact of the patron/staff interaction. The positive or negative behavior of the reference staff member (as observed by the patron) becomes a significant factor in perceived success or failure. This connection has been born out in the work of researchers like Gers and Seward (1985), who found that "behaviors have a strong influence on performance," and Whitlatch (1990), who stated "Librarian courtesy, interest, and helpfulness are crucial in providing successful reference service. Libraries must select and retain staff who have these service orientations toward users." Matthew Saxton (2002) put the Guidelines to a statistical test, and found that they did indeed correlate highly to a successful reference transaction.

The original RUSA Ad Hoc Committee that designed the Guidelines recognized the need for future adaptation to deal with issues related to remote users, and in late 2001 the RUSA Standards and Guidelines Committee requested that the RSS Management of Reference Committee undertake this revision. The revised Guidelines reflect the understanding that while in-person and remote reference interviews share some points in common, each also has its own peculiar characteristics that need to be addressed separately in the formation of standard guidelines.

With this in mind, the original format has been rearranged to reflect the changes in our profession. The five main areas (Approachability, Interest, Listening/Inquiring, Searching, and Follow Up) remain the same, but three distinct categories have been added (where appropriate) under each. They are:

General--Guidelines that can be applied in any type of reference interaction, including both in person and remote transactions.

In Person--Additional guidelines that are specific to face-to-face encounters, and make the most sense in this context.

Remote--Additional guidelines that are specific to reference encounters by telephone, email, chat, etc., where traditional visual and non-verbal cues do not exist.

Some of the original Guidelines have also been rewritten to make the service ideal they convey apply more generally. The goal of this document's revision has been to create a conceptual framework and service ethic with which reference professionals can consider all patron reference interactions, and help establish a service standard for their institution.

Note: The term *librarian* in this document applies to all who provide reference and informational services directly to library users.

1.0 Approachability

In order to have a successful reference transaction, patrons must be able to identify that a reference librarian is available to provide assistance and also must feel comfortable in going to that person for help. In remote environments, this also means placing contact information for chat, email, telephone, and other services in prominent locations, to make them obvious and welcoming to patrons. Approachability behaviors, such as the initial verbal and non-verbal responses of the librarian, will set the tone for the entire communication process, and will influence the depth and level of interaction between the staff and the patrons. At this stage in the process, the behaviors exhibited by the staff member should serve to welcome the patrons and to place them at ease. The librarian's role in the communications process is to make the patrons feel comfortable in a situation that may be perceived as intimidating, risky, confusing, and overwhelming.

To be approachable, the librarian:

General

1.1 Establishes a "reference presence" wherever patrons look for it. This includes having Reference Services in a highly visible location and using proper signage (both in the library and on the library's Web site) to indicate the location, hours, and availability of in-person and remote help or assistance.

1.2 Is poised and ready to engage approaching patrons. The librarian is aware of the need to stop all other activities when patrons approach and focus attention on the patrons' needs.

1.3 Acknowledges others waiting for service.

1.3.1 Employs a system of question triage to identify what types of questions the patrons have when more than two patrons are waiting. Frequently asked questions, brief informational questions, directional questions, and referrals can be answered quickly, allowing more time to devote to in-depth reference questions.

In Person

1.4 Establishes initial eye contact with patrons, and acknowledges the presence of patrons through smiling and attentive and welcoming body language.

1.5 Acknowledges patrons through the use of a friendly greeting to initiate conversation, and by standing up, moving forward, or moving closer to them.

1.6 Remains visible to patrons as much as possible.

1.7 Roves through the reference area offering assistance whenever possible. Librarians should make themselves available to patrons by offering assistance at their point-of-need rather than waiting for patrons to come to the reference desk. To rove successfully, the librarian should:

1.7.1 Be mobile. Get the patrons started on the initial steps of their search, then move on to other patrons.

1.7.2 Address the patrons before addressing their computer screen. Patrons are more likely to confide in librarians and discuss their needs if they do not perceive the librarians as "policing" the area.

1.7.3 Approach patrons and offer assistance with lines such as, "Are you finding what you need?" "Can I help you with anything?" or "How is your search going?"
1.7.4 Check back on the patron's progress after helping them start a search.
1.7.5 If the reference desk has been left unattended, check back periodically to see if there are patrons waiting for assistance there.

Remote
1.8 Should provide prominent, jargon-free links to all forms of reference services from the *home page* of the library's Web site, and throughout the site wherever research assistance may be sought out. The Web should be used to make reference services easy to find and convenient.

2.0 Interest

A successful librarian must demonstrate a high degree of interest in the reference transaction. While not every query will contain stimulating intellectual challenges, the librarian should be interested in each patron's informational need and should be committed to providing the most effective assistance. Librarians who demonstrate a high level of interest in the inquiries of their patrons will generate a higher level of satisfaction among users. To demonstrate interest, the librarian:

General
2.1 Faces the patron when speaking and listening.
2.2 2.2 Focuses attention on the patrons.

In Person
2.3 Faces patrons when speaking and listening.
2.4 Maintains or re-establishes eye contact with patrons throughout the transaction.
2.5 Signals an understanding of patrons' needs through verbal or non-verbal confirmation, such as nodding of the head or brief comments or questions.

Remote
2.6 Maintains or re-establishes "word contact" with the patron in text-based environments by sending written or prepared prompts, etc., to convey interest in the patron's question.
2.7 Acknowledges user email questions in a timely manner.
2.8 States question-answering procedures and policies clearly in an accessible place on the Web. This should indicate question scope, types of answers provided, and expected turnaround time.

3.0 Listening/Inquiring.

The reference interview is the heart of the reference transaction and is crucial to the success of the process. The librarian must be effective in identifying the patron's information needs and must do so in a manner that keeps patrons at ease. Strong listening and questioning skills are necessary for a positive interaction. As a good communicator, the librarian:

General
3.1 Communicates in a receptive, cordial, and encouraging manner.
3.2 Uses a tone of voice and/or written language appropriate to the nature of the transaction.
3.3 Allows the patrons to state fully their information need in their own words before responding.
3.4 Identifies the goals or objectives of the user's research, when appropriate.
3.5 Rephrases the question or request and asks for confirmation to ensure that it is understood.
3.6 Seeks to clarify confusing terminology and avoids excessive jargon.

3.7 Uses open-ended questioning techniques to encourage patrons to expand on the request or present additional information. Some examples of such questions include:
- Please tell me more about your topic.
- What additional information can you give me?
- How much information do you need?

3.8 Uses closed and/or clarifying questions to refine the search query. Some examples of clarifying questions are:
- What have you already found?
- What type of information do you need (books, articles, etc.)?
- Do you need current or historical information?

3.9 Maintains objectivity and does not interject value judgments about subject matter or the nature of the question into the transaction.

Remote
3.10 Uses reference interviews or Web forms to gather as much information as possible without compromising user privacy.

4.0 Searching

The search process is the portion of the transaction in which behavior and accuracy intersect. Without an effective search, not only is the desired information unlikely to be found, but patrons may become discouraged as well. Yet many of the aspects of searching that lead to accurate results are still dependent on the behavior of the librarian. As an effective searcher, the librarian:

General
4.1 Finds out what patrons have already tried, and encourages patrons to contribute ideas.
4.2 Constructs a competent and complete search strategy. This involves:
- Selecting search terms that are most related to the information desired.
- Verifying spelling and other possible factual errors in the original query.
- Identifying sources appropriate to the patron's need that have the highest probability of containing information relevant to the patron's query.

4.3 Explains the search strategy and sequence to the patrons, as well as the sources to be used.
4.4 Attempts to conduct the search within the patrons' allotted time frame.
4.5 Explains how to use sources when appropriate.
4.6 Works with the patrons to narrow or broaden the topic when too little or too much information is identified.
4.7 Asks the patrons if additional information is needed after an initial result is found.
4.8 Recognizes when to refer patrons to a more appropriate guide, database, library, librarian, or other resource.
4.9 Offers pointers, detailed search paths (including complete URLs), and names of resources used to find the answer, so that patrons can learn to answer similar questions on their own.

In Person
4.10 Accompanies the patrons in the search (at least in the initial stages of the search process).

Remote
4.11 Uses appropriate technology (such as co-browsing, scanning, faxing, etc.) to help guide patrons through library resources, when possible.

5.0 Follow-up

The reference transaction does not end when the librarian leaves the patrons. The librarian is responsible for determining if the patrons are satisfied with the results of the search, and is also responsible for referring the patrons to other sources, even when those sources are not available in the local library. For successful follow-up, the librarian:

General

5.1 Asks patrons if their questions have been completely answered.
5.2 Encourages the patrons to return if they have further questions by making a statement such as "If you don't find what you are looking for, please come back and we'll try something else."
5.3 Roving (see 1.7) is an excellent technique for follow-up.
5.4 Consults other librarians or experts in the field when additional subject expertise is needed.
5.5 Makes patrons aware of other appropriate reference services (email, etc.).
5.6 Makes arrangements, when appropriate, with the patrons to research a question even after the reference transaction has been completed.
5.7 Refers the patrons to other sources or institutions when the query cannot be answered to the satisfaction of the patron.
5.8 Facilitates the process of referring patrons to another library or information agency through activities such as calling ahead, providing direction and instructions, and providing the library and the patrons with as much information as possible about the amount of information required, and sources already consulted.
5.9 Takes care not to end the reference interview prematurely.

Remote

5.9 Suggests that the patrons visit or call the library when appropriate.

Appendix C: Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States

Prepared by the Interlibrary Loan Committee, Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), 1994, revised 2001. Revised 2008, by the Sharing and Transforming Access to Resources Section (STARS).

Introduction

The Reference and User Services Association, acting for the American Library Association in its adoption of this code, recognizes that the sharing of material between libraries is an integral element in the provision of library service and believes it to be in the public interest to encourage such an exchange.

In the interest of providing quality service, libraries have an obligation to obtain material to meet the informational needs of users when local resources do not meet those needs. Interlibrary loan (ILL), a mechanism for obtaining material, is essential to the vitality of all libraries.

The effectiveness of the national interlibrary loan system depends upon participation of libraries of all types and sizes.

This code establishes principles that facilitate the requesting of material by a library and the provision of loans or copies in response to those requests. In this code, "material" includes books, audiovisual materials, and other returnable items as well as copies of journal articles, book chapters, excerpts, and other non-returnable items.

1.0 Definition

1.1 Interlibrary loan is the process by which a library requests material from, or supplies material to, another library.

2.0 Purpose

2.1 The purpose of interlibrary loan as defined by this code is to obtain, upon request of a library user, material not available in the user's local library.

3.0 Scope

3.1 This code regulates the exchange of material between libraries in the United States.
3.2 Interlibrary loan transactions with libraries outside of the United States are governed by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' International Lending: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure.

4.0 Responsibilities of the Requesting Library

4.1 Establish, promptly update, and make available an interlibrary borrowing policy.
4.2 Ensure the confidentiality of the user.
4.3 Describe completely and accurately the requested material following accepted bibliographic practice.
4.4 Identify libraries that own the requested material and check and adhere to the policies of potential supplying libraries.
4.5 When no libraries can be identified as owning the needed material, requests may be sent to libraries believed likely to own the material, accompanied by an indication that ownership is not confirmed.
4.6 Transmit interlibrary loan requests electronically whenever possible.
4.7 For copy requests, comply with the U.S. copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code) and its accompanying guidelines.
4.8 Assume responsibility for borrowed material from the time it leaves the supplying library until it has been returned to and received by the supplying library. This includes all material shipped directly to and/or returned by the user. If damage or loss occurs, provide compensation or replacement, in accordance with the preference of the supplying library.
4.9 Assume full responsibility for user-initiated transactions.
4.10 Honor the due date and enforce any use restrictions specified by the supplying library. The due date is defined as the date the material is due to be checked-in at the supplying library.
4.11 Request a renewal before the item is due. If the supplying library does not respond, the requesting library may assume that a renewal has been granted extending the due date by the same length of time as the original loan.
4.12 All borrowed material is subject to recall. Respond immediately if the supplying library recalls an item.
4.13 Package material to prevent damage in shipping and comply with any special instructions stated by the supplying library.
4.14 Failure to comply with the provisions of this code may be reason for suspension of service by a supplying library.

5.0 Responsibilities of the Supplying Library

5.1 Establish, promptly update, and make available an interlibrary lending policy.
5.2 Consider filling all requests for material regardless of format.
5.3 Ensure the confidentiality of the user.

5.4 Process requests in a timely manner that recognizes the needs of the requesting library and/or the requirements of the electronic network or transmission system being used. If unable to fill a request, respond promptly and state the reason the request cannot be filled.

5.5 When filling requests, send sufficient information with each item to identify the request.

5.6 Indicate the due date and any restrictions on the use of the material and any special return packaging or shipping requirements. The due date is defined as the date the material is due to be checked-in at the supplying library.

5.7 Ship material in a timely and efficient manner to the location specified by the requesting library. Package loaned material to prevent loss or damage in shipping. Deliver copies electronically whenever possible.

5.8 Respond promptly to requests for renewals. If no response is sent, the requesting library may assume that a renewal has been granted extending the due date by the same length of time as the original loan.

5.9 Loaned material is subject to recall at any time.

5.10 Failure to comply with the provisions of this code may lead to suspension of service to the requesting library.