

2.10 Reference Services

I. Priorities

Service to the public receives priority over any other duties. Reference service is available to all persons served by the library without discrimination. The request of each user is taken seriously and treated with confidentiality.

In-person requests for service receive priority over telephone requests, followed by requests received by fax, mail, email or other electronic communication.

If several people are waiting for assistance, requests that are brief may be given priority over lengthy or complex questions that require large amounts of time.

Reference services available via mobile outreach library facilities may be limited due to availability of staff and privacy concerns. Such reference services may be referred to other library facilities.

II. Time Limits

The limit of reference service will vary according to the:

- number of users needing assistance
- number of staff available to help
- complexity of materials
- amount of information needed
- level of staff technical expertise needed

The amount of time devoted to a complex request is at the discretion of the reference staff. It is not the responsibility of the staff to conduct lengthy research for users. Library users requiring lengthy or involved research assistance should be given guidance on available resources and basic instruction on research methods.

III. Book a Librarian

Book a Librarian is a free service that allows you to make a one-on-one appointment with a librarian for more complicated questions or in-depth help that requires more time than walk-up help may allow. Each appointment can last up to 30 minutes. Additional appointments can be requested with a maximum of two appointments per calendar month.

IV. Telephone Reference

Telephone reference service is available for all reference questions. During particularly busy times, it may be necessary to return the user's call or arrange for the user to call back.

V. Fax, Mail, Email and Other Electronic Communications

Fax, mail, email and chat or other electronic communications requests for service are defined as short, factual informational questions that do not require extensive reading or interpretation on the part of staff members.

Email reference questions must include an email address for a reply.

VI. School Assignments

Student requests for assistance with school assignments will be given the same consideration as any other request. Staff will work with the student to find appropriate resources and provide instruction in the use of those resources. Online tutoring resources, such as Brainfuse, will be used to assist students with school assignments as appropriate. Library staff will assist with orientation to the resource for students and tutors. Student requests that cannot be filled may be noted on the Student Request/Unfilled Form and addressed to the teacher.

VII. Contest Questions

Contest questions will be given the same consideration as any other type of reference question. Some contest questions might have more than one answer that seems to be correct; staff should not interpret contest rules. Staff will work with the patron to find appropriate resources and provide instruction in the use of those resources for contests initiated by the Library or by library-related organizations.

VIII. Consumer Evaluations

The reference staff will help users locate consumer product information and sources for objective consumer evaluations. The staff does not offer personal opinions, recommend particular item brands, or interpret evaluation results.

IX. Appraisals

The reference staff will refer users to appropriate reference sources. Staff members will never give personal appraisals regarding the value of a patron's possession.

X. Genealogy Questions

Staff will provide general assistance in genealogical research, guidance in locating items in the collection, and help in obtaining resources through interlibrary loan. Staff members should not conduct genealogical research for patrons.

XI. Medical, Legal, and Tax Questions

Factual information, definitions, or citations from codes will be provided, but staff will not interpret or offer an opinion of medical, legal, or tax matters.

XII. Mathematical Calculations

Staff will refer patrons to sources with the appropriate formula or tables for performing their own calculations but will not perform the actual calculation.

XIII. Criss-cross and City Directories

No more than three listings will be provided per patron at any one time. Staff members will not give “nearby” listings for criss-cross requests. Staff will also refer to online reference tools such as AtoZdatabases.

XIV. Voting and Elections

Election issues will be answered as any other reference question. Reference staff should create a file of related information, such as printed brochures, newspaper clippings, position statements, etc. for important local, state, and national election issues. Staff will not summarize, interpret or offer opinions regarding political issues.

XV. Stock Quotes

Stock quote questions are treated as any other reference question. In order to avoid any misinformation over the telephone, patrons are encouraged to come to the library in person for stock quote information. Staff may provide patrons with appropriate Internet addresses for searching current or historical stock quotes.

XVI. Obituaries and Newspaper Reference

Staff will search for an obituary in the New Braunfels Herald Zeitung for patrons not able to visit the library in person if a date of death is provided. Staff will utilize the online search tool in the digitized version of the Herald Zeitung and may refer customers to this tool in lieu of staff performing the search.

Staff will not conduct research if the date does not produce an obituary for the named person.

XVII. Online Searching

The reference staff will utilize online searching as other reference sources.

XVIII. Technical Assistance with Devices and Electronic Library Resources

The New Braunfels Public Library offers technical assistance with devices and the library's electronic resources (eResources) in line with its vision of engaging, educating, and empowering library patrons.

All Library staff members are trained to assist users with the Library's electronic resources, the library catalog, the Library's online databases, and accessing the Internet, and staff can also provide limited assistance in the use of Library-installed software. This includes basic logging in, signing up for email, keyword suggestions for Internet searches, how to print, how to save to portable storage devices, or how to open word processing or spreadsheets. Staff may assist patrons with detailed questions about Library-installed software as time and knowledge permit, but computer users are expected to work independently and have basic knowledge of computer and Internet use.

Library staff can also direct patrons to print resources, digital resources, or training resources that can assist users further.

Patrons in need of extended or in-depth support on the computer or personal device will be referred to the Librarian On Duty or another member of the reference staff or be directed to use the Book a Librarian service.

Designated staff members have been trained to assist patrons with technology questions and concerns, but the Library cannot guarantee that staff will be available to users at all times.

Staff is explicitly prohibited from performing commercial transactions for patrons, contacting third parties, or filling out personal forms or typing in information on a patron's behalf. Examples include, but are not limited to, social security numbers, banking information, insurance forms, taxes, financial information, and passwords. This is for the security of patrons' personal information, as well as to protect the library and its staff.

Staff can help patrons with laptops or other devices with logging into the wireless network, but cannot troubleshoot, repair patrons' devices, or guarantee a Wi-Fi connection. The Library's wireless networks are offered as unsecure wireless networks. Users should use wireless access accordingly.

XIX. Referrals

Patrons will be referred to more appropriate sources when it becomes clear that the request cannot be properly answered given the limitations of the library's resources. Reference staff should refer to other agencies only when they are reasonably certain the answer can be found there. A referral to interlibrary loan is part of the library's service.



Endorsed by the New Braunfels Public Library Board, July 21, 2003

Revised May 15, 2006; May 19, 2008; Oct. 24, 2011

Endorsed June 16, 2014; June 15, 2015

Revised July 18, 2016; July 16, 2018; Feb. 19, 2019; Sept. 21, 2020; May 17, 2021; July 18, 2022

By: _____
President, Library Advisory Board

Attest: _____
Library Director