



DECATUR PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Reference & Reader's Advisory Services Policy

Definition:

Reference Service Transactions are information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs. (Reference and User Services Association (RUSA))

Readers' Advisory Services is provided by public services librarians who assist in the reading needs of the patrons of a public library. A readers' advisor recommends specific titles and/or authors, based on knowledge of the patron's past reading preferences, and may also compile lists of recommended titles.

Introduction: Staff trained to provide reference service and materials are available all hours the library is open. Decatur Public Library (DPL) staff will respond to all reference and information questions as efficiently, accurately, and completely as possible, and in a timely manner. All requests for information receive an answer or status report within one working day. Questions which cannot be answered with on-site resources are referred to the appropriate non-library resources. Every attempt is made to provide accurate answers to all questions. When possible, staff will refer patrons to authoritative, reputable sources, and offer supporting documentation or information upon further inquiry. Patrons have a right to be informed of the sources used to answer their questions.

Readers' Advisory Services answer questions that have more to do with the patron's leisure reading than their informational needs. Readers' advisory covers both fiction and nonfiction titles. Readers' advisory shall be provided in the following methods: formal or informal readers' advisory interviews with staff; bestseller lists; displays; genre labels; library resources such as NoveList. Readers' advisory is provided to all ages and without judgment of reading tastes or interests.

Access

The library will provide reference services and materials to all persons regardless of the age, race, gender, national origin, economic status, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Patrons do not need to be registered DPL cardholders to use library facilities, reference materials or services. Service is provided in response to all forms of inquiry including but not limited to patrons in the library, the telephone, e-mail, instant message, or other forms of technology as they emerge. The reference questions of patrons present at the library are given the highest priority.

Confidentiality

The needs of library patrons are treated with respect. Names of patrons and the transactions which occur between patrons and the staff are confidential and not discussed outside a professional context.

Services

Insofar as it is possible, reference services shall not only meet but also anticipate patron needs. The library shall provide instruction in the effective use of its resources. Such instruction can include individual explanation of information resources, written guides and instructions, group presentations, videos, or other forms of technology as they emerge. Print and electronic resources are available to assist staff and patrons in answering questions. Electronic books and subscription databases are available remotely to DPL cardholders, except where not permitted by license agreements.

Reference staff may be available to work one-on-one with patrons to assist in their information needs. Staff instructional sessions include, but are not limited to, using library's research databases, training on Internet, basic Microsoft products, and specific electronic devices such as e-readers. Staff 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 reference services for all patrons. Staff reserves the right to schedule appointments for one-on-one sessions as time permits.

Staff may assist patrons with basic computer operations and applications and/or refer patrons to other resources for further assistance. When assisting with computer resources, staff will not enter personal information for patrons.

Limits of Services

In the instance of legal, medical, investment, or tax reference questions, the staff may only guide the patron to the material available on the topic of interest. The staff may not evaluate or interpret the information provided nor may the staff define the meaning of terms, offer investment advice, select income tax forms, or serve as a surrogate for a professional in any of the fields listed above. If all materials within the library are beyond the understanding of the patron, the patron will be advised to consult with their professional from the above listed fields for additional information or advice. Staff will not engage in conversation or debate of a personal nature, including but not limited to religious or political beliefs, or their personal lives. Patrons may not expect to work exclusively with a particular staff member.

Evaluation of Reference Service and the Reference Policy

The library will evaluate its service every three years to assure that the service furthers the institution's goals, and the goals reflect the needs and interest of the community served.

Approved by the Decatur Public Library Board of Trustees
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