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5.7 Reference Policy

The mission of the Emmetsburg Public Library is to empower an informed citizenry by helping people to use information effectively, make informed life decisions, and research their heritage.

In-Person Reference

Service to the public is a priority of the library. It takes precedence over other tasks. A question that cannot be readily answered will be immediately referred to at least one other full time staff member. After conducting the reference interview to ascertain the information needed, the staff member will take the patron to the source(s) of information.

Instruction may be given in the use of the OPAC (online patron accessible catalog), internet, and basic reference resources. If the patron has a question that will require a lengthy amount of time, and others are waiting, the staff member will offer to complete the question at a later time.

Patrons will be invited to return to the circulation desk if they find they are in need of further assistance. Interlibrary loan

capabilities will be suggested and explained when appropriate. The patron will be thanked for using the library.

College Students/Faculty Requests

Reference requests from Iowa Lakes Community College students or faculty will be answered as any other reference request until it is determined their need is exclusively related to service only the college staff may provide. They will then be promptly referred to the college staff on duty or advised of the hours that the college library is open.

Telephone Reference

Telephone reference questions will be answered quickly in short, factual answers. When a patron calls with a question, their name and number will be taken so as to call them back with the answer. If the question is extensive, they will need to come to the library for better assistance. Out-of-town callers can arrange a time to call back for the answer. The source of the information will be cited. The patron will not be placed on hold unless they request it. The patron will be thanked for using the library.

Fax or Email Reference

Every effort will be made to respond to reasonable fax and email requests with short, factual, and informational answers that do not require extensive research by the staff. If the question is more involved, the patron will be invited to visit the library for assistance.

Homework Help

Help with school assignments will be treated as any other request for reference information. Guiding students to resources and instructing them in how to use resources will enable the student to return to the resources as needed.

Contest Questions

Trivia or contest questions will be answered as any other reference questions. If more than one answer might be suitable, options will be provided. Library staff will not interpret contest rules.

Consumer Evaluations

When patrons ask consumer-based questions, the staff will guide them to objective consumer product information. Short published consumer ratings may be read over the phone, but in-depth information will require a library visit by the patron.

Genealogy Questions

It is the policy of the Emmetsburg Public Library to not devote staff time to genealogical or personal history research requests, unless at the discretion of the library director, it is determined the information requested can be found in an efficient manner and ample information has been given within narrow parameters. In such cases, limited staff time may be allowed

All other such requests will be referred to the Palo Alto County Genealogical Society.

Medical, Legal and Tax Questions

The library does not provide advice in the area of medical, legal, and taxation. Any information that is located in print or online resources can be utilized to help patrons find what they need. Library staff will not interpret any definitions, laws or medical conditions for patrons.

Criss-Cross/City Directory Information

The library does not provide criss-cross or city directory information.

Confidentiality shall be respected in all instances.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees: April 20, 1999; Reviewed: November 20, 2001; Revised: March 2004; Reviewed: January 2006, December 2011, December 2014, October 2017 January 2021; Scheduled for Review: December 2023