

Cobb County Public Library System
Reference Policy

Approved February 25, 2013, May 18, 2015, June 26, 2017

I. The Mission Statement for Cobb County Library System

The Cobb County Public Library System is a place where we are committed to being a vital resource center by providing equal access to information, materials, and services to enrich people's lives.

II. Mission Statement for Reference Service

It is the mission of the Cobb County Public Library System's Reference Service staff to help users satisfy their information needs through print or electronic resources by effectively using the wide range of services available at the Cobb County Public Library System.

III. The Definition of Library Users

A. Cobb County Public Library System (CCPLS) users are any members of the public who visit or contact CCPLS reference service with information needs.

B. All CCPLS users are to be treated with dignity and respect.

C. Any question is accepted and treated equally, subject to prioritization, as detailed in this policy.

IV. Reference Service Objectives

A. Assist all CCPLS users in meeting their information needs.

B. Provide CCPLS users with the highest quality customer service.

C. Acquire and organize sources of information to meet the needs of all CCPLS users.

D. Provide CCPLS users with tours, programs, and instructions in using resources.

E. Coordinate in meeting other Cobb County departments and community agencies' needs effectively.

V. Purpose of Reference Guidelines

A. To describe the services and resources that are provided by CCPLS Reference Service staff, which is comprised of the Public Service staff.

B. To set standards and guidelines that ensure quality and consistency of service.

C. To provide direction for CCPLS Reference Service and Youth Service staff and those being trained to work in these areas.

VI. General Guidelines for Reference Service Staff

A. The highest quality of customer service is maintained.

B. The Reference Service staff is knowledgeable about CCPLS' resources, programs, and services.

C. The Reference Service staff is approachable and communicates effectively, by listening closely to inquiries, in order to facilitate a mutual understanding between staff and users.

D. All questions are accepted and treated equally.

E. Discretion is maintained in handling all confidential inquiries.

F. The Reference Service staff will follow procedures and use judgment in interpreting CCPLS policy.

G. The Reference Service staff will refer questions to other staff members when appropriate.

VII. Specific Guidelines for Reference Service

A. Priorities

1. Users seeking service at any CCPLS location take precedence over users' requests by telephone, or fax, or email.

2. Each question is to be treated confidentially.

3. Each question will be answered in a reasonable amount of time, though response time will vary depending on staffing, user traffic, and the amount of effort staff must spend answering a question or gathering information.

4. Users will be notified if their requests cannot be fulfilled within a reasonable amount of time.

5. Staff will make a reasonable effort to accommodate users' deadlines or other time constraints, but prioritization on this basis cannot be guaranteed.

6. In-depth research cannot be performed by CCPLS staff, but users will be guided to sources where such information can be found.

B. Incomplete Reference Transactions

1. Every effort is made to complete reference questions immediately.
2. If a reference question cannot be immediately answered, the user will be given a reasonable time frame in which to expect a response.
3. Unfinished reference questions will be turned over to incoming staff.
4. Staff members are encouraged to consult with colleagues, either at their branch or at other CCPLS branches, if they need assistance with a difficult question.

C. Sources

1. Authoritative sources are used to give the most accurate answers possible.
2. The opinion of staff members, even when requested, should not be given as fact.
3. The source of an answer should always be cited.
4. CCPLS provides access to many online databases. When a database is recommended in answering a reference question, a demonstration and guidance of the database should be offered.

D. Referrals to Other Organizations

1. If appropriate, CCPLS staff members will refer users to other organizations for further assistance; however, Reference Service staff members will remind users they may contact CCPLS if further assistance is needed.
2. When referring users to businesses or organizations, Reference Service staff will not recommend one firm or organization above another.
3. If the list of businesses or organizations is extensive, staff members will request that users come to the appropriate CCPLS branch to obtain their requested information, or staff members will refer users to the appropriate online resources.

E. School Assignments

1. Questions regarding school assignments will be treated as any other request for reference assistance.
2. Every effort is made to answer satisfactorily student questions and provide the sources for information.
3. Instruction on the use of library resources will be given if time allows and the student requests.

4. Every effort to have information available in a variety of formats and levels is made but availability cannot be guaranteed.

5. Students, as well as other users are encouraged to approach staff members and discuss their information needs.

6. Not all reference questions can be answered in a reasonable amount of time. If every effort has been made by the Reference Service staff and the student to locate information in the required format, without results, the student will be encouraged to return to the teacher for further instruction or an altered assignment.

7. In the event that a student should use the library and fails to find the materials necessary for the completion of an assignment, the librarian will provide the student with a form which verifies his or her effort and clarifies for the teacher the problem with the location of materials.

F. Consumer Evaluations

1. The staff will assist users in locating and utilizing objective consumer information.

2. Users will be shown how to consult the indexes to Consumer Reports and related magazines, buying guides, and/or general indexes which may lead to product evaluations in other periodicals.

3. The staff does not offer personal opinions recommending one product over another.

G. Book, Antique, Art, and other Collectibles Appraisals

1. Users will be referred to appropriate identification or price guides.

2. Users will be referred to knowledgeable persons or associations or comparable resources with no recommendation being made.

3. Library staff will assist in locating an object within the library's identification and price guides, but staff will make no attempt to appraise its value.

H. Genealogical Questions

1. Staff members will provide general assistance in answering genealogical questions and guidance in locating items in the collection including print, electronic resources or microforms for users.

2. Staff members will refrain from actual individual genealogical research for users but enable users to conduct their own genealogical research.

I. Translations

1. Translation of words or simple phrases may be provided by staff with appropriate expertise, when feasible.

2. Staff will assist in locating resources for translation.

J. Legal, Medicine, and Tax Questions

1. CCPLS does not provide advice in the areas of law, medicine, or taxes, regardless of how commonplace the knowledge seems to be.

2. CCPLS has authoritative resources which staff members will help users utilize.

3. Legal information found in authoritative sources may be provided.

4. Complicated legal searches will not be undertaken, nor will personal interpretations of legal matters be offered.

5. For medical information, brief definitions and descriptions from authoritative sources will be provided.

6. Sources will be quoted verbatim with no personal interpretation.

7. The user will be informed of the source from which the information is taken.

8. Staff will direct users to additional resources, if needed.

9. The library provides select tax forms and publications, as well as contact information for government agencies, but does not provide tax advice.

10. If more information is required, staff will encourage users to examine the library's collection or provide another source.

K. Business Questions

1. CCPLS provides a wide range of business information including, but is not limited to current or past information about: specific values for investments; car values; antique values; and CrissCross Directory.

2. Staff will direct users to possible sources, both in and out of the library, where the information they require will be provided, including books, pamphlets, journals, electronic services, service agencies, and professionals in the appropriate field.

3. Staff will provide assistance in the use of the resources or, if the users have trouble understanding the source, an alternative source will be sought.

VIII. Orientation/Tours

- A. Formal group library orientation tours, bibliographic instruction, and online demonstrations are provided by Reference Service staff.
- B. All types of tours must be pre-arranged through the branch manager.

IX. Reference Outreach

- A. Reference outreach is a way to make the community aware of the library resources which will be useful or enjoyable to them.
- B. The difference between reference work and reference outreach is that outreach usually implies a group.
- C. Outreach can be done within the library (tours, classes, or book groups); or outside of the library in the form of a speaking bureau for organizations, civic clubs, or business groups.
- D. Outreach can be done in conjunction with another agency such as the Literacy Council, or Senior Services.

X. Georgia Room

- A. The Georgia Room staff does not take requests for research over the telephone but can be contacted by email at georgiac@cobbcat.org or by using the "Contact Us" link found on CCPLS website (www.cobbcat.org).
- B. CCPLS suggests that users send in a self-addressed stamped envelope when they make a written request, but users are not required to do so.
- C. Staff will reply to written requests using a form letter. Staff will reply to e-mail requests by e-mail.
- D. The Reference Service staff /Georgia Room staff is able to call Georgia residents who do not reside in Cobb County
- E. When a user makes a written research request, staff will determine if the request can be filled. Copies of the requested material will be mailed to the user. The form letter enclosed will ask the user to reimburse the library at \$.15 per copy plus the amount of postage reflected on the envelope.
- F. The cost for printing documents is the same as the cost for photocopying.
- G. A specific time for written responses cannot be guaranteed.
- H. Cobb County residents are encouraged to come to the Georgia Room for assistance.

XI. Recording Statistics and Questions

A. Accurate statistics regarding service to users should be recorded on standardized reporting forms, approved by the Library System's Administration.

B. These approved forms can be found on the CCPLS' staff page and are used for CCPLS Reports.