

Boston Public Library <i>Reference Services Policy</i>	Public Service Policy
	Date Approved: May 17, 2005 Previously Approved: _____

1.0 Reference Services Mission

Reference Services assists, educates, informs and empowers library users in all areas of knowledge through availability of expert staff and access to a broad, in-depth range of authoritative resources and collections.

2.0 Purpose of the Reference Services Policy

The Reference Services Policy provides standards for the staff that will ensure all patrons receive consistently high levels of service. The System-Wide Reference Team will review this document annually.

3.0 Staff

The Reference Staff of the Boston Public Library will adhere to the standards established in the *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Informational Services Providers* as published in the Employee Manual and on the BPL website.

4.0 Library Users

Reference Services at the Boston Public Library offers the same quality of service to all regardless of age, race, gender, nationality, educational background, disability, sexual orientation or any other criteria which may be the source of discrimination

5.0 General Guidelines for Desk Service

5.1 Service to the public receives priority over any other duties.

5.2 Reference questions are treated confidentially.

5.3 Whenever possible or prudent, in-person reference receives priority over telephone queries.

5.4 Reference staff will conduct expert reference interviews to determine the reference/research needs of the library user. Reference staff will exhibit model reference behavior at all times.

5.5 Reference staff will rely upon information obtained from reputable sources in order to give the most accurate and authoritative answers to questions.

5.6 Reference staff will also use professional judgment in determining how best to serve each customer's reference needs.

5.7 Reference staff will always cite the source of the answer.

5.8 Reference staff will refer the client to other appropriate sources or institutions when the query cannot be answered to the satisfaction of the client using BPL resources.

6.0 Specific Question Guidelines

6.1 Reference staff will make every attempt to provide information and reference assistance for all inquiries. When information cannot be provided as stipulated below in 6.2-6.9, referrals to appropriate professional organizations or federal/state/municipal agencies will be made.

6.2 Reference staff does not give medical, legal, copyright, financial or tax advice.

6.3 Reference staff never refers library users to individual practitioners – physicians, attorneys, mental health professionals, or others.

6.4 General assistance is provided in genealogical research. Reference staff does not conduct genealogical or heraldic research for patrons.

6.5 Reference staff does not provide an appraisal of books, works of art, antiques, coins, stamps, currency, or other collectibles but will provide contact information for appraisal services derived from professional association directories.

6.6 Reference staff does provide brief translations only if a staff member is available with the appropriate expertise.

6.7 Reference staff does not provide personal critical analyses, interpretations, or judgments regarding the merit of literary or other works.

6.8 Reference staff does not provide editorial services or picture research to library users.

6.9 General assistance is provided for patent and trademark research. Reference staff does not conduct patent or trademark research for library users.

7.0 Specific Desk Service Guidelines

7.1 In-Person Reference:

7.1.1 Reference questions may require reference staff to accompany clients to the online catalog/databases to explain its use or to the library stacks to help locate material.

7.1.2 Because no two reference questions are alike, there is no time limit to reference assistance.

7.1.3 If there are a number of library users needing assistance, requests that are directional or brief in nature may be given priority over lengthy or complex questions.

7.2 Telephone Reference

7.2.1 Telephone reference generally falls into the Ready Reference category and should take no more than 5-10 minutes.

7.2.2 Telephone reference questions should be limited to a reasonable number; librarians will use their best professional judgment. Reference questions of a more complex nature should be referred to the library subject specialists.

7.2.3 For long and/or complex questions, reference staff will follow-up with the library user by calling them back or another mutually agreeable means of communication.

7.3 Electronic Reference

7.3.1 E-mail reference questions will be answered in the order in which they are received.

7.3.2 Questions of a complex or subject specific nature received either through e-mail or 24/7 Reference will be forwarded to the library subject departments. The originating department will be copied on the response to the client.

7.3.3 Internet reference questions will be answered at those times that the library is monitoring the 24/7 service.

7.4 Reference Letters

7.4.1 Residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will receive priority in the answering of reference letters.

7.4.2 All other reference letters will be answered in the order in which they are received.

7.5 Regional Reference Questions

7.5.1 Massachusetts libraries sending reference questions will be contacted within 48 hours with a status report.

7.5.2 If the question is of a complex nature and will take longer, the reference staff will contact the inquiring library to determine the deadline.

7.6 Electronic Databases/Internet

7.6.1 Reference staff will instruct and/or orient users to the online resources subscribed to by the library and made accessible through the BPL webpage.

7.6.2 Reference staff will use professional judgment to determine when a fee-based electronic database would be the best means of answering a question.

7.6.3 Reference staff will provide authoritative answers to questions.

7.6.4 Reference staff cannot guarantee the validity or accuracy of information retrieved from the Internet.

8.0 Loan of Reference Materials

The purpose of the reference collection is to assure library users of access to reference tools at all times that the library is open. Reference materials, therefore, will not circulate.