



# Nevins Library Reference Policy

Approved by Trustees on September 3,  
2024

## Introduction

As part of its mission to enrich the community, the Nevins Library is committed to providing quality reference service to its patrons without regard to the race, gender, age, sexual orientation, appearance and or personal knowledge of the patron requesting the information. This service may be accessed in different ways and may result in either information, instruction and or referrals to appropriate alternative sources.

## Purpose

This Reference Services Policy serves as a framework to ensure a uniform and high level of service to all patrons. Its purposes include:

- Offering guidance to maintain consistent quality in reference services
- Serving as a document for the proper training of staff
- Acting as a referral tool for staff seeking assistance and guidance
- Making written guidelines on the scope and boundaries of services accessible to the public

## Reference Philosophy

Nevins Library upholds the principles outlined in the Library Bill of Rights<sup>1</sup> and the American Library Association's Statement on Intellectual Freedom. In alignment with these guidelines, the Library establishes the following philosophical principles:

- Reference services will be provided on a non-discriminatory basis to all Methuen residents and non-residents.
- All requests for information are considered legitimate and will not be judged on the worth of the information desired.
- All transactions between staff and patrons shall be considered confidential and be treated accordingly.
- Staff will make every effort to impartially deliver the reference assistance in an unbiased, non-judgmental and non-interpretative manner; and will always cite the source of the response.

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<sup>1</sup> American Library Association. (2006, June 30). *Library Bill of Rights* [Text]. Advocacy, Legislation & Issues.

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

- All information will be conveyed as promptly, accurately and efficiently as possible.
- Staff collaborate with each other and may seek assistance or share ideas regarding questions or issues related to reference service.
- Staff refrains from offering advice on medical, legal, copyright, financial, or tax matters.

## Services

The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) defines Reference as assistance through specialized expertise in response to an information need. It emphasizes that the purpose of reference work is “to ensure that library users can find the resources they need when they want them” (RUSA, 2001, The Definition in Context section)<sup>2</sup>.

Library reference questions arise when an individual or group seeks immediate information or assistance from a library worker, who may also identify and address apparent information needs. Unlike formal instruction or planned workshops, reference work is driven by the patrons' current need and focuses on providing timely access to necessary resources, rather than teaching or addressing anticipated needs.

## Modes of Inquiry and Patrons Priorities

Service to the public receives the highest priority over all other duties while staffing the Reference Desk. Patrons are assisted on a first-come, first-served basis regardless of the age, race, gender, nationality, educational background, disability, sexual orientation or any other criteria which may be the source of discrimination. Priority service will be given to in-person requests. When there are two or more patrons at the desk requesting service, callers will be encouraged to call back or provide their contact information so they can be assisted when time allows. If a patron has a request that requires more time, it will be addressed after assisting other patrons with simpler questions.

- **In Person**
  - Patrons will be assisted at the Reference desk in order of arrival according to the best judgement of the staff.
- **By Phone**
  - While our team is committed to helping patrons with brief reference questions over the phone, staff may need to follow up with personal email to provide more information.

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<sup>2</sup> Reference and User Services Association. (2021, December 13). *Definitions of Reference*. RUSA. <https://www.ala.org/rusa/guidelines/definitionsreference>

- **Email and E- Forms**

- Email services are available for brief or factual questions through the address: [nevinsref@nevinslibrary.org](mailto:nevinsref@nevinslibrary.org).
- Interlibrary loans and Reader's advisory services can be requested using the respective electronic forms available on the Library's website.
- Questions received via email or e-forms will be addressed in the order they are received and the staff will make every effort to respond within 2 business days. However, response times may vary depending on the complexity of the inquiry.

- **By E-forms**

- Questions will be addressed in the order they are received, and the Reference staff will make every effort to respond within 2 business days. Inquiries received on Sundays, holidays, or during Library closings will be attended to on the first business day following the Library's reopening.

- **By Texting**

- If the telephone and internet are unavailable, inquiries will be addressed via cell phone at (781) 226-9184. However, such occurrences will be pre-notified on the Library's website and social media platforms.
- This service is available for brief or factual inquiries and will be handled on a first-come, first-served basis, and the Reference staff will do their best to respond within two business days. However, response times may vary depending on the complexity of the query and/or the availability of Internet service.

- **By Mail**

- All will be answered in the order in which they are received.

### **Time Limits on Questions**

No two reference questions are alike; therefore, staff will spend up to 30 minutes on a reference question and make best attempts to provide at least some results relevant to the search. After 30 minutes, the patron will be asked to schedule an appointment to address their information request in more detail so as not to affect the quality of service to other patrons.

### **Specialized Requests**

- **Directory Information.** Publicly accessible telephone numbers and addresses from telephone directories, city directories, and electronic resources will be provided

upon request. However, staff reserve the right to limit the number of such requests.

- **Editing.** No documents such as manuscripts, school assignments, academic papers, cover letters, resumes, or similar materials will be edited.
- **Exam Proctoring.** See Exam Proctoring Guidelines<sup>3</sup>
- **Genealogical and Obituaries Research.** General assistance and guidance in navigating our Local History Collection will be available. This includes basic advice on using the microfilm reader and accessing various online genealogy resources such as American Ancestors, Ancestry Heritage Quest, and Ancestry Library Edition, among others. If further assistance is required, patrons may be referred to other libraries or accredited researchers in the area. For obituaries, patrons must provide both the deceased's name and the date of death to assist with the research. Staff are unable to conduct a search without reasonable certainty that the provided name and date are accurate. There is a limit of three (3) requests per month per patron for obituary searches or genealogical research requested by phone or email.
- **Homework Assignments and Research Assistance.** Homework assignments will not be interpreted; however, patrons will be assisted in locating specific sources to meet their informational needs in the required format. Reference services do not encompass generating, modifying, or rectifying extensive bibliographic lists. Patrons will be referred to the relevant style manual or to bibliographic managers to ensure proper citation.
- **Medical, Legal, Tax, and Financial Information.** The Library does not provide advice or interpretation of medical, legal, financial or tax information, nor does it recommend specific professionals, such as doctors or lawyers. Assistance in these areas is limited to directing patrons to Library resources and/or secondary reference sources such as specialized libraries or relevant government agencies. Tax forms will be available when distributed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Federal Government. Upon request, the Library provides printouts or tax schedules, but does not suggest which tax products are appropriate or which schedules are needed for a specific situation.

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<sup>3</sup> Nevins Library. (2018, April 3). *Exam Proctoring Guidelines*.  
<https://www.nevinslibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ExamProctoringGuidelines.pdf>

- **Patent and Trademark Research.** Reference staff will not conduct patent or trademark searches. Patrons will be referred to obtain patent and trademark legal assistance offered by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)<sup>4</sup>.
- **Technology Assistance.** Assistance and guidance will be provided in the use of technology equipment, internet, as well as online information resources available in the Library. However, in-depth technical help is only available by appointment with the Technology Librarian. This support includes help with using eReaders, laptops, email, cell phones, and other personal devices. Services related to repairs, upgrades, or maintenance of computers or other devices will not be provided.
- **Translations.** Staff does not offer translation services for entire documents. However, they can assist with translations of specific words or phrases using language dictionaries. Additionally, they may suggest print or online dictionaries and online translators for further assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> United States Patent and Trademark Office. (n.d.). *Massachusetts*. Uspto.  
<https://www.uspto.gov/about-us/uspto-office-locations/massachusetts>