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## General Reference Service Policies, University Libraries, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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## University Libraries, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Professional librarians and highly trained support staff provide information and assistance to all library patrons. They may:

1. Help patrons choose the best resources to research a topic or to answer a specific question. Resources include library research databases, general internet search engines, books, people or organizations.
2. Help patrons use the resources. This may include
  - selecting terms
  - constructing search statements
  - using database commands and features
  - printing, downloading or emailing results
  - interpreting results
  - evaluating results
  - modifying search strategies
  - accessing databases remotely
  - incorporating results into papers and projects
  - using print reference books and other library materials
3. Direct patrons to library materials and services and facilities.
4. Provide brief answers to factual and directional questions.
5. Refer patrons to other sources of information, including people, library or campus units, or other organizations.

Patrons may pose questions in person, or by email, online chat, telephone or mail. Answers will be provided in the venue most suitable for the patron and the answer. For example, a question posed via online reference may be answered with a fax; or a question posed by telephone may be answered via email.

The library staff does not perform extensive research for patrons.

The library staff does not offer legal, medical, patent or tax advice of any type.

Patrons asking for help with complex questions by email, online reference, letter or phone may be referred to a reference desk, to a specific branch library or to a subject specialist.

All staff members are committed to teaching people how to conduct research, locate information, and critically evaluate results. As much as possible and as time allows, they provide individual instruction and assistance tailored to people's skills, experience, project parameters and time limits.

In all reference transactions, library staff members act in accordance with the following American Library Association guidelines:

***Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Services Professionals***, Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of ALA  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/guidelinesbehavioral.htm>

***Guidelines for Medical, Legal, and Business Responses at General Reference Desks***, RUSA  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/guidelinesmedical.htm>

***Library Bill of Rights***, American Library Association (ALA)  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm>

***The Universal Right to Free Expression: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, ALA*** <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/interpretations/universalright.htm>

***Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, ALA***

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/interpretations/accesselectronic.htm>

***Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Gender or Sexual Orientation: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, ALA***

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/interpretations/accesslibrary.htm><http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/interpretations/universalright.htm>

***American Library Association Code of Ethics, ALA***

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.htm>

***Freedom to Read Statement, ALA***

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ftstatement/freedomreadstatement.htm>

The confidentiality of patrons is respected. However, library staff may consult with others, both on and off campus, in order to answer questions. Guidelines for forwarding questions and for maintaining records of reference transactions are given below in the specific policy sections for email, online, telephone and mail services. The University Libraries complies with federal law in providing information under the USA Patriots Act whereby paper or electronic files may be subject to seizure.

### **General Ask-A-Question Services**

**The following policies apply to the University Libraries general email, online, telephone and mail reference services. Policies for handling questions posed directly to specific branch libraries may vary. In addition, subject specialists vary in the way they handle questions and make arrangements with patrons on an individual basis.**

### **General Email Reference**

The general email Ask-A-Question reference service is coordinated by the Love Library Reference Desk Services Librarian.

The Reference Desk Services Librarian, or another staff member designated by the Reference Desk Services Librarian, checks the Ask-A-Question inbox at least twice a day, except weekends, intercessions and university holidays. Questions are responded to within two working days.

Email messages may be forwarded to another department or individual within the Libraries. If a question is better answered by another campus unit, a non-campus agency or an individual, the patron will generally be referred. Emails may occasionally be forwarded to other campus units but are not forwarded outside of the University.

Questions and answers are deleted by the coordinator at the end of ninety days or when they are clearly resolved. Some questions and answers may be stored as templates for future answers or as part of a knowledge base. All identifying information is removed.

### **General Online Reference**

The online (chat) reference service is coordinated by the Ask-A-Question online reference coordinator and staffed by librarians and support staff.

Electronic resources, along with a limited number of print resources, are used to answer questions. If electronic resources cannot answer the question, the patron is asked to call the Love Library reference desk, contact a subject specialist or send an email to Ask-A-Question.

Online reference transcripts are deleted from the Libraries' chat page by the coordinator after ninety days. Chat transcripts may remain on QuestionPoint server.

Questions and answers may be stored as templates for future answers or as part of a knowledge base. All identifying information is removed.

### **General Telephone Reference**

The general telephone reference service is coordinated by the Love Library Reference Desk Services Librarian.

Calls to the Libraries' general reference telephone number are answered by members of the Love Library reference desk staff. Student assistants do not answer the telephone. Patrons at the desk are served first. A caller may leave a voicemail message when the reference desk is closed or when the staff members are unable to answer the call by the fourth ring. Calls are returned as soon as possible.

Voicemails are not archived.

### **General Reference by Mail**

General reference queries addressed to the University Libraries or Love Library are forwarded to the Love Library Reference Desk Services Librarian.

If at all possible, letters received by the Reference Desk Services Librarian are answered or referred within 48 hours of receipt. Because it is difficult to converse with patrons in a mail transaction and because the research can be time consuming, responses may take longer.

Letters may be passed on to other library staff members or library units. Letters may occasionally be passed on to other campus units. Letters are not passed on to non-UNL agencies.

Letters are destroyed as soon as they are answered.