

W.H. Walters Free Public Library

REFERENCE AND READER'S ADVISORY SERVICE

General Statement:

The reference and readers' advisory services at the W.H. Walters Free Public Library are designed to offer personalized assistance to library patrons in their search for information. These services aim to ensure optimal access to the library's resources, both local and beyond, to meet the diverse informational needs of the community. The assistance provided is tailored to the individual, varying according to the specific needs of the person requesting help.

As a public service institution, the W.H. Walters Free Public Library adjusts and expands its reference services to address current social issues, such as employment, education, healthcare, and consumer concerns, while also anticipating emerging needs in the future.

General Guidelines:

At the W.H. Walters Free Public Library, every reference inquiry is taken seriously, and no question is considered trivial. All inquiries are treated with equal importance, and every effort will be made to provide the most accurate and comprehensive answers possible within a reasonable time frame. Our primary goal is to assist as much as possible, utilizing the expertise of our staff and leveraging resources from various cooperative library networks, such as those within the New Jersey Library Network. We may also reach out to out-of-state libraries and organization, including the Library of Congress, if necessary.

To ensure the highest quality of responses, library staff will cite their sources and avoid offering personal opinions, recommendations, or interpretations. Whenever possible, the title and date of the reference source will be clearly provided.

The amount of time and dedication to answering each question will depend on the nature of the request, the urgency of the situation, and the discretion of the librarian. In general, in-person inquiries take priority over those made via phone, email, mail, or other remote channels.

Library staff are committed to serving all patrons equally, without discrimination based on age, gender, disability, and ethnicity. Staff members should refrain from offering personal opinions on political, religious, or social issues during interactions with patrons.

Guidelines for Specific Types of Inquiries:

SCHOOL QUESTIONS

Reference requests related to school assignments will be treated with the same level of importance of other inquiries. We will make every effort to assist students by providing resources and guidance on how to use those resources effectively. If both the librarian and student have exhausted all available sources without success, the student may be encouraged to consult with their teacher for additional instructions or revised assignments. In some cases, a note may be provided to the student if deemed necessary.

MEDICAL, LEGAL, AND BUSINESS INQUIRIES

For inquiries in medical, legal, and business areas, the librarian's role is to help patrons access appropriate reference materials and resources. However, librarians must refrain from offering medical, legal, or business advice, as misinterpretation or incomplete answers could be harmful. Due to the complexity of these topics, librarians will not read substantial passages of legal, medical, or business documents over the phone. Phone inquiries will be limited to brief, factual information such as definition. All information provided will be directly quoted from sources, with proper citation. Patrons seeking professional advice should be directed to a qualified expert in the relevant field. The W.H. Walters Free Public Library follows the guidelines for medical, legal, and business responses established by the Reference and Adult Services Division of the American Library Association.

PERSONNEL RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPRAISALS

Staff members will refer patrons to suitable resources or specialists when necessary, but they should never provide personal appraisals or evaluations of a patron's belongings.

GENEALOGICAL QUESTIONS

While the W.H. Walters Free Public Library offers a small collection of local history, it does not maintain comprehensive family history collections. Library staff can provide guidance on using genealogy and local history resources, including genealogy databases, but they will not conduct genealogical research for patrons. The library will respond to factual inquiries from non-residents regarding local history and genealogy, but responses will be limited to information from primary sources. Patrons may be referred to external organizations such as other libraries with genealogical collections.

TRANSLATIONS AND MATHEMATICAL CALCULATIONS

Translation services and mathematical calculations will only be provided if a staff member with the necessary expertise is available. Otherwise, patrons will be referred to appropriate dictionaries, reference books, or online tools for help.

Telephone Reference Services:

The library provides phone support for short, factual inquiries that do not require in-depth research or interpretation. All information provided over the phone will be cited, and for more complex requests, patrons will be invited to visit the library for further research. Telephone reference service is available to non-residents as time and resources allow it.

Electronic Reference Service:

In addition to in-person and phone services, the W.H. Walters Free Public Library offers an email reference service. The reference team/Library Director monitors the email inbox during library hours and responds to inquiries following the same guidelines as other reference services.

Delivery of Materials:

The W.H. Walters Free Public Library participates in New Jersey's statewide delivery system for interlibrary loans and other materials. We also utilize the U.S. Postal Service and other delivery methods for requests outside the state. The library may fax or email materials to other libraries, schools, government agencies, or individuals as resources permit. Limits may be placed on the number of pages that can be faxed or copied, and requests that exceed our service capacity may be declined.

Readers' Advisory:

The readers' advisory service follows the same core public service principles as other library services. When a patron requests book, movie, or digital materials, staff engage in a brief conversation to understand the patron's interests and preferences. Based on this input, staff will suggest materials the patron may enjoy. If a patron asks for suggestions in an unfamiliar genre, the librarian will use reference sources, both print and electronic, to identify suitable titles. Librarians may also consult colleagues who are more familiar with the genre or author in question. No request for suggestions will be dismissed simply because the staff member is unfamiliar with the specific genre or topic.

Date Adopted: January 12, 2026.

Date Revised: [if applicable].