

24/7 Reference Collaborative Policies and Procedures

The mission of the 24/7 Reference Service is to provide high-quality information to the entire community in the most efficient manner possible.

1. SCOPE OF SERVICE

The 24/7 Reference Service consists of two parts: immediate online service to the patron, and Follow Up.

- When online with a patron, provide quick, ready reference responses (as is done in telephone reference).
- For questions that are not readily answered online, or if a question could be better answered by email, first send patrons web sites that will get them started, then handle the question as a Follow Up (see section 3 on Follow Up and the QRC Appendix). This will ensure that the patron will get a more complete answer to his request. Most patrons will accept call-backs or email responses if this provides a more satisfactory answer.

1.1 Quick Answers vs Research vs Instruction

- Try to keep responses quick and factual.
- If the transaction cannot be completed live, use the follow up procedures (Section 3) and use the resolution code "Follow Up". Sessions should not be coded as "Completed" if the librarian can't find any information. If in fact no information can be found, handle the question as a follow up or referral. In the follow up email, detail the specific sources that were checked, as evidence and support for our claim that no information can be found.
- Although 24/7 Reference does not provide research services for patrons, it is appropriate to suggest resources and assist in their use. Refer patrons to their local library if detailed research assistance is requested.
- Queries that require instruction (e.g. how to use a search engine to locate information or how to use the Library online catalog) are exceptions to the quick and factual guideline. 24/7 Reference provides an excellent vehicle for such instruction.
- Use Meetings feature for In-Depth Instruction

Librarians may make virtual appointments with patrons to continue the instruction after the librarian's shift, or refer the session to the patron's local library for an instruction appointment (e.g., patron with limited computer skills wants to learn how to place Holds using the online catalog but the patron's

lack of skill makes instruction very slow and other calls are waiting). To refer the question, tell the patron that you will be referring his request to his local librarian, then forward the request to the patron's library by sending the scripted message **Goodbye—Local** and use the Resolution Code "Local".

1.2 Circulation questions: Use Library Policy Manual

This service is designed to answer reference questions, not assist with circulation inquiries. However, general circulation questions may be answered, as follows:

- Some circulation matters are addressed in the library policies section of the manual. We recommend that you open the manual from the Main Page when you first start monitoring, and keep it minimized on your desktop. This will save time during the online session.
- If possible, use the manual to answer general questions pertaining to loan periods, late fees, placing a hold, etc. If the patron has a question about their individual library record, tell them they will have to call the library, and give them the appropriate telephone number or email address (located in the manual).
- Placing Holds: General information is in the policies manual. If the patron is unable to place the hold, direct them to call their library (give them the phone number provided in the manual). It's possible that there may be a problem with their library card, and they will need to speak to their library's circulation department.
- For any circulation policy or procedure that is not listed in the manual, first check the library's web page to see if the information is available there. If not, check to see if a librarian from that library is online. If yes, transfer the call to that librarian. If no, give the patron the telephone number for the circulation department of that library.

1.3 Periodical questions:

- If possible, send the article from an electronic database, either that the patron's library subscribes to (show the patron how to access the database and get the article), or from a 24/7 Reference database (see the Databases section in the Policy manual for more detail).
- If the article is not online: forward the request to the patron's library by sending the scripted message **Goodbye—Local** and use the Resolution Code "Local", OR
- Send the library's ILL policy to patron. You may want to first check the periodical holdings of that library to see if the library carries the title, for the

year required.

- If the patron is from California, do a search at the California Digital Library site to see what libraries have the periodical: go to <http://www.cdlib.org> then select Periodicals from the drop down menu.

1.4 ILL/Books not found at the library

If a patron wants a book that is not at his local library:

- If the patron wants to drive to another local library, you can do an OCLC WorldCat search to determine if any local libraries have the book.
- Individual library catalogs can also be searched – the urls for local (CA) public library webpacs are available in the Policy manual.
- In the alternative, inform the patron of his library's ILL policies, found in the library policies section of the manual.

1.5 Citation Verification

Electronic indexes may be checked to help patrons verify citations if it can be done quickly. E.g.: The patron can provide the date of the article within a year or two and has the title of the periodical or has a name and wishes to know if anything was written on the subject within a particular year. Extensive checking may be treated as a follow up or must be done by the patron in the Library.

1.6 Information NOT covered in this service:

- Side effects/complications of drugs. Only the general description and/or indications may be sent.
- Ratings from "Consumer Reports." The patron may be directed to the CR site, but should be informed that there is a fee for subscribing to the site.
- Specific answers to legal questions (e.g. How do I change my name?). Sections from the California Codes may be sent but no attempt to interpret the Codes may be made. In addition, send the question to a law librarian, either live or as a follow up.
- Referrals to specific businesses, individuals, or services. Do not recommend your own doctor, dentist, mechanic. The Library is not an advertising agency. Use the yellow pages and give 2 or 3 referrals, or refer patrons to their county medical or bar association, most of which have referral services.

- Avoid interpreting materials - anything which requires your interpretation can lead to misunderstanding. An exception may be made for helping with routine questions involving etiquette, grammar, forms of address, etc. providing you are certain you fully understand the principles involved. In this case, you should be able to locate a printed example.
- Personal Opinions: as a general rule, it is not appropriate for librarians to give personal opinions in a reference setting. Professional opinions, based on training and experience, of course, are appropriate.

2. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

2.1 Reference Practices

As professional librarians, we provide quality information that meets certain criteria. Since the patron is contacting us remotely, try to send as many of these materials during the session as possible, using web page push or collaborative browsing.

1. Use Web or other online resources whenever possible.

24/7 Reference is designed for online resources. Online databases and Web sites are always the primary resource used for 24/7 Reference. It may be necessary to enter data or to copy and paste information into the chat box to answer a question but data entry should be kept to a minimum and used only when absolutely necessary.

2. Proprietary Databases:

Use the online databases available at the patron's library to answer a question (as described in the library policy manual). In addition, use 24/7 Reference databases, as described in the Databases section of the 247 Ref Collaborative Policy Manual.

3. Print Sources:

If there is no online resource to answer the question but the answer can be found in a print source, then treat the request as a Follow Up (see Section 3). Materials may be sent by fax or email in response to a question received via 24/7 Reference.

4. Use Authoritative, Quality Resources

- Whenever possible, use information from library resources (including the Librarians' Index to the Internet – <http://www.lii.org> – or proprietary databases) to answer questions, rather than using Google or Yahoo.

There are times when a search engine is appropriate, but the patron has probably already tried that, and he is coming to you for expert assistance.

- Always use a reference source to locate the answer to a question and always give the caller the name of the source.
- Always cite the source of the information pushed to the patron if the source is not readily apparent on the online database or Web page. If you have specialized knowledge about the topic and answer the question based on your expertise, then specifically cite yourself as the source.
- Be sure the web sites you send match the 5 criteria for:
 - Accuracy
 - Authority
 - Objectivity
 - Currency
 - Coverage
- If you are unable to locate an authoritative answer to a question in a timely fashion, then handle the question as a Follow Up (see Section 3).
- Authoritative medical, legal, and consumer report information pages may be pushed to patrons but librarians must make it clear that the Library does not verify the accuracy of the information. The caveat about the accuracy of Web sites applies to all Web sites the librarian suggests.

2.2 Interaction with Patrons

1. Calls should be answered as quickly as possible.

While it is not always possible, the goal is to keep patrons waiting no more than two minutes.

2. Reference Interview/Communication with Patron

- Clarify/Verify the patron's need. Don't assume at the beginning that you already know what they're talking about or what the answer is.
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[0] Ask at least one question or verification to establish with the patron that this is a two-way communication. Use the Reference Interview scripted messages under the Scripts icon.
- Find out where they've already searched. Especially in the virtual environment, we don't want to waste time redoing an easy search if they've already done so. But don't assume that a standard source is

eliminated just because a patron has consulted it--the librarian's professional experience may be needed to find the information in that source. Also, finding out where they've searched (if at all) gives the librarian an understanding of the level of the question.

- When searching for something, explain what sources you're consulting and what terms you're using for a database query. An effective reference interaction should include the patron!!
- When offering information that may answer the question, make a Request for Feedback (i.e. Is this information helpful to you?)
- Ask the patron if we can help them with anything else and invite them to come back if they need more help.
- Wait for patron to respond before asking the next question.
- Never type in capital letters – this has the effect of shouting at the patron.
- Do not "chat" too much with the patron. 24/7 Reference is not a chat room for lonely people. If it becomes necessary to disconnect a patron, do it politely.
- If you encounter a patron who is abusive or behaves in other inappropriate ways, including communication of a sexual or too personal nature, do not engage in dialog with them. Send the Goodbye-Inappropriate script and disconnect, using the Inappropriate resolution code. If the transaction seemed particularly rude or obscene, forward the transcript with a note to Sue Barb at sue@247ref.org.

2.3 Multiple patrons

- If you are already helping one patron, do not immediately pick up another patron. Before picking up an additional patron, check to see if other librarians from our group are available and not busy (click on the Librarians icon to see who's available and not busy). If others are available, give them a chance to pick up the patron.
- Acknowledge all patrons that you pick up as soon as possible by sending a chat message.
- Before sending the "With another patron" script from the Greetings folder, ask the patron to re-type their email address. Patrons often get tired of waiting and disconnect before the librarian comes back. If so, this will ensure that the correct email is included in the transcript, and the Follow

Up librarian will be able to successfully contact the patron.

- Ask as many reference interview questions of the second patron as possible. This will give you additional time to finish up the first session, and the second patron will remain involved and not feel abandoned. In addition, this additional information will assist the librarians who follow up with the question.
- Do not give a time estimate of how long it will be before you will be able to work on the question, unless the patron asks. If you feel that you will not be able to get to the 2nd patron's question for more than 5 minutes, try to transfer the session to another librarian in the collaborative group.
- Be very cautious if handling more than two actual transactions at one time; this easily results in confusion and mistakes in sending the wrong chat and/or sites to patrons.
- If patrons choose not to wait, code the session Complete.

3. FOLLOW UP/REFERRAL

Questions which are not readily answered with quality resources during the online session will be handled as either Follow Up or Referral.

3.1 Ask Patron for Deadline

- Inform the patron that a librarian will be getting back to him via email. Ask the patron how soon he needs the information. If a request is referred to Follow Up, there may be a 72 hour delay.
- Click on the Script icon, select the topic Goodbye/FollowUp, and send the following scripted message:

Deadline--Asking patron: We need to consult some additional sources before we can answer your question. If you can wait a few days, someone can get back to you with more information. Would you like me to do that? What's the latest date that you can use this information?

3.2 Follow-Up: Sending transcript to QRC General Follow up Folder

- Click on the Script icon, select the topic Goodbye/Followup, and use the following scripted message:

Goodbye--FOLLOWUP: We will email you with a response to your question. (Note to staff: xferin) If you need more help, please contact us again. Goodbye, and thank you for using the 24/7 Reference service!

- By sending this script, you are sending the transcript to the Follow Up Folder in QRC. This folder will be accessed by librarians throughout the 24/7 Reference service.
- At the end of the session, use the Resolution Code: Follow Up.
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[0]Always use the appropriate script for followup, even if you are doing it yourself. A followup should NEVER be coded complete.
- The staff person who handles the online session may elect to handle the follow up to the question. The follow up should be done within 24 hours. To do the follow up for a session you handle, use the Goodbye—Follow Up scripted message, then log into QRC as described in the Appendix to claim the question.

3.3 Follow-Up: Sending to System Reference Centers (use only for California patrons)

Sessions should only be sent to the System Reference Centers if the question is unusually complex or will require specialized resources that are unlikely to be found in a typical public library. Examples of the types of questions to send to System Reference include questions about poems or quotations, complex business questions, song requests, etc.

If you are unsure whether to send the question to System Reference, send it to the Follow Up folder instead. If the subject is covered by one of the subject experts on our network (art, law, health), send it to the subject experts.

- Click on the Script icon, select the topic Goodbye/Followup, and use the Goodbye scripted message for the appropriate System Reference center, as follows:

Goodbye – SystemRef: We will email you with a response to your question. If you need more help, please contact us again after you receive your email. Goodbye, and thank you for using the 24/7 Reference Service! [note to staff: xferxxxx]

- The xfer code will vary depending on the category. For example, in the MCLS category, the SystemRef script is xfermcls; in the QandAcafe category, the SystemRef script is xferqanda; in the Gold category, the script is xfergold and in the Tierra del Sol category, the script for SystemRef is xfertds.
- At the end of the session, use the Resolution Code: System Reference. The System Reference librarians will be able to pick the transcript up in their QRC folder, so you need do nothing more.

3.4 Referral

3.4.1 Referral to Subject Experts when Subject Expert is online

The question should be referred to a subject expert if the question relates to a matter that is solely in the province of a subject expert.

- Check to see if the subject expert is online by clicking the Conference/ Transfer icon. A separate window will appear. At the top are the individual librarians that are currently logged in, followed by the individual library categories.
- Under Categories, the list of libraries participating in the collaborative are listed with an “A” preceding them (since we are the “A” list!). If the subject appears in the list of “A” libraries, then you can either conference or transfer the request to that category. We recommend you select Conference, to make sure the 2nd librarian is available to get the request.
- Once the 2nd librarian joins the session, you can leave the session by clicking the Exit button, then select LEAVE (rather than Leave and Close).

3.4.2 Referral to Subject Experts when Subject Expert is not online

Click on the Script icon, select the topic Goodbye/Followup, and use the scripted message that relates to the appropriate subject expert, as follows:

Goodbye—ART FOLLOWUP: to send the transcript to the art librarians.

Goodbye—ERIC FOLLOWUP: to send the transcript to AskERIC.

Goodbye—Law FOLLOWUP: to send the transcript to the law librarians.

Goodbye—Spanish FOLLOWUP: to send the transcript to the Spanish-speaking librarians.

By sending this script, the transcript is sent to the appropriate FollowUp Folder in QRC, which is accessed by the subject specialists. As more subject specialists are added, there will be additional Follow-Up scripted messages for each subject, as well as a corresponding folder on QRC.

- At the end of the session, use the Resolution Code: FollowUp.

3.4.3 Referral back to Local Library

The question should be referred to a member library if the question relates to material specific to that library or library jurisdiction, such as local history, or if the question concerns a patron's circulation record.

- First check to see if a librarian from that library is online by clicking the Librarian check box.
- If the librarian is online and not busy, click on the Conference/ Transfer icon, select that librarian from the list of representatives, and Conference him in. Once he is in and communicating, then leave the session (by clicking Exit, then LEAVE)
- If the local librarian is not online at the moment, or does not respond when you Conference him in, then click on the Script icon, select the topic Goodbye/Followup, and use the following scripted message:
 - **Goodbye -- LOCAL:** We will email you with a response to your question. If you need more help, please contact us again after you receive your email. Goodbye, and thank you for using the 24/7 Reference Service! [note to staff: xferlocal]
 - Then use the Resolution Code: Local. The local library will be able to pick up the transcript up in their Reports. The session will also appear in the QRC folder named "LOCAL".
- To check to see if your library received any local questions, look in the LOCAL folder in QRC (for instructions, see QRC Appendix). Your library's name will appear in the subject line. 24/7 staff will also forward any questions in the LOCAL folder directly to the supervisor at the local library.

4. QUALITY CONTROL

4.1 Review of Session Transcripts and Patron Survey Responses

In order to maintain the highest standards, each participating library is tasked with reviewing both the session transcripts and the survey responses from their library's patrons on a regular basis, at least once a week if not more frequently. Each library should designate at least one 24/7 supervisor for this purpose.

If a transcript demonstrates that the 24/7 Reference Collaborative Policies and Procedures have not been followed, or if there is any other issue with the transcript, then the library supervisor should forward the transcript to quality@247ref.org. The quality control staff will then address the issue with the supervisor of the online librarian in question. Please include a brief note about why it is being forwarded and your name.

4.2 Feedback from Patrons: Complaints

Either forward or refer all patron complaints to quality@247ref.org. Please

include a brief note and your name when forwarding.

Appendix: QRC: Email Follow Up handling system

24/7 Reference has adapted QRC, a software solution to handle email, developed by the Internet Public Library. Each session transcript becomes a separate 'article' in QRC, which can be moved around to different categories or folders and replied to or commented upon by librarians. QRC stores the entire 'life' of a question, so that a librarian accessing QRC can see if a particular session has been followed up and, if so, by whom. QRC also provides access to the archive of answered questions. QRC is password protected.

Sessions are sent to QRC directly from the 24/7 software, and are further sorted into the appropriate categories by use of scripted messages sent during the online session. For example, if a session relates to law and the librarian in session wishes to transfer the request to a law librarian for follow up offline, then the librarian must send the scripted message to the patron that contains the filter for law (as illustrated in section 3.4.2). At the conclusion of the session, this transcript is sent automatically to the law category in QRC, where all of the law librarians in the consortium pick up the law questions.

QRC Procedures for FollowUp

1. Log in: <http://qrc1.247ref.org:7700>
Enter your username and password - email victor@247ref.org if you need one
2. Look at the questions that need follow up:

Click on the Followup Reference Questions category (or the subject category if you are a subject specialist)

Click on the question to view the full record, making sure to read all of the transactions for that question. The most recent transaction is last.

3. Select a Question to work on:

Click the **Claim** button first. That way other librarians will not also work on the same question. You don't have to immediately answer the question to Claim it, but try to finish your work within a few hours.

4. Responding to the patron:

Answering the Question: Click on **Reply to Patron**, select the ANSWERED status and type in the answer in the text box. Currently, you cannot send attachments in QRC – send these through other email programs.

Ask Patron for more information: Click **Reply to Patron** then select the ASK_INFO status.

5. Getting help from other librarians:

To post information only to staff, click the **Staff Comments** button. For questions that need more in-depth research, it is a good idea to frequently post your progress so it is recorded in the QRC article. Select the No Change status when you post your message.

If you would like other librarians to help you with the question, post the specific sources you've consulted, along with any search terms/queries, and select the NEED_HELP status.

6. Send the Question to a subject specialist:

To refer questions elsewhere, click the **Admin** button, choose the appropriate category from the "Transfer to Another Category" pull-down menu. Under the "Set the status of this question to" section, choose REFERRED, then click the **Do It** button.

Additional Information:

- 1) If no followup script or resolution code was used, the question will appear in the Incoming Reference Questions category. If the question needs followup, transfer the question to the appropriate category (see step 6 above).
- 2) To find a particular question in a QRC category, press Ctrl-F to do a Find in Page search on a keyword from the question or the patron's email address.

Warning: the CTRL+F function is very sensitive to spaces, etc. and may fail to find an article that is actually there. You can locate the session via the Info report (go to <http://www.247ref.org/info>, then go to Reports). In Info, verify time and date of the transcript, then use this information to locate it in QRC. It may be necessary to look in more than one folder (i.e the question was inactivated by Quality Control, so it is now in the Inactive articles folder).

- 3) If the patron provided or corrected the email address during the live session, click the **Admin** button. Paste the patron's correct address into the "Change original address" field and click the **Do It** button.
- 4) If an email is undeliverable, it will be returned to QRC with a <BOUNCE> indicator. Check for typos and check the transcript to see if the patron corrected the address in the live session. If a change can be made, click the **Admin** button and edit the "Change original address" field. If you still have problems sending the message, forward it to Wren at wren@247ref.org.

QRC Procedures for Local Questions

Each library should periodically check the Local folder of QRC for questions that pertain to their local library or that were forwarded to the local library by the other librarians in the 24/7 Reference service.

1. Go to the Local folder in QRC.
2. Check the subject line to determine if any session was from your library.
3. If yes, claim the question and answer it, as described above.
4. The question will remain in the folder until it is inactivated by the designated folder supervisor.

For clarification about QRC policies and procedures, please contact Wren at wren@247ref.org.

Appendix: **REFERENCE DESK PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

These Performance Standards were formulated by the University Library Reference Department at the University of Omaha and published in the Spring 1994 RQ)¹, provided courtesy of the Santa Monica Public Library Reference Department.

Definition: Desk Performance Standards are the behaviors expected of everyone who staffs the Reference Desk. Carrying out these behaviors in a consistent manner demonstrates competent job performance at the Reference Desk.

Goal 1: Acts in a manner that encourages patrons to ask questions.

Behaviors:

- Allows patron to finish asking a question before commenting.
- Remains calm in dealing with patron.
- Presents a friendly and professional attitude.

Goal 2: Conducts reference interview and follow-through according to the following behaviors:

Behaviors:

- Interviews patron to determine what is needed and provides service at the level of need.
- Suggests more than one source if needed.
- Asks patrons if they found what they needed, or tells them to check back if they don't find what they need.
- Makes referral(s) if necessary, e.g., ILL, subject specialists, MCLS, other libraries.
- Gives patron instructions on how to use a source if necessary.
- Asks for assistance from coworkers if necessary via AOL instant Messenger.
- Educates the patron by suggesting additional sources and services which would help patron, i.e., CD-ROM, online searches, more specialized indexes or abstracts.
- Recommends that patrons needing in-depth assistance go to their local public library and get the help they need.
- Arrives punctually for desk hours.
- Waits for replacement to arrive before leaving the desk, or makes other arrangements.
- Informs scheduler promptly of changes in schedule, absences or technical difficulties in performing duties.

Goal 3: Exhibits knowledge of reference sources; continues to develop knowledge of collections and resources through such activities as:

Behaviors:

- Examining new online reference tools.
- Participating in--both attending and presenting--workshops and bibliographic instruction on reference tools and services.
- Using published and in-house ready reference materials.
- Using a variety of sources to answer questions.
- Using a varied search strategy.
- Referring questions to a subject specialist only after first consulting obvious sources.

¹ Larson, Carole and Dickson, Laura. "Developing Behavioral Reference Desk Performance Standards." *RQ* 33:3 (Spring 1994): 349-57.

Goal 4: Exhibits minimum electronic reference competencies

Behaviors:

- Can search Library databases by all searchable fields specific to the database (e.g. author, title, subject, keyword, local call number)
- Can use boolean operators specific to each database
- Can interpret all status and location messages specific to each database
- Can find on screen help for each database
- Can use appropriate online databases as ready reference tools
- Can instruct patrons in using electronic resources and answer general questions about library services

Electronic reference competencies are a modified version of those drafted by Loyola Marymount University for use of staff.