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Ask a Librarian

Filling out the form

Two items on the Ask a Librarian form are essential – your e-mail address (which we will not receive automatically) and, of course, the question itself.

The form asks for some additional information, which can be helpful. If you choose to include a phone number, the person researching your question may call you if they need to clarify anything. That can save time, but it's not essential.

There are also blanks for name, zip code, whether you have a JCPL card, the card number, some general age categories and whether you're asking the question for business, school or personal use. Most of these are to help us evaluate the service and make any adjustments needed to improve it.

If you include your JCPL library card number, the responding librarian can place holds on library materials for you, if you wish.

Who answers my question?

All responses come from trained staff at the reference desks of our libraries. The e-reference responsibility circulates from library to library daily, so you won't necessarily be communicating with the same person each time.

You may send a question at any hour. Responses will come usually within two working days and during regular working hours at the libraries.

Will you answer any question?

We will respond to all questions. If basic factual information is needed – you'll get an answer and the source of that answer. But there are some limits.

Librarians do not give medical or legal advice. They won't figure your taxes or write your school report for you.

But in all of these areas and many more, they will refer you to reputable, reliable sources of information.

If your question is about library policy or procedures, it will be referred to the appropriate staff person, who may not work on weekends.

Why does it take 48 hours?

It doesn't always. Sometimes, simple factual questions are answered within 24 hours. (Things such as: "When and where was George Washington born?") More involved questions take longer to research.

The 48 hours is for library working days only, so there may be an extra day's delay for a holiday.

The library added this new service with no increase in personnel, to see if you like it and how much you use it. Current patron services staff respond to the questions when they're not serving customers in the libraries, so instant response is not possible.

Depending on patron response and demand, these limits may change in the future.

May I still call the reference desk?

Absolutely.

If you don't have e-mail, need a more immediate answer, or just want to talk to one of our friendly librarians, you may call or visit any library during open hours. Service in the libraries has not been curtailed in any way.