# Library Reference Service Guideline

Implementation Date: December 2012   
Replaces: June 2010

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Goals of Reference Service</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Types of Reference Service</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Order of Service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Assistance to Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Restrictions on Service</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Email and Other Electronic Communications-Based Services</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.0 Goals of Reference Service

The Library’s collections and related services:

- Support the teaching and learning process
- Support research
- Contribute to intellectual, professional, and personal development
- Assist in the conduct of Institute business

The goals of reference service are (1) to meet the information research needs of the NAIT community and (2) to enable clients to learn strategies for information research and the use of information retrieval tools available through the Library. These goals are achieved by:

1.1 Providing accurate, efficient, and individual reference assistance to all clients in a courteous and encouraging manner.

1.2 Providing instruction and a positive learning experience for students to aid them in the development of information literacy skills. Reference staff take a proactive approach and do not wait to be asked for assistance.

1.3 Providing equitable reference assistance to all clients in a time frame appropriate to their needs, regardless of whether the client has come to the Library, telephoned, emailed, engaged in an online chat or text session, or used other communication technologies. Service for clients at a distance is designed so that their information search and retrieval experience is comparable to that experienced by clients who choose to use the Library in person.

1.4 Providing an appropriate level of service to all clients. Every effort is made to ensure that each individual obtains the information required. The specific type of assistance depends on the level of library skills and on the needs of the client.

- Students are directed to appropriate resources in multiple formats, and guided in their search to find the information they need.

- Students at a distance receive the same level of service, adjusted to compensate for extra challenges imposed by remote access.

- Staff members are offered assistance in accessing information. Reference staff also perform both quick and in-depth information research for staff in support of their academic and organizational roles.

- Students who are affiliated with NAIT, such as those enrolled in the Cape Breton University MBA in CED receive the same level of reference service as do NAIT students. Access to the library collection is in accordance with established guidelines, agreements, and licenses.

- NAIT alumni and members of the public, including those with The Alberta Library (TAL) cards, have access to the library collection in accordance with established guidelines, agreements, and licenses. Routine reference service is available to alumni and members of the public, however students and staff are the primary clientele and priority is given to meeting their needs. Clients with time-consuming inquiries who are not affiliated with NAIT may be referred to public libraries or their own organizations if the inquiry is not relevant to NAIT’s mandate.

1.5 Providing service to faculty who are assisting their students in the development of information literacy skills. A good understanding of library services and of the information research process will enable faculty to use the Library more effectively as a learning
resource for their students. Refer to the *Library Information Literacy Instruction Service Guideline* for additional information.

1.6 Maintaining up-to-date, relevant, and readily accessible collections of reference materials. Refer to the *Library Collection Development Guideline* and *Library Collection Development Procedure* for additional information.

1.7 Creating and maintaining appropriate user guides to aid clients in their pursuit of information.

1.8 Maintaining the library website as a source of information and a primary point of access to the Library. The website provides efficient access to information resources and user guides as well as descriptions of services and includes library staff contact information and online request forms.

1.9 Facilitating access to information in resources available through the Library.

### 2.0 Types of Reference Service

2.1 Assistance with and instruction in the information research process

Reference staff assist clients to become more information literate — individuals need to know when they require information; define that need and formulate a plan for where and how to locate the information; and evaluate, use, and communicate information effectively and in an ethical manner.

- Clients often approach the search for information without a clear concept of what they need. Reference staff use the reference interview to help clients define their needs in terms of the type and amount of information required for their purpose.

- Reference staff suggest how to approach a subject search and the types of resources that might be useful.

- Reference staff demonstrate and explain the use of the library search tool, databases, electronic resources, the internet, and other information resources as well as RefWorks.

- Reference staff provide clients with guidance on how to evaluate information.

- Reference staff guide clients through the process of capturing information in electronic format (save/print/email) and obtaining print materials (borrowing/requesting interlibrary loan). They explain what data are needed and why, and how to properly reference information sources.

- Reference staff are aware of copyright restrictions and NAIT’s participation in the *Access Copyright Interim Post-Secondary Educational Institutions Tariff, 2011-2013*, when assisting clients.

- If resources available through the Library do not fully meet the client’s needs, reference staff make referrals to other libraries and other sources of information.

- Research appointments are available for staff and students engaged in applied research or taking degree courses.

2.2 In-depth research requests

In-depth information research is available to support staff in their academic and organizational roles, such as:
- Development of new NAIT initiatives
- Development of course curriculum and assignments
- Maintenance of current awareness in fields of interest
- Applied research

Reference staff search catalogues, licensed electronic resources and the internet as appropriate, and provide a references list of sources found. Additional databases available through the Dialog search service can also be searched on a charge-back basis at the request of staff or students involved in applied research.

2.3 Quick factual information

Reference staff provide quick factual information or guidance to that information as appropriate.

2.4 Referrals

All legitimate needs for information deserve assistance. The minimum response is a referral to external resources if the request is not appropriate to the Library’s mandate.

2.5 Individual or group demonstrations

Reference staff provide demonstrations of any library resource or service. In-depth demonstrations of electronic resources for staff (either groups or individuals) can be arranged with the Collections Librarian.

2.6 Troubleshooting/ensuring access to resources

Reference staff members are the first line of contact in case of problems accessing or using information resources. They work with the client to diagnose the problem and provide advice/instructions if needed. Technical problems and diagnostic information are forwarded to the appropriate staff member.

3.0 Order of Service

During periods when several clients are waiting for assistance, reference staff offer help on a first come, first served basis. If it appears that the inquiry will take some time, staff may deal with other pending questions, provided that answers are brief and do not detract from the initial inquiry. This order of service includes both in-library and real-time remote inquiries.

4.0 Assistance to Persons with Disabilities

Reference staff make every effort to assist persons with disabilities with their information needs. Assistance may include personal instruction/assistance in the use of library resources and book retrieval.

5.0 Restrictions on Service

Many factors enter into decisions concerning the level and type of service that can be provided to individuals, and judgment must be exercised. If unsure, staff should consult the Coordinator Information Research and Instruction.

5.1 Answering assignment questions
Staff members do not answer assignment questions. They will help students locate information for class assignments.

5.2 Interpretation of material

Staff members do not interpret information such as legal, medical, or financial.

5.3 Lending reference materials

Reference materials generally do not circulate; however, in some circumstances such as class presentations, exceptions may be made.

5.4 Checking assignments

Staff members do not provide feedback/corrections on assignments, such as checking grammar or citations. Staff members do help students find style guides and explain how to cite references.

5.5 Assistance with computer problems involving programs not core to the Library’s mandate.

Adobe Creative Suite, and application software, licensed for campus-wide use are available on library computers, but assistance is limited by available staff time and skills. Staff will make referrals to the Project Factory.

5.6 Proctoring of exams

The Library does not provide exam proctoring or invigilation services to students enrolled in other institutions and it does not generally provide this service for NAIT students. Requests from programs should be referred to the Coordinator Information Research and Instruction for individual consideration.

6.0 Email and Other Electronic Communications-Based Services

6.1 Reference service provided via telephone, email, chat, text, or other technologies follows the same guidelines as service provided in-person whenever possible.

6.2 Staff respond to email reference inquiries within 24 business hours of receipt.

7.0 Staffing

7.1 All staff members who provide reference service complete an orientation, a self-paced training program, and a period of being teamed with an experienced staff member.

7.2 The Library Help Desk is staffed by librarians, library technicians, and reference assistants who are in the final year of the Master of Library and Information Studies Program. The Library Help Desk is the central reference point for all NAIT campuses.

8.0 Confidentiality

Library staff members safeguard the confidentiality of transactions between the Library and its clientele. Refer to the Library Confidentiality Guideline for details.