

Text Best Practices for Ask a Librarian Delaware



Please remember these best practices:

- Patrons expect a reasonably timely response, as if they are texting a person. 5 - 10 minutes is best.
- Libraries can generally expect ready reference questions and local policy questions. For in-depth questions, texting can be an opening into an email or in-person conversation.
- Try to keep answers short – just enough characters to fill one box. Patrons want brief answers and may be charged for each message received.
- Sign each answer with a name (a made-up first name is fine). However, avoid long, wordy signatures.
- Do not answer a question with a web address. Many patrons won't be able to access a web site on their phones. When it is necessary to send a web address (to cite the source of an answer or as a resource for further information) use a URL shortener, such as <http://bit.ly/> for very long web addresses.
- For some questions, the librarian will need to know which library the patron uses so you may need to ask for clarification.

Crafting warm but brief answers

- Being friendly is important – it lets patrons know we are real people and invites them to continue to use the texting service.
- But it is tough to do in 140-150 characters! So:
 - Use abbreviations, shorten links, eliminate unnecessary words, be creative. If stuck, ask for advice.
 - Links are good as citations, but be aware that not everyone is using a smartphone. Even if they are, web access may be slow, expensive, or non-existent.
 - Sign a name somehow – it helps so much if we need to follow up or have a question to resolve!

Is texting Synchronous or Asynchronous?

- Chat is 'synchronous' – the patron is sitting at the computer, waiting eagerly for your reply. Frequent 'word contact' is very important to let them know you are still engaged with the question.
- Email is 'asynchronous' – the patron may not expect a reply for hours or even days.

- Texting is 'sort of synchronous!'– it is fine to let a text go for several minutes without a response.
 - Working on digging out an answer? No need to reply to let them know you are working on it. We don't want to assume they have unlimited texting.
 - Need to follow up? May be hours or days until they get a response? Do a reference interview and let them know that they will get an answer, but it may take a day or two.
 - Remember that if you take a text, you have claimed it and will get any additional texts from that same patron within a 24 hour period. (Admins can unclaim and refer any type of question to someone else on the team.)