

[Service Guidelines](#) [1]

Service Guidelines

Who do we serve?

The service is intended for all students, faculty and staff at all publicly-funded, post-secondary institutions in BC.

Patrons will access the service from access points on each participating institution's website and from [AskAway.org](https://askaway.org) [2].

No authentication is required to ask a question; authentication is only required to get into licensed databases.

What kinds of questions do we answer?

We are open to all questions and will provide help with course-related research tasks, e.g. finding books, journals, articles, etc.

How do we answer questions?

Levels of service will depend on how the user accesses the service, either via Qwidget or the full-screen interface.

The service will combine chat and email reference; when the chat service is closed a form will route email questions to the appropriate institution.

Hours of Service

At present, AskAway provides 67 hours of service per week. Actual hours of service are:

- 10am–9pm Sunday-Thursday
- 11am-5pm Friday-Saturday

AskAway closes for the December break and for intersession in April and August. For actual dates, please see the [schedule](#) [3].

Policies

AskAway Competencies

- Staff should have completed or be currently enrolled in a formal LIS program (MLS, Library Technician diploma) or have demonstrated relevant experience and skills.

- Staff must possess core virtual reference competencies, including:
 - Ability to carry out a reference transaction online
 - Excellent communication skills
 - Ability to effectively multi-task and to effectively assist multiple users simultaneously
 - Broad-based knowledge of library resources and materials
 - Ability to select and demonstrate searching of search engines and subject directories
 - Ability to select and demonstrate searching of library catalogues and databases
 - Ability to explain and apply library policies
 - Customer service orientation
 - Ability to work independently and with a diverse and widely-dispersed team in a virtual context
 - Awareness of the range of services and resources available throughout the province
 - Ability to judge when a referral is needed and to make appropriate referrals
 - Comfort with technology and basic troubleshooting abilities
 - Commitment to ongoing skills development

Patron Privacy

On AskAway, we cannot ask for any personally identifiable information from the patron, including email address, name, phone number, student number, etc.

You are free to share your contact information with the patron in order to provide the best reference service possible.

If a patron would like to have a transcript of the session emailed to them, they can click the email icon in the chat box and enter their email address. Their email address is not captured at this point and is not subject to the same privacy restrictions as the chat transcript.

Librarian privacy and screen names

Library staff who staff AskAway are not identified to the patron with a personal screenname. If a service provider would like share their name with patrons, they may wish to create a canned welcome message that includes their first name.

Library staff names are captured and stored in session data, which is visible to colleagues but not to patrons.

Initial contact

Response to users will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

Calls should be answered as quickly as possible.

All queries should be given a response, whether or not the question may be answered.

Instruction

Where practical, aim to provide opportunities to the user to improve their own search strategies. Show them what you are doing and explain why you are doing it. Don't do the research for them.

Working with members of the public

As no authentication is required to access the service, from time to time you may be serving members of the general public. Please apply the same policy on AskAway as you would serving a member of the general public at your own library's reference desk. If appropriate, refer the patron to their local public library or to a professional research service.

Inappropriate behaviour

Expect the same behaviour from virtual reference users as from users in the library. You have the right to refuse service if user behaviour is inappropriate.

User disputes

Please refer any disputes with patrons to the AskAway coordinator.

Accessing Licensed Electronic Resources

In order to respect licensing agreements, please only use the resources of the patron's library to answer questions.

Each participating institution has provided a [guest login for AskAway service providers](#) [4] to use when helping patrons with resources at the patron's institution.

In-depth Questions & Referrals

If a question cannot be answered within a reasonable amount of time online, or if the patron doesn't want to wait, remember that we cannot ask the patron for any personal information such as phone number, email address, etc. in order to follow-up. Instead:

Give the patron referral information for an appropriate service, such as:

- the specific subject specialist or liaison librarian at their local post-secondary library if it is an advanced reference question that requires the use of subject specific databases or print resources.
- the email reference service at their local post-secondary library if it is a question that requires local knowledge and/or resources.
- When referring a patron to their local post-secondary library, it is preferable to provide both the contact information for the specific subject specialist or liaison librarian and the general email reference service, as individuals may be on holiday, ill, etc.
- their local public library's chat service or their local public library branch's email reference service where appropriate.
- a non-BC chat service or email reference service where appropriate.

At your discretion, you may provide your email or phone number to the patron and encourage them to contact you for follow-up.

Procedures

Ending a shift and logging out

When exiting the Webclient, it is vitally important to correctly log out via the Log Out button. Failure to do so keeps you logged in and keeps AskAway open even if no one is there to staff it.

This must be done even if a technical problem caused the chat monitor to freeze or your browser to shut down. In this case, log into the LibraryH3lp Webclient again and click the Log Out button.

Transferring Patrons at Shift change

When you are starting your shift:

Log in to [LibraryH3lp](#) [5] a few minutes before your shift begins to give yourself time to do the following:

1. Check to see how busy each queue is. The number of active calls in a queue is visible if you hover over the queue status icon (to the left of the queue name).
2. Use [Campfire](#) [6] to let the other librarians know you are starting your shift and to ask if they want to transfer any calls they are currently handling to you.

When you are ending your shift:

1. It is up to you whether you feel able to finish the calls you are currently handling before logging off or whether you transfer those calls to a librarian coming on shift.
2. Unless it's impossible, please wait until at least one of the service providers coming on-shift has shown up in the Webclient before you log off - if no service providers are monitoring the service, the patron will see the closed message.
3. If no replacement service providers arrive in the queue before the end of your shift, contact your [local coordinator](#) [7] or the [AskAway coordinator](#) [8].

Breaks During Long Shifts

This policy is intended to provide guidance on taking breaks during long AskAway shifts. This policy does **not** override local practice around breaks at your institution, whether that practice is based on rules in a union agreement or on written/unwritten policy. If your institution has its own rules on breaks during long reference shifts, please apply your own rules, but conforming as much as possible to the principles expressed below, e.g. arrange for a backup to cover you, inform your colleagues, etc.

In most cases, quickly running to the bathroom during your shift is fine. Inform your colleagues in Campfire if you are taking a quick break.

If you are working a long shift and need to take a 15 minute break:

- If possible, arrange for another AskAway staff person at your institution to cover your break.
- If this is not possible, communicate with the other librarians on your shift to arrange taking a break. Use your own judgement to decide when it would be best to go, taking into account the number of calls coming in and whether there is another librarian available to take the next call. If it seems like taking a break at that particular time would negatively impact the service level, please postpone your break until another time.

End of Day

If you are working the last shift of the day, please Log Out from the Webclient promptly at closing time, as the service will stay open until the last librarian logs out. When there are no librarians logged on, patrons will automatically see a notice on the question form page that lets them know the service is closed.

If a patron asks a question within 15 minutes of the time when the service will close for the day, and you feel it cannot be answered in the time available, you may ask the patron to come back the next day or refer the patron to their library.

If you are still helping a patron at the time of service closure, you have the option to set your status to "Busy", but then finish up your chat session with your current patron. Remember that the service stays open until the last service provider has logged out, so it is imperative that you log out at closing time.

Sickness/Unexpected Absence

If you are unable to work a scheduled AskAway shift, please work with your local AskAway coordinator to find a replacement AskAway staff person at your institution.

If a replacement is unavailable locally, you may offer the shift up for trade on the serviceproviders@askaway.org [9] listserv.

If you are unable to find a replacement and it is within 24 hours of the shift's scheduled start time, please contact the [AskAway Administrative Centre](#) [8].

Working From Home

AskAway has no policy on working from home. Please follow your local institutional policy. However, librarians working from home are expected to have a high-speed internet connection and a computer which meets the [system requirements for chat](#) [10].

If you have any questions or concerns about these guidelines, please don't hesitate to [contact](#) [8] the AskAway Admin Centre.

Last updated May 8, 2019

Source URL: <https://askaway.org/staff/service-guidelines>

Links

[1] <https://askaway.org/staff/service-guidelines>

[2] <https://www.askaway.org/>

[3] <https://askaway.org/staff/schedule>

[4] <https://askaway.org/staff/guest-logins>

[5] <https://ca.libraryh3lp.com/webclient/client>

[6] <http://askawayps.campfirenow.com/>

[7] <https://askaway.org/staff/local-coordinator-contacts>

[8] <https://askaway.org/staff/contacts>

[9] <mailto:serviceproviders@askaway.org>

[10] <https://www.oclc.org/support/services/questionpoint/documentation/Requirements.en.html>