Questions that Ask Us 24/7 Public Librarians are hesitant to answer

Public – 15 people:

Most common answers:

- **Unfamiliar or in-depth topics (6 people):**
    - topics I have no knowledge about
    - Questions that are outside of my training/education/expertise;
    - In-depth research questions that are very technical or very out of my range of expertise.
    - In-depth research questions on very specific topics that seem better suited to an academic library.
    - Politics
    - Fine Arts

- **UK questions (3 people):**
    - Questions from the UK that are about gov't agencies or UK-specific information
    - Questions that are from England – often don't understand what the patron is referring to in their question
    - Questions from England

- **Math (3 people):**
    - Math
    - math questions
    - math homework

- **Library- or institution-specific questions (3 people):**
    - Circulation policy questions from other libraries: renewals, date due, fines, etc.
    - Questions that are location/library specific that I'm not certain will be on the policy page.
    - Questions specific to NYPL because not familiar w/area or holdings/policies

- **Databases (2 people):**
    - How to use the databases.
    - Questions that are location/library specific that I'm not certain will be on the policy page.

- - Questions that require database access - someone needs journal articles, I can point them to the appropriate database from their library site, but can't get in to execute a search

Other:

- Obscure questions. I'm sure some patrons do not realize when they start a chat that they may be talking with a librarian from another state, or even another country. Sometimes, they ask a question that would be very difficult to find the answer to, such as, "What time does _____ start on the green downtown?" I tend not to click on those kinds of questions, because I'm not local and may only frustrate the patron if I have to dig, possibly futilely, for an answer.
- Questions that seem too involved for the time I have left for chat;
- Students who ask you to basic answer their research assignment instead of looking for sources that my provide answers.
- Questions asking for help with interpreting/critiquing specific pieces of literature
- questions that obviously call for opinion.
- Technical issues with Overdrive audio downloads.
- Questions with 6 or 7 homework questions in the same login
- Questions from patrons with librarians from their library or state that are online and not helping other patrons – i.e. the patron is from PA and there is a PA librarian online that is available to answer.

Questions that Ask Us 24/7 Academic Librarians are hesitant to answer

Academic – 16 people:

- **Library- or institution-specific questions (9 people):**
  - questions that deal with campus information unrelated to the library
  - eligibility for library use questions
  - "I'm at x campus library and wondering if I can return my book to y campus library".
  - Specific questions about campus/library policies (holiday hours, etc.)
  - Questions about library fines that are specific to an event.
  - Questions about whether a database is working or not   When I do answer these questions, I usually end up giving them an appropriate phone number to call at their campus.
  - When they're very library specific. Such as, "the website isn't letting me renew my books" or "is the library open today" or "what floor is the science books located".
  - Questions that are specific to a particular library. For example, "can I renew my books" .
  - Those that are related to local settings not described in typical policy pages, such as "Where is the after hour drop box located?";

- **Complex Research or Unfamiliar Topics (8 people):**
  - questions that deal with someone starting research on a paper and wanting database searching help all the way through to citation help and wanting it pronto
  - In-depth questions on topics I am completely unfamiliar with - e.g. chemistry and other hard sciences - especially from graduate schools.
  - My research topic is X and I can't find anything that is what I need.
  - Complex questions on topics I normally do not support in my own library
  - open-ended questions
  - Economics, physics or math problems posed. The patron is not asking for resources, but an answer.
  - Graduate level chemistry or physics questions.
  - legal questions,
  - statistics

- **Login (2 people):**
  - login questions
  - Problems with logging on

- **Local questions (2 people):**
  - questions dealing with local statistics or local subjects,

- other specific local questions that may not be covered in the library's policies page

Other:
- I'm also hesitant to answer questions that almost sound like they're asking me an actual homework question like "What were some of the social impacts of World War II", as opposed to where do I find so and so information. I always do answer them but my experience has been that they continue to ask me more questions and it turns into "let the librarian find all the information while I sit back and relax". It used to happen a lot on the Ask Here PA chat line but it's been awhile since I've had one.
- Questions coming through the general portals for Ask Here PA and QandANJ are probably my least favorite to pick up. I have a difficult time using the general policy pages for Ask Here PA and QandANJ. I can't find information about the patrons' home library, to help them search their library catalog or access databases. Instead, I usually end up searching the Internet for answers. In addition, these portals seem to be often used for high school (?) class visits, and the students can be less than polite.
- Questions where the patron just puts a very vague topic (I do take these, but I'm always a little wary because you never know what it'll turn into and it's hard to guide someone through narrowing a topic via chat).
- If the patron doesn't type up a question, I tend to not pick it up because I don't know what to expect at all.
- I hate to admit this but I dread seeing the career resources question from Bryant & Stratton students. Can the librarian perhaps put a link to these resources somewhere in the vicinity of the chat icon? It seems to me that if there is this high a number of students that can't find this information on the Bryant & Stratton VL site that the librarian should at least try to do something about it.
- Very frequently when I am in the chat monitor, questions come in and are grabbed by another librarian before I can even read the question. Most librarians are uncomfortable accepting a question blindly but sometimes it seems to be the only way to accept a question. It can feel like a competition to click on a question in the instant that it appears. Any delay results in someone else grabbing the question.