



# PLSN Volunteer Orientation

1. Agenda
2. How to volunteer
3. How to answer a reference question
4. Reference Exercise Worksheet
5. Sample Response
6. Bibliography



# Orientation Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Introduction from NYC jail and prisons from library staff
3. Workflow for Volunteers
4. Exercise: Answer a reference question
5. Questions
6. Sign up



# How to Volunteer

1. Email [plsn\\_nyc@protonmail.com](mailto:plsn_nyc@protonmail.com) to join PLSN's event listserv and learn about the next Volunteer Orientation for our Reference Project
2. Attend a volunteer orientation event to join PLSN's Reference Volunteer Mailing List
3. When PLSN receives a reference question from library staff, a call for volunteers will be sent to the volunteer listserv. If you are available to answer a request by the due date specified, reply to the email.
4. After receiving your response, a PLSN coordinator will reach out by email to provide the reference question you've been assigned along note from library staff and resources for putting together a response.
5. Assemble your response using the response guidelines: [<https://plsn-reference.tumblr.com/how2ref> ] and resources on the subject resources page: [<https://plsnref.tumblr.com>].
6. Compile your material into a pdf and send it to the coordinator who got in touch. If you aren't able to access programs to make a pdf, save the files and send them with your cover sheet so someone can put it together when it is received
7. The coordinator who got in touch with you is available throughout the week to respond to questions that come up and issues you run into. This person is also available to finish your response if you aren't able to complete it by specified due date.

*Note: Please be mindful of the scarcity of resources for incarcerated people. It is a priority to avoid offering a service we cannot provide. In order to ensure that our volunteer work generates a useful and reliable resource it is critical to be accountable to deadlines and communicate when you need support. We understand that a major challenge of volunteer powered work is that it often has to take a back seat to vital things like jobs, family, health etc. To account for this, we've established a group of volunteers who are scheduled to be on call throughout this process in order to act as a backup or tap in at any point*



# How to Answer Reference Questions

1. Read the request carefully to pinpoint the question(s) being asked in as much detail as possible. Count the number of questions you find. If it contains more than one question, assess your capacity to make sure you are comfortable answering all of them in full. If you feel overwhelmed, it might make sense to ask for help!

2. Identify the type of material you are looking for and brainstorm a list of resources lists of to consult. Think creatively about the information resources and types of resources you have access too. Take a peek at the subject resources for suggestions about where to start.

3. Search the resources you choose and identify the best material for your response. If you are faced with many options, revisit the question for clues that help identify the best source for a patron. For example,

- *requests that ask about a topic generally could call for introductory information like that which you would find in an encyclopedia or Wikipedia.*
- *requests for in depth research might call for academic articles which review literature on a subject.*
- *requests that ask for resources that can be used to develop a skill – e.g. drawing tutorials or language learning – may merit scanning textbooks at the public library.*

**If you aren't sure how to accurately match someone with a specific resource, try to do what you can to give the patron an idea of what exists so they can make a more informed choice.**

4. Decide how it makes sense to structure your response. Examples:

- *copies of something from one source e.g. scans of a language textbook, a book chapter, sections of Connections*
- *excerpts from multiple sources e.g. a compilation of encyclopedia entries, news articles and academic articles, a series of worksheets and exercises from various website*
- *a table or list e.g. information about college degree programs available to people while they are incarcerated in NYS, a list of electrician apprenticeships near Albany*

5. Create a cover sheet that includes the request you are answering, the sources you used and any important information about how you chose them, and the date the response was complete. You can use this template: **[insert URL]** to start.

6. Compile your material into a pdf and number the page.

7. Send it to the coordinator who got in touch. If you aren't able to access programs to make a pdf, save the files and send them with your cover sheet so someone can put it together when it is received.

# Think. Pair. Share. Exercise Worksheet

Consider one of the reference requests above individually, then pair up to share your thoughts.

Example reference requests:

1. Tudor Lineage / Henry VIII / Constantinople/ Ottoman Empire
2. Learning Portuguese, phrases
3. Information on funding a business

List the sources you would consult to fulfill the request and how you would access these materials (e.g. through the public library, personal access to academic databases, scanning physical materials). If you aren't able to think of specific sources, you can list the reference sources you would consult more broadly e.g. Encyclopedia Britannica, ARTstor, or Ancestry.com.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

If there are multiple sources that cover the same content, how will you choose which one best responds to the request?

---

---

---

---

---

How would you present the information/ How would you communicate your findings? Would you format the information in any particular way e.g. as a table, compilation of scans, or sections of copy pasted text?

---

---

---

---

---

What are some possible challenges of fulfilling the request?

---

---

---

---

## Sample Response

**Request:** <---Write the request you are responding to

Information on things mentioned in The Da Vinci Code: witches hammer, Council of Nicaea, Knights Templar, hieros gamos, invincible sun

**Contents:** <--- List the resources you've included (if you've made something like a table include the sources of the information you used)

1. "Malleus Maleficarum" in *The Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft*, Scarecrow Press, pages 131-33, 2012.
2. "The First Council of Nicaea Codifies Christianity." *Global Events: Milestone Events Throughout History*. Cengage Learning, Volume 5, pages 91-94, 2014.
3. "The First Council of Nicaea" by Mark Edward in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Volume 1, pages 552-67, 2006,
4. "Knight Templars" in *Encyclopedia of Historical Warrior Peoples and Modern Fighting Groups*, Grey House Publishing, Third Edition, 2016.
5. "Forget The Da Vinci Code: This Is Real Mystery of the Knights Templar." by Dominic Selwood. *The Telegraph Online*, 2013.
6. "Hieros Gamos" *Britannica Encyclopedia Of World Religions*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2006.

**You can use this space to include any important notes about a source or alternatives you weren't able to include**

**Date Complete** <---Date you sent your response to the coordinator

06/10/2019

# Bibliography

In addition to reading the instructions using the resources and tips listed here, volunteers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the existing literature on providing reference service to incarcerated patrons (particularly as it relates to remote reference). Included here is a bibliography of collected writing on this topic.

Drabinski, Emily. "Reference Services to Incarcerated People, Part I: Themes Emerging from Answering Reference Questions from Prisons and Jails." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, Rabina, Debbie, vol. 55, no.1, Fall 2015, pp. 42-48.

Drabinski, Emily. "Reference Services to Incarcerated People, Part II: Sources and Learning Outcomes." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, Rabina, Debbie, vol. 55, no. 2, Winter 2015, pp. 123-131.

Austin, Jeanie. "Information Provision and the Carceral State: Race and Reference beyond the Idea of the "Underserved"." *The Reference Librarian*, Villa-Nicholas, Melissa, vol. 60, no 4, August 2019, pp. 233-261.

Lang, Moyra, and Gayle Sacuta. "Library Programs and Information Access for Incarcerated Women: A Canadian Perspective." *Informed Agitation: Library and Information Skills in Social Justice Movements and Beyond*, edited by Melissa Morrone. Library Juice Press, 2014. pp. 87-102.

Ball, Dabielle and Hannah Lee. "Reference Behind Bars: Information Needs, Rights, and Empowerment of Inmates." *Reference Librarianship and Justice*, Edited by Kate Adler, Ian Beilin, and Eamon Tewell. Library Juice Press, 2018. pp. 132-150.

Finnell, Joshua. "2596 Girls School Road: The Indiana Women's Prison Far-Away Reference Desk." *Reference Librarianship and Justice*, Edited by Kate Adler, Ian Beilin, and Eamon Tewell. Library Juice Press, 2018. pp. 113-131.

Jacobson, Emily. "Reference by Mail to Incarcerated People." *Reference Librarianship and Justice*, Edited by Kate Adler, Ian Beilin, and Eamon Tewell. Library Juice Press, 2018. pp. 152-159



Thank you!

