



AskMN: The Librarian Is In!

Introducing Students to Minnesota's Statewide Online Reference Service

We want students and librarians to have a positive experience. A discussion with students about what the service is will help set expectations. Please use these guidelines to provide needed information to help students have a productive and efficient session.

What is AskMN.org?

AskMN.org is an online service for information and research help available to Minnesota residents and students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When Minnesota librarians are not available, staffing is also provided by out-of-state librarians as part of the QuestionPoint 24/7 reference cooperative. Students will chat with real librarians who can help them find authoritative information online. Librarians can also show students how to find resources.

How does it work?

When students visit AskMN.org and click on the state/question mark logo for “Question on Any Topic,” they are prompted to fill out a brief form asking for a screen name, their zip code and their question. Once a librarian picks up the question, the student and librarian work together to find age-appropriate, quality resources on the Web. The websites are “pushed” to the student and appear on the student’s screen so he or she can follow along. The student can then use those resources to assist in completing an assignment or research paper. Since there are often several links “pushed,” there is an option for the student to enter an email address to receive a copy of the session transcript, including all of the links to the resources that were recommended during the session.

AskMN.org is designed to provide fast answers to students’ questions, using information found on the Internet and in proprietary databases funded for schools and libraries. In most cases, AskMN.org librarians will provide an online answer in 15 minutes or less. If a question involves lengthy research, we’ll get the student started and may provide a referral.

Have your class “visit” AskMN.org

Group or “class visits” to AskMN.org can be a fun way to let your students experience the service. However, the librarians can become overwhelmed very quickly when an entire class logs into the service simultaneously. Therefore, students are encouraged to access the service at different times of the day in school, at home, or in their school library or local public library. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Class visits must be scheduled in advance using the form on the AskMN.org website, www.Askmn.org/schools. We need to know the number of students, grade level, and topics that the students are researching a few days in advance to ensure that the students, teachers, and librarians have a rewarding experience.

Introducing AskMN.org to students

When you are ready to introduce AskMN.org to your students, setting student expectations will ensure they have a good and productive experience. To start, it is helpful to point out the who, what, where, when, and how of AskMN.org:

Who will students be chatting with in AskMN.org?

Minnesota librarians staff AskMN.org. Additional staffing is also provided by out-of-state librarians as part of the QuestionPoint 24/7 reference cooperative. Providing a great experience for students and librarians is important. It is very important students are aware of netiquette (appropriate behavior on the internet). They are chatting with a real person in a safe environment. Rudeness is not tolerated.

What to expect when visiting AskMN.org.

AskMN.org is neither an answer site nor a tutor site. Students must be aware that they need to do the work. Librarians will assist in identifying appropriate resources and determining authoritative information.

Where will AskMN.org serve a purpose in a student's homework/research needs?

AskMN.org will be most beneficial to students if they have the expectation that librarians will help guide students to resources most suited to their grade level. To save duplication of work, the librarian may ask where the student has already looked for information. AskMN.org is not a replacement for doing their homework, and we are not a tutoring service. If the assignment is to give an opinion or reaction, the student will need to formulate his or her own opinion or reaction to an assigned test or discussion question.

When should students use AskMN.org?

Students should have a clear understanding/grasp of their assignment so they can explain to the librarian what it is they need. Students should formulate their question with sentences, not just keywords, and provide as much detail as they can. It is also helpful if students have set aside some time to ask their question via AskMN.org. A typical chat session usually takes about 15 minutes to research a question and supply proper information.

Top ten things librarians want students to know about AskMN.org

10: Please be polite and courteous. Say "please" and "thank you" and let your librarian know when he or she has helped you!

9: Please provide as much information as possible when asking your question. Let us know how much information you need and whether the information needs to be in a specific format, such as an article or website.

8: If you've already searched for information yourself, please let us know what you've done so we can continue from there.

7: We want you to learn how to find the best information yourself, too. Therefore, we'll show or tell you what we're doing so you can try it later on your own.

6: We work as fast as we can, but finding good information online can take time. Please try to be patient while we work. It's not uncommon for a session to last about 15 minutes.

5: We enjoy chatting with you, but we are very busy. Unfortunately, we can't spend too much time chatting about things other than your question.

4: Let us know if we didn't find what you really needed on the first try—we're willing to keep searching. Try to give us more specific information about your topic or question.

3: We do not give you our vital statistics or demographic information. We prefer to keep our genders, our real names, our ages, and where we live private (and you should too when you're online!)

2: We can't do your homework for you. For one thing, your teachers wouldn't appreciate that. We can help you find information so YOU can do your homework. You'll need to read and think about the information we send you so you can come up with the answers you need.

1: **Yes, we are real people** (not robots). Librarians from around the state staff AskMN.org as well as librarians from around the United States under a cooperative agreement.