Something we hear often in libraries these days is “Why do we even need libraries anymore? You can get everything from the internet. Just Google it!” Nothing can be further from the truth. In addition to providing books, movies, and community meeting spaces, one thing librarians are better at than a computer is answering questions. All types of questions. With a smile.

On a typical day, at the Greenfield Public Library we answer:

* Directional questions – Can you tell me where the Large Print books are? Is the courthouse located near the library? And the ever-popular, where is the bathroom?
* Questions about books or movies – When is the next James Patterson book being published? Has the latest series of (insert name of television show here) come out on DVD yet? I’ve read everything by Anne Perry, so can you recommend a new author for me to read?
* Computer questions – Can I access the internet using my own laptop? Is it possible to download books to my phone/Kindle/iPad to take on vacation with me? Can you change the price on Amazon for me? (Yes, we were asked that one.)

Most of the questions we get can be answered quickly at the main circulation desk, but if there is a line or if the question is more involved – like ‘How do I log onto my email if I can’t remember my password?’ – the patron may be directed to the Information Services desk, also known as the Reference desk.

Information Services staff are trained to find the answers to questions, whether on how to use the databases provided by the state (free to use in Massachusetts with no library card needed!), addresses for businesses when people have complaints, or obituaries from back issues of the *Recorder*.

Sometimes the answer is quick and easy to find. In Warwick a young patron asked, “Do you have any books on Optical Illusions?” When the librarian checked the reference book breaking down the Dewey Decimal Classification system, Optical Illusions was listed at call number 152. Amazingly, when the patron walked over to the shelf, there waiting patiently was *The Great Book of Optical Illusions*. It had taken about a minute to get it in his hands, and the look on his face was priceless!

Sometimes we are unable to help. For example, we get questions about activities and programs happening in other Greenfields – New Hampshire, Indiana, Wisconsin, and California, among others – on a fairly regular basis. The first few minutes of the phone call are always a little confusing. Once we let the patron know we are in Massachusetts, things tend to become more clear. In Sunderland, they get questions from even farther away, from Sunderland, UK and Sunderland, Australia. Sunderland’s director has memorized the phone numbers for those libraries to give to the patrons when they call the US by mistake, which is fabulous customer service.

Other questions can be quite complex and involve a bit of research. Some of the questions we have been asked over the years include:

* **Do you have any information on the artist Berlinghiero Berlinghieri?** This seemingly easy question involved three librarians working to find something other than a very short and uninformative paragraph on Wikipedia. We even called the Metropolitan Museum in New York City as they own one of the paintings, alas to no avail. Finally a handful of websites were found – in Italian – with information about the artist and his family.
* **When was the Greenfield Tuberculosis Dispensary established?** A professor from Denmark emailed to find out the answer to this question. After some research we found it in the 1931 edition of *The History of Greenfield*. September 4, 1915 was when it was established.
* **Who was the artist who inspired Maurice Sendak?** The answer to this question was Tomi Ungerer and was found in a 2012 article in *The Atlantic* magazine.
* **Can you find me the Heating Degree Days measurements for December 12 – December 31, 2007?** This question came in 2014. The patron was calling from a moving train. After much searching the answer was found on the Weather Underground website.

In addition to answering questions, Information Services librarians help people with computer issues. Here in Greenfield, we are always available to assist with printing or how to find something on the internet, but sometimes a patron needs more help than we can give while we are on desk. Because of this, we also offer tech help sessions where patrons can book a half-hour time slot with a librarian for a more in-depth appointment. Patrons can learn how to use computer programs, how to download books to their mobile devices, or can explore the genealogical resources GPL has to offer. Appointments can be made by phone, email, or in person.

So, the next time you have a question you can’t find the answer to, give a call to your friendly neighborhood librarian! We are always happy to help.