



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SOUTH AFRICA

LIBRARY GUIDE 2025 - 2026 (4)

Quality Service in Interlibrary Loans

To All Members of the Southern Inter-lending Scheme (SAIS)

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1. Introduction

The primary purpose of Interlibrary Loans is to facilitate end users' access to information by obtaining documents not available in their library, but from other libraries through inter-lending. This guide outlines quality service standards for Inter-lending to provide consistent excellent service to the end users and other libraries. Therefore, it is necessary to have knowledge about library users, technical and professional knowledge and skills, a professional attitude and the ability to provide high-quality service.

2. What is Quality Service?

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, quality service implies a high standard of excellence in the service provided to library users or a high standard of assistance or work provided, emphasising excellence.

This is a concept obtained by comparing perceived expectations and perceived results to achieve users' satisfaction. It is a management concept that helps to improve effectiveness, efficiency, flexibility and competitiveness among the inter-lending libraries in rendering quality-based services to the users. It primarily involves understanding user needs and expectations and then delivering services in a way that meets or exceeds those expectations. Quality service can help Inter-lending libraries to build user loyalty, increase satisfaction, and ultimately increase revenues.

Quality means the degree of goodness as per the specifications and standard. Hornby (2005) defined quality as the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind or the degree of excellence of something. Therefore, in general, it can be said that quality is a degree of excellence towards the resources and services provided to the users, and similarly, the users can get the maximum satisfaction and feel delighted.

3. Knowledge About Your Users

Users expect a product or service to measure up to their expectations and to satisfy their needs. The Inter-lending Department needs to understand their users: Internal users could be staff, other departments, students, researchers, etc., depending on

the type of library. External users include supplying and borrowing libraries, both national and international.

Users value courtesy, initiative, staff who go the extra mile, assurance of quality service, communication, and efficiency as well as promptness. Therefore, it is important to focus on the needs and preferences of the end user. Again, it can be useful to conduct surveys on a regular basis.

4. Technical and Professional Knowledge and Skills

To ensure quality service it is important that interlending staff have the relevant technical knowledge and skills.

- 4.1. Interlending staff should know their systems, procedures and policies.
- 4.2. They need to adhere to the agreed Standards and best practices in the South African Interlending Code of Best Practice.
- 4.3. Libraries should leverage technology and automated ILL workflows to enhance service delivery efficiency.
- 4.4. Interlending staff should have knowledge of copyright issues.
- 4.5. Staff members should continuously develop their competencies and receive training in the use of new tools and resources. They are expected to attend workshops and training sessions made available, particularly those related to Interlending.

5. Professional Attitude

The skilled professional staff are constantly faced with situations that require skill, tact, diplomacy and a positive attitude to succeed in even the most difficult situations.

A user-focused attitude can be:

- 5.1. Striving for constant improvement
- 5.2. Being accountable
- 5.3. Always being considerate.
- 5.4. Be accurate in your work.
- 5.5. Being quick to respond.
- 5.6. Always being polite.
- 5.7. Respecting and listening to your user.

- 5.8. Self-control – Staff working with user service need to be able to calmly handle all users, even the most negative ones. Staff must strive to remain calm and cool, even when the user is not.

6. Quality Service

6.1. General

- 6.1.1. Maintain your SAIS Online database entry and ensure that contact details are correct.
- 6.1.2. Correctness of contact details will ensure faster turnaround time and users will get their requested items faster. Use the following URL with your password supplied by the National Library of South Africa:
<http://databases.nlsa.ac.za/dbtw-wpd/textbase/SAISWEB/search.html>
- 6.1.3. Your catalogue department should maintain your holdings so that it is up to date.
- 6.1.4. Undertake regular housekeeping, such as completing processes such as received, checked-in and returned items. Frequently follow up on messages, overdue notices, unfilled, etc.
- 6.1.5. Streamline the processes of your own library
- 6.1.6. Define performance indicators for service levels and turnaround time and monitor your performance against it. Evaluate your own routines and change them accordingly.
- 6.1.7. Reduce the number of handling points through which the request passes.
- 6.1.8. Use the expertise of skilled staff members.
- 6.1.9. Use experienced staff to collect requested material from your collections to minimise mistakes.
- 6.1.10. Keep hardware and software up to date.
- 6.1.11. Encourage users to submit requests electronically.

6.2. Responsibilities of the Requesting Library

- 6.2.1. Ensure the confidentiality of the library user.

- 6.2.2. Process requests from end users quickly.
- 6.2.3. Describe completely and accurately the requested material following accepted bibliographic practice to expedite response time from the Supplying Library.
- 6.2.4. Observe special provisions on the use of material and enforce all restrictions specified by the supplying library.
- 6.2.5. Promptly reply and adhere to conditional replies from the Supplying Libraries.
- 6.2.6. Accept responsibility for the safety of borrowed material and pay for lost or damaged materials.
- 6.2.7. Honor the due dates.
- 6.2.8. Deliver materials as fast as possible to the end user.

6.3. **Responsibilities of the Supplying Library**

- 6.3.1. Make available and, frequently update, your interlibrary lending policy, contact information, and constant data on the OCLC WorldShare ILL system.
- 6.3.2. Process requests in a timely manner, recognizing the needs of the requesting library. If unable to fill in a request, respond promptly and state the reason the request cannot be filled.
- 6.3.3. Send sufficient information to identify the request when filling or communicating about requests.
- 6.3.4. Supply the best copy possible, in accordance with efficient work processes.
- 6.3.5. Indicate the due date, any restrictions on the use of the material and any special packaging or shipping requirements.
- 6.3.6. Respond promptly to requests for renewals
- 6.3.7. Your library may recall loaned material at any time.
- 6.3.8. Complete transactions. Move filled requests to complete status.

7. References

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