

SMS Your Enquiry: SMS Reference Service @ the National Library

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Imagine you are on the move, in a taxi, the MRT, or simply enjoying your coffee on the sidewalk. Something is bugging you. There is that report you have to submit in a few days' time, and you have no clue where to get the information. Why not simply take out your mobile phone, and SMS (Short Message Service) your enquiry to us at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library? The number is **9178 7792**.

The SMS Reference Service, the latest initiative from NLB, was launched during the FIND IT campaign on 11 April 2006 to bring convenience to our valued users. The service is targeted at educators, designers, entrepreneurs, researchers, consultants, academics and tertiary students who need to find the sources to answer their information, reference and research needs. This facility adds to a suite of email, fax, phone and onsite reference services currently provided by reference librarians, and gives customers the option to pose their queries from virtually anywhere.

Why SMS?

Worldwide, the trend to provide greater accessibility for library users has motivated libraries to post

online reference enquiries. So why the choice of SMS as a mode of reference enquiry service?

Singapore's mobile phone penetration rate for February 2006 stood at 99.8%, a 0.7% increase from January 2006. [Statistics on Telecom Services for 2006 (January – June): <http://www.ida.gov.sg/idaweb/factfigure/index.jsp>]. Current interest in e-communication suggests that SMS is an ideal way to reach out to a greater pool of potential users of reference enquiry service. Add to it the portability of the mobile phone, it becomes obvious that SMS is a convenient form of enquiry service for library users who may not have the luxury of visiting the library due to their busy schedules or simply because they are always on the move.

There is, however, one main constraint in using SMS. Each SMS message is limited to 160 characters. Therefore, longer messages will be broken up into two or more. To overcome this problem, the Library delivers longer answers through a URL link sent to the user's mobile phone. Upon opening up the URL link, either through the mobile phone directly or via a computer, the patron can view the reply for a period of two weeks.

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What to Expect?

This service aims to help users obtain information in the course of their work or learning. For simple fact-seeking questions, users receive quick answers via SMS within a short time. For longer enquiries, we reply through email by the next working day.

Response to the service has been very encouraging. We have received over a thousand SMS enquiries within two weeks from the launch. Users generally find the service helpful and easy to use. Examples of reference questions asked include:

- *Where can I find good resources relating to setting up an eco business in Singapore?*
- *What is the history of Hoover Park Estate in Singapore*
- *Who founded the Teochew Building in Singapore?*
- *What is the annual cargo tonnage handled by PSA?*
- *What is the lowest temperature ever recorded in Pluto?*

This service is free of charge and users need only pay their mobile phone service provider the usual SMS charges.

So what's stopping you? SMS your enquiry now!

Operating Hours

Monday to Friday: 9am to 9pm
Saturday: 9am to 5pm
Sunday: 1pm to 5pm
Closed on Public Holidays