
Librarians

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Significant Points

- Librarians use the latest information technology to perform research, classify materials, and help students and library patrons seek information.
- A master's degree in library science is the main qualification for most librarian positions, although school librarians often need experience as teachers to meet State licensing requirements.
- Despite slower-than-average projected employment growth, job opportunities are still expected to be favorable because a large number of librarians are expected to retire in the coming decade.

Nature of the Work

The traditional concept of a library is being redefined from a place to access paper records or books to one that also houses the most advanced electronic resources, including the Internet, digital libraries, and remote access to a wide range of information sources. Consequently, librarians, often called information professionals, increasingly combine traditional duties with tasks involving quickly changing technology. Librarians help people find information and use it effectively for personal and professional purposes. They must have knowledge of a wide variety of scholarly and public information sources and must follow trends related to publishing, computers, and the media in order to oversee the selection and organization of library materials. Librarians manage staff and develop and direct information programs and systems for the public and ensure that information is organized in a manner that meets users' needs.

Most librarian positions focus on one of three aspects of library work: user services, technical services, and administrative services. Still, even librarians specializing in one of these areas have other responsibilities, too. Librarians in user services, such as reference and children's librarians, work with patrons to help them find the information they need. The job involves analyzing users' needs to determine what information is appropriate and searching for, acquiring, and providing the information. The job also includes an instructional role, such as showing users how to find information. For example, librarians commonly help users navigate the Internet so they can search for and evaluate information efficiently. Librarians in technical services, such as acquisitions and cataloguing, acquire, prepare, and classify materials so that patrons can find it easily. Some write abstracts and summaries. Often, these librarians do not deal directly with the public. Librarians in administrative services oversee the management and planning of libraries: they negotiate contracts for services, materials, and equipment; supervise library employees; perform public-relations and fundraising duties; prepare budgets; and direct activities to ensure that everything functions properly.

In small libraries or information centers, librarians usually handle all aspects of library operations. They read book reviews, publishers' announcements, and catalogues to keep up with current literature and other available resources, and they

select and purchase materials from publishers, wholesalers, and distributors. Librarians prepare new materials, classifying them by subject matter and describing books and other library materials to make them easy to find. Librarians supervise assistants, who enter classification information and descriptions of materials into electronic catalogs. In large libraries, librarians often specialize in a single area, such as acquisitions, cataloguing, bibliography, reference, special collections, or administration. Teamwork is increasingly important.

Librarians also recommend materials. Many compile lists of books, periodicals, articles, audiovisual materials, and electronic resources on particular subjects and analyze collections. They collect and organize books, pamphlets, manuscripts, and other materials in a specific field, such as rare books, genealogy, or music. In addition, they coordinate programs such as storytelling for children and literacy skills and book talks for adults. Some conduct classes, publicize services, write grants, and oversee other administrative matters.

Many libraries have access to remote databases and maintain their own computerized databases. The widespread use of electronic resources makes database-searching skills important for librarians. Librarians develop and index databases and help train users to develop searching skills. Some libraries are forming consortiums with other libraries to allow patrons to access a wider range of databases and to submit information requests to several libraries simultaneously. The Internet also has greatly expanded the amount of available reference information. Librarians must know how to use these resources and inform the public about the wealth of information available in them.

Librarians are classified according to the type of library in which they work: a public library; school library media center; college, university, or other academic library; or special library. Librarians in special libraries work in information centers or libraries maintained by government agencies or corporations, law firms, advertising agencies, museums, professional associations, unions, medical centers, hospitals, religious organizations, and research laboratories. They acquire and arrange an organization's information resources, which usually are limited to subjects of special interest to the organization. They can provide vital information services by preparing abstracts and indexes of current periodicals, organizing bibliographies, or analyzing background information and preparing reports



Librarians assist patrons with their research and resource needs.

on areas of particular interest. For example, a special librarian working for a corporation could provide the sales department with information on competitors or new developments affecting the field. A medical librarian may provide information about new medical treatments, clinical trials, and standard procedures to health professionals, patients, consumers, and corporations. Government document librarians, who work for government agencies and depository libraries in each of the States, preserve government publications, records, and other documents that make up a historical record of government actions.

Some librarians work with specific groups, such as children, young adults, adults, or the disadvantaged. In school library media centers, librarians—often called school media specialists—help teachers develop curricula and acquire materials for classroom instruction. They also conduct classes for students on how to use library resources for research projects.

Librarians with computer and information systems skills can work as automated-systems librarians, planning and operating computer systems, and as information architects, designing information storage and retrieval systems and developing procedures for collecting, organizing, interpreting, and classifying information. These librarians analyze and plan for future information needs. (See the section on computer scientists and database administrators elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) Automated information systems enable librarians to focus on administrative and budgeting responsibilities, grant writing, and specialized research requests, while delegating more routine services responsibilities to technicians. (See the section on library technicians elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

More and more, librarians apply their information management and research skills to arenas outside of libraries—for example, database development, reference tool development, information systems, publishing, Internet coordination, marketing, Web content management and design, and training of database users. Entrepreneurial librarians sometimes start their own consulting practices, acting as freelance librarians or information brokers and providing services to other libraries, businesses, or government agencies.

Work environment. Librarians spend a significant portion of time at their desks or in front of computer terminals; extended work at video display terminals can cause eyestrain and headaches. Assisting users in obtaining information or books for their jobs, homework, or recreational reading can be challenging and satisfying, but working with users under deadlines can be demanding and stressful. Some librarians lift and carry books, and some climb ladders to reach high stacks, although most modern libraries have readily accessible stacks. Librarians in small settings without support staff sometimes shelve books themselves.

More than 20 percent of librarians work part time. Public and college librarians often work weekends, evenings, and some holidays. School librarians usually have the same workday and vacation schedules as classroom teachers. Special librarians usually work normal business hours, but in fast-paced industries—such as advertising or legal services—they can work longer hours when needed.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A master's degree in library science (MLS) is necessary for librarian positions in most public, academic, and special libraries. Librarians in the Federal Government need an MLS or the equivalent in education and experience. School librarians do not typically need an MLS but must meet State licensing requirements.

Education and training. Entry into a library science graduate program requires a bachelor's degree, but any undergraduate major is acceptable. Many colleges and universities offer library science programs, but employers often prefer graduates of the 56 schools accredited by the American Library Association. Most programs take 1 year to complete; some take 2. A typical graduate program includes courses in the foundations of library and information science, such as the history of books and printing, intellectual freedom and censorship, and the role of libraries and information in society. Other basic courses cover the selection and processing of materials, the organization of information, research methods and strategies, and user services. Prospective librarians also study online reference systems, Internet search methods, and automated circulation systems. Elective course options include resources for children or young adults; classification, cataloguing, indexing, and abstracting; and library administration. Computer-related course work is an increasingly important part of an MLS degree. Some programs offer interdisciplinary degrees combining technical courses in information science with traditional training in library science.

The MLS degree provides general preparation for library work, but some individuals specialize in a particular area, such as reference, technical services, or children's services. A Ph.D. in library and information science is advantageous for a college teaching position or a top administrative job in a college or university library or large public library system.

Licensure. States generally have certification requirements for librarians in public schools and local libraries, though there are wide variations among States. School librarians in 14 States need a master's degree, either an MLS or a master's in education with a specialization in library media. In addition, about half of all States require that school librarians hold teacher certifications, although not all require teaching experience. Some States may also require librarians to pass a comprehensive assessment. Most States also have developed certification standards for local public libraries, although in some States these guidelines are only voluntary.

Other qualifications. In addition to an MLS degree, librarians in a special library, such as a law or corporate library, usually supplement their education with knowledge of the field in which they are specializing, sometimes earning a master's, doctoral, or professional degree in the subject. Areas of specialization include medicine, law, business, engineering, and the natural and social sciences. For example, a librarian working for a law firm may hold both library science and law degrees, while medical librarians should have a strong background in the sciences. In some jobs, knowledge of a foreign language is needed.

Librarians participate in continuing education and training to stay up to date with new information systems and technology.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Librarians	25-4021	158,000	164,000	5,800	4

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Advancement. Experienced librarians can advance to administrative positions, such as department head, library director, or chief information officer.

Employment

Librarians held about 158,000 jobs in 2006. Most worked in school and academic libraries, but more than one-fourth worked in public libraries. The remainder worked in special libraries or as information professionals for companies and other organizations.

Job Outlook

Despite slower-than-average projected employment growth, job opportunities are still expected to be favorable because a large number of librarians are expected to retire in the coming decade.

Employment change. Employment of librarians is expected to grow by 4 percent between 2006 and 2016, slower than the average for all occupations. Growth in the number of librarians will be limited by government budget constraints and the increasing use of electronic resources. Both will result in the hiring of fewer librarians and the replacement of librarians with less costly library technicians and assistants. As electronic resources become more common and patrons and support staff become more familiar with their use, fewer librarians are needed to maintain and assist users with these resources. In addition, many libraries are equipped for users to access library resources directly from their homes or offices through library Web sites. Some users bypass librarians altogether and conduct research on their own. However, librarians will still be needed to manage staff, help users develop database-searching techniques, address complicated reference requests, choose materials, and help users to define their needs.

Jobs for librarians outside traditional settings will grow the fastest over the decade. Nontraditional librarian jobs include working as information brokers and working for private corporations, nonprofit organizations, and consulting firms. Many companies are turning to librarians because of their research and organizational skills and their knowledge of computer databases and library automation systems. Librarians can review vast amounts of information and analyze, evaluate, and organize it according to a company’s specific needs. Librarians also are hired by organizations to set up information on the Internet. Librarians working in these settings may be classified as systems analysts, database specialists and trainers, webmasters or web developers, or local area network (LAN) coordinators.

Job prospects. More than 2 out of 3 librarians are aged 45 or older, which will result in many job openings over the next decade as many librarians retire. However, recent increases in enrollments in MLS programs will prepare a sufficient number of new librarians to fill these positions. Opportunities for pub-

lic school librarians, who are usually drawn from the ranks of teachers, should be particularly favorable.

Earnings

Salaries of librarians vary according to the individual’s qualifications and the type, size, and location of the library. Librarians with primarily administrative duties often have greater earnings. Median annual earnings of librarians in May 2006 were \$49,060. The middle 50 percent earned between \$39,250 and \$60,800. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$30,930, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$74,670. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of librarians in 2006 were as follows:

Junior colleges.....	\$52,030
Colleges, universities, and professional schools	51,160
Elementary and secondary schools	50,710
Local government.....	44,960
Other information services.....	44,170

The average annual salary for all librarians in the Federal Government in nonsupervisory, supervisory, and managerial positions was \$80,873 in 2007.

About 1 in 4 librarians are a member of a union or are covered under a union contract.

Related Occupations

Librarians play an important role in the transfer of knowledge and ideas by providing people with information. Jobs requiring similar analytical, organizational, and communication skills include archivists, curators, and museum technicians and computer and information scientists, research. School librarians have many duties similar to those of school teachers. Librarians increasingly store, catalogue, and access information with computers. Other jobs that use computer skills include computer systems analysts, and computer scientists and database administrators.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on a career as a librarian and information on accredited library education programs and scholarships, contact:

- American Library Association, Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Internet:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/education/educationcareers.htm>

For information on a career as a special librarian, contact:

- Special Libraries Association, 331 South Patrick St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.sla.org>

For information on a career as a law librarian, scholarship information, and a list of ALA-accredited schools offering programs in law librarianship, contact:

➤ American Association of Law Libraries, 53 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 940, Chicago, IL 60604.

Internet: <http://www.aallnet.org>

For information on employment opportunities for health sciences librarians and for scholarship information, credentialing information, and a list of MLA-accredited schools offering programs in health sciences librarianship, contact:

➤ Medical Library Association, 65 East Wacker Place, Suite 1900, Chicago, IL 60601. Internet: <http://www.mlanet.org>

Information concerning requirements and application procedures for positions in the Library of Congress can be obtained directly from:

➤ Human Resources Office, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Ave. SE., Washington, DC 20540-2231.

Internet: <http://www.loc.gov/hr>

State library agencies can furnish information on scholarships available through their offices, requirements for certification, and general information about career prospects in the particular State of interest. Several of these agencies maintain job hot lines reporting openings for librarians.

State departments of education can furnish information on certification requirements and job opportunities for school librarians.