
Library Technicians

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Significant Points

- Increasing use of electronic resources enables library technicians to perform tasks once done by librarians.
- Training requirements range from a high school diploma to an associate degree, but computer skills are necessary for all workers.
- Employment should grow more rapidly in special libraries because increasing numbers of professionals and other workers use those libraries.
- Opportunities will be best for those with specialized postsecondary library training.

Nature of the Work

Library technicians help librarians acquire, prepare, and organize materials and help users to find those materials. Library technicians usually work under the supervision of a librarian, although they sometimes work independently. Technicians in small libraries handle a range of duties; those in large libraries usually specialize. The duties of technicians are expanding and evolving as libraries increasingly use the Internet and other technologies to share information. Depending on where they work, library technicians can have other titles, such as *library technical assistant* or *media aide*.

Library technicians direct library users to standard references, organize and maintain periodicals, prepare volumes for binding, handle interlibrary loan requests, prepare invoices, perform routine cataloguing and coding of library materials, retrieve information from computer databases, and supervise support staff.

Technicians also market library services. They participate in and help plan reader advisory programs, used-book sales, and outreach programs. They may also design posters, bulletin boards, or displays to inform patrons of library events and services.

As libraries increasingly use the Internet, virtual libraries, and other electronic resources, the duties of library technicians are changing. In fact, new technologies allow some technicians to assume responsibilities which were previously performed only by librarians. Technicians now catalog new acquisitions and oversee the circulation of all library materials. They often maintain, update, and help customize electronic databases. Technicians also may help to maintain the library's Web site and instruct patrons in how to use the library's computers.

The automation of recordkeeping has reduced the amount of clerical work performed by library technicians. Many libraries now offer self-service registration and circulation areas, where patrons can register for library cards and check out materials themselves. These technologies decrease the time library technicians spend recording and inputting records.

Some library technicians operate and maintain audiovisual equipment, such as projectors, tape and CD players, and DVD



Library technicians may process materials for circulation.

and videocassette players. They also assist users with microfilm or microfiche readers.

Library technicians in school libraries encourage and teach students to use the library and media center. They also help teachers obtain instructional materials, and they assist students with assignments.

Some technicians work in special libraries maintained by government agencies, corporations, law firms, advertising agencies, museums, professional societies, medical centers, or research laboratories. These technicians conduct literature searches, compile bibliographies, and prepare abstracts, usually on subjects of particular interest to the organization.

To extend library services to more patrons, many libraries operate bookmobiles, which are often run by library technicians. The technicians take bookmobiles—trucks stocked with books—to shopping centers, apartment complexes, schools, nursing homes, and other places. Technicians may operate a bookmobile alone or with other library employees.

Library technicians who drive bookmobiles are responsible for answering patrons' questions, receiving and checking out books, collecting fines, maintaining the book collection, shelving materials, and occasionally operating audiovisual equipment to show slides or movies. Technicians who drive the bookmobile keep track of mileage and sometimes are responsible for maintenance of the vehicle and any equipment, such as photocopiers, in it. Many bookmobiles are equipped with personal computers linked to the main library Internet system, allowing patrons access to electronic resources as well as books.

Work environment. Library technicians who prepare library materials sit at desks or computer terminals for long periods and can develop headaches or eyestrain. They may lift and carry books, climb ladders to reach high stacks, and bend low to shelve books on bottom shelves. Technicians who work in bookmobiles may assist handicapped or elderly patrons to the bookmobile or shovel snow to ensure their safety. They may enter hospitals or nursing homes to deliver books.

Library technicians in school libraries work regular school hours. Those in public libraries and college and university libraries may work weekends, evenings, and some holidays. Library technicians in corporate libraries usually work normal business hours, although they often work overtime as well. The schedules of technicians who drive bookmobiles often depend on the size of the area being served.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Training requirements for library technicians vary widely, ranging from a high school diploma to specialized postsecondary training. Some employers only hire individuals who have library work experience or college training related to libraries; others train inexperienced workers on the job.

Education and training. Most libraries prefer to hire technicians who have earned a certificate or associate degree, but some smaller libraries may hire individuals with only a high school diploma.

Many library technicians in public schools must meet the same requirements as teacher assistants. Those in Title 1 schools—schools that receive special funding because of the high percentage of poor students enrolled—must hold an associate or higher degree, have a minimum of 2 years of college, or pass a rigorous State or local exam.

Associate degree and certificate programs for library technicians include courses in liberal arts and subjects related to libraries. Students learn about library organization and operation and how to order, process, catalogue, locate, and circulate library materials and media. They often learn to use library automation systems. Libraries and associations offer continuing education courses to inform technicians of new developments in the field.

Other qualifications. Given the rapid spread of automation in libraries, computer skills are a necessity. Knowledge of databases, library automation systems, online library systems, online public access systems, and circulation systems is particularly valuable. Many bookmobile drivers must have a commercial driver's license.

Advancement. Library technicians usually advance by assuming added responsibilities. For example, technicians often start at the circulation desk, checking books in and out. After gaining experience, they may become responsible for storing and verifying information. As they advance, they may become involved in budget and personnel matters. Some library technicians advance to supervisory positions and are in charge of the day-to-day operation of their departments or, sometimes, a small library. Those who earn a graduate degree in library sciences can become librarians.

Employment

Library technicians held about 121,000 jobs in 2006; about half worked in local public libraries. Most of the rest worked in school or academic libraries, but some worked in special libraries in health care and legal settings. The Federal Government employs library technicians primarily at the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Library of Congress.

Job Outlook

Employment of library technicians is expected to grow about as fast as average. Opportunities will be best for those with specialized postsecondary library training.

Employment change. The number of library technicians is expected to grow by 8 percent between 2006 and 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations, as the increasing use of library automation creates more opportunities for these workers. Electronic information systems have simplified some tasks, enabling them to be performed by technicians rather than librarians, and spurring demand for technicians. However, job growth in educational institutions will be limited by slowing enrollment growth. In addition, public libraries often face budget pressures, which hold down overall growth in library services. However, this may result in the hiring of more library technicians because they are paid less than librarians and, thus, represent a lower-cost way to offer some library services. Employment should grow more rapidly in special libraries because increasing numbers of professionals and other workers use those libraries.

Job prospects. In addition to job openings from employment growth, some openings will result from the need to replace library technicians who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Opportunities will be best for library technicians with specialized postsecondary library training. Increased use of special libraries in businesses, hospitals, and other places should result in good job opportunities for library technicians in those settings.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of library technicians in May 2006 were \$26,560. The middle 50 percent earned between \$20,220 and \$34,280. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$15,820, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$42,850. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of library technicians in 2006 were as follows:

Colleges, universities, and professional schools	\$29,950
Junior colleges	29,470
Local government	25,610
Elementary and secondary schools	24,760
Other information services	23,420

Salaries of library technicians in the Federal Government averaged \$43,238 in 2007.

Related Occupations

Library technicians perform organizational and administrative duties. Workers in other occupations with similar duties in-

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Library technicians.....	25-4031	121,000	132,000	10,000	8

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*.

clude library assistants, clerical; information and record clerks; and medical records and health information technicians. Technicians also support and assist librarians in much the same way as teacher assistants support teachers.

Sources of Additional Information

For general career information on library technicians, including information on training programs, 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>

➤ Council on Library/Media Technology, P.O. Box 42048, Mesa, AZ 85274-2048. Internet: **<http://colt.ucr.edu>**

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 requirements for technicians and general information about career prospects in the State. Several of these agencies maintain job hot lines that report openings for library technicians.

State departments of education can furnish information on requirements and job opportunities for school library technicians.