
Library Assistants, Clerical

(0*NET 43-4121.00)

Nature of the Work

Library assistants assist librarians and, in some cases, library technicians in organizing library resources and making them available to users. (Librarians and library technicians are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Library assistants, clerical—sometimes referred to as library media assistants, library aides, or circulation assistants—register patrons so that they can borrow materials from the library. They record the borrower's name and address from an application and then issue a library card. Most library assistants enter patrons' records into computer databases.

At the circulation desk, library assistants lend and collect books, periodicals, videotapes, and other materials. When an item is borrowed, assistants stamp the due date on the material and record the patron's identification from his or her library card. They inspect returned materials for damage, check due dates, and compute fines for overdue material. Library assistants review records, compile a list of overdue materials, and send out notices reminding patrons that their materials are overdue. They also answer patrons' questions and refer those they cannot answer to a librarian.

Throughout the library, assistants sort returned books, periodicals, and other items and put them on their designated shelves, in the appropriate files, or in storage areas. They locate materials to be loaned, to either a patron or another library. Many card catalogues are computerized, so library assistants must be familiar with computers. If any materials have been damaged, these workers try to repair them. For example, they use tape or paste to repair torn pages or book covers and other specialized processes to repair more valuable materials.

Some library assistants specialize in helping patrons who have vision problems. Sometimes referred to as library, talking-books, or braille-and-talking-books clerks, they review the borrower's list of desired reading materials. They locate those materials or closely related substitutes from the library collection of large-type or braille volumes, tape cassettes, and open-reel talking books, complete the requisite paperwork, and give or mail the materials to the borrower.

Employment

Library assistants held about 120,000 jobs in 2002. More than one half of these workers were employed by local government in public libraries; most of the remaining employees worked in school libraries. Opportunities for flexible schedules are abundant; nearly half of these workers were on part-time schedules.

Job Outlook

Opportunities should be good through 2012 for persons interested in jobs as library assistants. Turnover of these workers is quite high, reflecting the limited investment in training and subsequent weak attachment to this occupation. The work is attractive to retirees, students, and others who want a part-time schedule, and there is a lot of movement into and out of the occupation. Many openings will become available each year to replace workers who transfer to another occupation or who leave the labor force. Some positions become available as library assistants move within the organization. Library assistants can be promoted to library technicians and, eventually, supervisory positions in public-service or technical-service areas. Advancement opportunities are greater in larger libraries.



Library assistants organize library materials and make them available to users.

Employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2012. The vast majority of library assistants work in public or school libraries. Efforts to contain costs in local governments and academic institutions of all types may result in more hiring of library support staff than librarians. Also, due to changing roles within libraries, library assistants are taking on more responsibility. Because most are employed by public institutions, library assistants are not directly affected by the ups and downs of the business cycle. Some of these workers may lose their jobs, however, if there are cuts in government budgets.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about a career as a library assistant can be obtained from either of the following organizations:

- ▶ Council on Library/Media Technology, 100 W. Broadway, Columbia, MO 65203. Internet: <http://colt.ucr.edu>
- ▶ American Library Association, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.ala.org/hrdr>

Public libraries and libraries in academic institutions also can provide information about job openings for library assistants.

(See the introductory statement on information and record clerks for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)