

Library Technicians

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Significant Points

- Training requirements range from a high school diploma to an associate's or bachelor's degree, but computer skills are needed for many jobs.
- Increasing use of computerized circulation and information systems should continue to spur job growth, but many libraries' budget constraints should moderate growth.
- Employment should grow rapidly in special libraries because growing numbers of professionals and other workers use those libraries.

Nature of the Work

Library technicians both help librarians acquire, prepare, and organize material and assist users in finding information. Library technicians usually work under the supervision of a librarian, although they work independently in certain situations. Technicians in small libraries handle a range of duties; those in large libraries usually specialize. As libraries increasingly use new technologies—such as CD-ROM, the Internet, virtual libraries, and automated databases—the duties of library technicians will expand and evolve accordingly. Library technicians are assuming greater responsibilities, in some cases taking on tasks previously performed by librarians. (See the statement on librarians elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Depending on the employer, 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.

The widespread use of computerized information storage and retrieval systems has resulted in technicians handling technical services—such as entering catalogue information into the library's computer—that were once performed by librarians. Technicians assist with customizing databases. In addition, technicians instruct patrons in how to use computer systems to access data. The increased automation of recordkeeping has reduced the amount of clerical work performed by library technicians. Many libraries now offer self-service registration and circulation areas with computers, decreasing the time library technicians spend manually recording and inputting records.

Some library technicians operate and maintain audiovisual equipment, such as projectors, tape recorders, and videocassette recorders, and assist users with microfilm or microfiche readers. They also design posters, bulletin boards, or displays.

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 special assignments. Some work in special libraries maintained by government agencies, corporations, law firms, advertising agencies, museums, professional societies, medical centers, and research laboratories, where they 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, often run by library technicians. The technicians take trucks stocked with books, or bookmobiles, to designated sites on a regular schedule, frequently stopping at shopping centers, apartment complexes, schools, and nursing homes. Bookmobiles also may be used to extend library service to patrons living in remote areas. Depending on local conditions, the technicians may operate a bookmobile alone or may be accompanied by another library employee.

Library technicians who drive bookmobiles, answer patrons' questions, receive and check out books, collect fines, maintain the book collection, shelve materials, and occasionally operate audiovisual equipment to show slides or films. They participate, and may assist, in planning programs sponsored by the library, such as reader advisory programs, used-book sales, or outreach programs. Technicians who drive the bookmobile keep track of their mileage, the materials lent out, and the amount of fines collected. In some areas, they are responsible for maintenance of the vehicle and any photocopiers or other equipment in it. They record statistics on circulation and the number of people visiting the bookmobile. Technicians also may record requests for special items from the main library and arrange for the materials to be mailed or delivered to a patron during the next scheduled visit. Many bookmobiles are equipped with personal computers and CD-ROM systems linked to the main library system, allowing technicians to reserve or locate books immediately. Some bookmobiles now offer Internet access to users.

Working Conditions

Technicians answer questions and provide assistance to library users. Those who prepare library materials sit at desks or computer terminals for long periods and can develop headaches or eyestrain from working with the terminals. Some duties, like calculating circulation statistics, can be repetitive and boring. Others, such as performing computer searches with the use of local and regional library networks and cooperatives, can be interesting and challenging. Library technicians may lift and



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carry books climb ladders to reach high stacks, and bend low to shelve books on bottom shelves.

Library technicians in school libraries work regular school hours. Those in public libraries and college and university (academic) libraries also work weekends, evenings and some holidays. Library technicians in special libraries usually work normal business hours, although they often work overtime as well.

The schedules of library technicians who drive bookmobiles depend on the size of the area being served. Some bookmobiles operate every day, while others go only on certain days. Some bookmobiles operate in the evenings and weekends, to give patrons as much access to the library as possible. Because library technicians who operate bookmobiles may be the only link some people have to the library, much of their work consists of helping the public. They 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 to patrons who are bedridden.

Employment

Library technicians held about 119,000 jobs in 2002. Most worked in school, academic, or public libraries. Some worked in hospitals and for religious organizations, mainly parochial schools. The Federal Government—primarily the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Library of Congress—and State and local governments also employed library technicians.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Training requirements for library technicians vary widely, ranging from a high school diploma to specialized postsecondary training. Some employers hire individuals with work experience or other training; others train inexperienced workers on the job. Still other employers require that technicians have an associate's or bachelor's degree. Given the rapid spread of automation in libraries, computer skills are needed for many jobs. Knowledge of databases, library automation systems, online library systems, online public access systems, and circulation systems is valuable. Many bookmobile drivers are required to have a commercial driver's license.

Some 2-year colleges offer an associate-of-arts degree in library technology. Programs include both liberal arts and library-related study. Students learn about library and media organization and operation, as well as how to order, process, catalogue, locate, and circulate library materials and work with library automation. Libraries and associations offer continuing education courses to keep technicians abreast of new developments in the field.

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 in their departments. Some library technicians advance to supervisory positions and are in charge of the day-to-day operation of their departments.

Job Outlook

Employment of library technicians is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012. In addition to jobs opening up through employment growth, some job openings will result from the need to replace library technicians who transfer to other fields or leave the labor force.

The increasing use of library automation is expected to continue to spur job growth among library technicians. Computerized information systems have simplified certain tasks, such as descriptive cataloguing, which can now be handled by technicians instead of librarians. For example, nowadays technicians can easily retrieve information from a central database and store it in the library's computer. Although efforts to contain costs could dampen employment growth of library technicians in school, public, and college and university libraries, cost containment efforts could also result in more hiring of library technicians than librarians. Growth in the number of professionals and other workers who use special libraries should result in good job opportunities for library technicians in those settings.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of library technicians in 2002 were \$24,090. The middle 50 percent earned between \$18,150 and \$31,140. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,410, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$38,000. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of library technicians in 2002 were as follows:

Colleges, universities, and professional schools	\$27,280
Local government	23,310
Elementary and secondary schools	21,770
Other information services	20,950

Salaries of library technicians in the Federal Government averaged \$36,788 in 2003.

Related Occupations

Library technicians perform organizational and administrative duties. Workers in other occupations with similar duties include library assistants, clerical; information and record clerks; and medical records and health information technicians.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on training programs for library/media technical assistants, write to

► American Library Association, Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.ala.org>

Information on acquiring a job as a library technician with the Federal Government may be obtained from the Office of Personnel Management through a telephone-based system. Consult your telephone directory under "U.S. Government" for a local number, or call (703) 724-1850 (Federal Relay Service (800) 877-8339). The first number is not toll free, and charges may result. Information also is available on the Internet at <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>.

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.

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 reporting openings for library technicians.

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