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## Library Assistants, Clerical

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(O\*NET 43-4121.00)

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### Significant Points

- Flexible schedules and ample opportunities for part-time work characterize this occupation.
- Library assistants train on the job; most libraries use electronic cataloging systems so computers skills are essential.
- Job prospects should be good.

### Nature of the Work

Library assistants, clerical—sometimes referred to as library media assistants, library aides, or circulation assistants—help librarians and library technicians organize library resources and make them available to users. (Librarians and library technicians are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

At the circulation desk, library assistants lend and collect books, periodicals, videotapes, and other materials. When an item is borrowed, assistants scan it and the patron's library card to record the transaction in the library database; they then stamp the due date on the item or print a receipt with the due date. When an item is returned, assistants inspect it for damage and scan it to record its return. Electronic circulation systems automatically generate notices reminding patrons that their materials are overdue, but library assistants may review the record for accuracy before sending out the notice. Library assistants also register new patrons and issue them library cards. They answer patrons' questions or refer them 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. Before reshelving returned materials, they look for any damage and try to make repairs. For example, they may use tape or paste to repair torn pages or book covers and use other specialized processes to repair more valuable materials.

Assistants also locate materials being lent to a patron or another library. Because nearly all library catalogs are computerized, library assistants must be familiar with computers. They sometimes help patrons with computer searches.

Some library assistants specialize in helping patrons who have vision problems. Sometimes referred to as *braille-and-talking-books clerks*, these assistants review the borrower's list of desired reading materials, and locate those materials or close substitutes from the library collection of large-type or braille volumes and books on tape. Then, they give or mail the materials to the borrower.

**Work environment.** Library assistants who prepare library materials may sit at desks or computer terminals for long periods and can develop headaches or eyestrain. Some duties can be repetitive and boring, such as shelving new or returned materials. Others can be rewarding, such as assisting patrons who are performing computer searches with the use of local and regional library networks. Library assistants may lift and carry books, climb ladders to reach high stacks, and bend low to shelve books on bottom shelves.

Library assistants in school libraries work regular school hours. Those in public libraries and college and university libraries also work weekends, evenings, and some holidays. About 60 percent of library assistants work part time, making the job appealing to retirees, students, and others interested in flexible schedules.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Library assistants receive most of their training on the job. No formal education is required, although familiarity with computers is helpful.

**Education and training.** Training requirements for library assistants are generally minimal; most libraries prefer to hire workers with a high school diploma or GED, although libraries also hire high school students for these positions. No formal postsecondary training is expected. Some employers hire individuals with experience in other clerical jobs; others train inexperienced workers on the job.

**Other qualifications.** Given the extensive use of electronic resources in libraries, computer skills are needed for most jobs; knowledge of databases and other library automation systems is especially useful. Library assistants should be able to pay close attention to detail, as the proper shelving or storage of materials is essential.

**Advancement.** Library assistants usually advance by assuming added responsibilities. Many begin by performing simple jobs such as shelving books or adding new books and periodicals to the database when they arrive. After gaining experience, they may move into positions that allow them to interact with patrons, such as staffing the circulation desk. Experienced assistants may be able to advance to library technician positions, which involve more responsibility. Eventually they may advance to supervise a public service or technical service area. Advancement opportunities are greater in large libraries.

### Employment

Library assistants held about 116,000 jobs in 2006. More than half of these workers were employed by local governments in public libraries; most of the remaining employees worked in school, college, and university libraries. Many of these jobs are part time.



Library assistants reshelve books after they are returned.

**Projections data from the National Employment Matrix**

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Library assistants, clerical.....	43-4121	116,000	125,000	9,100	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*.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of library assistants is expected to grow about as fast as average. Prospects should be good because many workers leave these jobs and need to be replaced.

**Employment change.** The number of library assistants is expected to increase by 8 percent between 2006 and 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Efforts to contain costs in local governments and academic institutions of all types will slow overall growth in library services, but may result in the hiring of more library support staff, who are paid less than librarians and who take on more responsibility. Because library assistants work for public institutions, they are not directly affected by the ups and downs of the business cycle, but they may be affected by changes in the level of government funding for libraries.

**Job prospects.** Each year, many people leave this relatively low-paying occupation for other occupations that offer higher pay or full-time work. This creates good job opportunities for those who want to become library assistants.

**Earnings**

Median hourly earnings of library assistants were \$10.40 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.07 and

\$13.45. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.77, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$16.73.

**Related Occupations**

Library assistants, store materials and help customers retrieve it. File clerks have similar duties. Library assistants also work closely with library technicians in providing library services to patrons.

**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, P.O. Box 42048, Mesa, AZ 85274-2048. Internet: <http://colt.ucr.edu>
- American Library Association, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611.

Internet:

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

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