

# A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

By Tim Wojcik [librarians.guide@about.com](mailto:librarians.guide@about.com)

<http://librarians.about.com/library/weekly/aa052801.htm>  
<http://librarians.about.com/library/weekly/aa061201a.htm>  
<http://librarians.about.com/library/weekly/aa061201b.htm>  
<http://librarians.about.com/library/weekly/aa070701a.htm>  
<http://librarians.about.com/library/weekly/aa070701b.htm>

*NOTE: This wonderful, multi-part document disappeared from About.com. Fortunately, I had printed out a copy and have re-typed it here as a single document. I have the permission of the author to do so. Since this article was written around 2000 or so, some of the information has probably changed, and there's probably even additional librarian job titles. Some I can think of include: **Genomics Librarian**, **Hospital Librarian**, as well as the other titles listed on these webpages, [The A B C's of Library Careers](#), and [Job Titles](#). The "[Medical Librarianship: Help Save a Life!](#)" section is a list of the promotional materials I handed out for a university's Career Development Day, including the "[The Dream Career](#)" brochure I wrote.*

There are still traditional librarian jobs such as cataloger or reference librarian. But increasingly, current jobs are including non-traditional components. In the library world with its need to adopt leading edge technologies to sort, charge, and offer content, it is no surprise that whole new job titles have developed at an increasing rate.

This is Part 1 of a glossary of current library job titles. These descriptions will include core component responsibilities and also functions that often accompany a job of this description.

- **Access Services** – This term is an update of the traditional “circulation” function. Circulation involves the movement of books and materials through the lending cycle of shelf, to patron, to return, and back to the shelf. This would include management of remote storage facilities, and access for persons with physical disabilities. In addition, access services often include these functions: managing reserves, building security, scheduling of student circulation staff, and responsibility for routine machine maintenance. Heads of access services have some responsibility for circulation statistics, and perhaps full reporting to the university or the director.
- **Acquisitions** – Responsibility is the purchasing process. Involves the functions of ordering materials, verifying receipt of items purchased, authorizing payment for the materials, and working with vendors. The acquisitions librarians works closely with the collection development folks, or may actually perform degrees of collection development. Often, serials acquisition is included in acquisitions. Increasingly, acquisitions is the department which handles the business of licensing electronic materials. A knowledge of MARC and Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2) is often required to perform effectively.
- **Administration** – Depending on the size of the library, these kinds of positions can be as complex as budget advisor, to functions as simple as taking messages for everyone. Many of the responsibilities of the administrative assistant apply, including “excellent oral and

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

written communications skills”. Use of word processing software, spreadsheet software, and use of a variety of business machines is expected. Experienced administrators usually handle the human resources jobs of the library. As primary library contact, the library office administrator usually becomes the interface with other university of government departments. Usually, the library office manager is the “telephony” expert. Maintenance of the schedule is a common administrative job. Checking invoices, and performing special projects are other common activities. At times, the administrator will take a turn covering at the reference desk to fill a scheduling gap.

- **Archivist** – Primary functions include appraising, describing, classifying, arranging and preserving materials. The materials may or may not be historic, fragile, or intrinsically valuable. Materials may include books, other printed materials, recorded audio, motion pictures, art, antiques, and other archival content. Other duties include retrieving items from the collection for use by patrons, observing due care in the handling of the materials. Other duties are reference work and bibliographic instruction in the subject area, and the creation of exhibits. Responsibilities may revolve around a specific endowed collection. A specific job may be a project which is limited to the establishment/“setting up” of a new collection accepted by the library. Cataloging experience is usually expected. For some extensive or well endowed collections, experience in digital preservation is becoming an expectation. A related job title is *curator*.
- **Cataloger** – Two broader functions of this job are “Information Organization” and “Knowledge Management”. This job usually includes original and complex copy cataloging. The materials may include books and monographs, serials, electronic resources, and foreign language materials. The tools used to establish and maintain “authority control” over the material include AACR2, LCSH, LCRI, and the DDC along with other vendor tools. Experience with OCLC is expected. Knowledge of current practices, new technologies, and trends in bibliographic control is expected. Other duties may include database maintenance, supervision of cataloging assistants, formulating department policies, and reference desk coverage. The cataloger is most often associated with the *Technical Services* department.

Here is a continuation of librarian job title descriptions. This second group includes three current library jobs which are new, technology caused functions: the Digital Resources Librarian, the Distance Learning Librarian, and the Electronic Resources Librarian. The Government Documents Librarian is also affected by technology since the documents themselves are increasingly being made available only electronically. Only the Collection Development function looks relatively unchanged.

- **Collection Development** – aka Collection Management, or Resource Development. The many facets of this job require strong collaboration and coordination skills. The collections develop to support the teaching and research needs of the institution. Maintaining a good relationship with faculty and students as well as many departments in the library is required for success. Collection management includes the selection, assessment, de-selection (weeding) and preservation of the collection. Some overlap

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

with the Acquisitions department may include purchasing, processing of new books/materials, and inventory control responsibilities. Other responsibilities may be assessing the library's collection and selection policies, developing new collections for new academic programs or fields of study to which the institution commits, reporting to upper library and university management on collection development and management issues, and contributing to accreditation reports.

The collection development librarian is expected to have some background in dealing with the publishing trade, including online resources. They may negotiate contracts with vendors and other content providers, and monitor compliance of the contracts. They should have experience with institution and library budgeting and accounting practices. They will help to plan the budget. Also, they are likely to coordinate the collection development work of the staff and perhaps manage some staff, both full-time and part-time. Keeping an eye to the future, they should have a sense of mission and direction of content delivery in coming years, specifically including the viability of digital library holdings. They may have liaison reference responsibility and reference desk duty. The position may require a second masters (aka advanced degree).

- **Digital Resources** – Still relatively new, this position has also been called a Coordinator of Digital Resources (or Digital Initiatives), or a Library Specialist in Digital Collections, or a Manager of Electronic or Online Archives. Note: Some libraries refer to electronic resources (databases) as digital resources. This title does not involve electronic resources collection development although they are related and may be combined in some library environments.

Components of work in a digital library can include:

- Digitizing documents, photographs, and other audio and visual resources.
- Managing the hardware and the software used to deliver these resources, including networked access to the digital collections.
- Presenting digitized collections effectively on the Web.
- Organizing the metadata. Ensuring compliance with copyright requirements.
- May perform higher administrative projects such as grant writing and cost controls.

Since the technology is still relatively new, knowledge of the methods brings the responsibility to educate others in digital library practices. In some cases, this librarian shows users how to “work” the machines to obtain usable results. Recognizing digital opportunities, planning them, developing them, launching their initial release and managing them is another work cycle representation of this position. Preferred skills include experience in archival methods, EAD (encoded archival description), and in some cases formal archival training. Technical experience in systems is expected. UNIX, Windows NT, Java, Linux, Perl, and XML are some of the software and programming terms seen as preferred experiences. Much digitizing work is focused on a specific collection, perhaps funded by a donor who is providing the content and/or funding. For this reason, it's not unusual for digital library positions to be offered on a project, limited time basis. Technical leadership is often noted as a preference. The MLS is almost always required.

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

- **Distance Learning** – Other titles for this kind of position are Coordinator of Distributed Learning, Librarian for Distributive Learning, Distant Services Librarian, and Outreach Services Librarian. Responsibilities include planning, development, coordination, and service of distance learners. Is likely to work in collaboration with contacts at distance learning centers. Must be knowledgeable of online resources, the licensing agreements that the library holds for these resources, and how to maximize use of these licenses for the distance learner. Collaborate with librarians and staff to provide effective distribution of printed materials, fiche/microform, etc. to distance learners. Answers reference questions from distance learners. As distance learning is increasing in use, this job is likely to feature an upward trend in activity and complexity. As such, the distance learning librarian is expected to look for opportunities to “expand the business”.

Collaboration is one of the key skills for this position. Success means working well with various departments and administrations to satisfy distance learner needs. Other skills include the ability to develop Web based instructional materials and tools. Also, providing library instruction and developing learning modules for distance learner library users. Experience in circulation and ILL is helpful.

- **Electronic Resources** – Also called an Electronic Services Librarian. This position is responsible for the development, maintenance, and management of the library’s electronic resources such as electronic journals. Identifies and evaluates electronic resources. May negotiate with vendors on licensing agreements and reviews costs and usage of the resource. Has responsibility for the successful integration of electronic resources. Is likely to use Web based methods to help with the ongoing integration. Develops and/or maintains statistics on usage of these resources.

Skills include experience in using and evaluating online journals. Experience with licensing online journals would be helpful. Webpage development and HTML/XML skills would be helpful, as well as collaborative and communication skills.

- **Government Documents** – The responsibilities of this position include specialized reference service for users with USA and international government document and map needs. Provides guidance to students and faculty in both printed and electronic government documents and resources. Conducts formal and informal instruction to library users in government document use. Should be conversant with any special GIS (geographic information systems) programs or tools that the library offers. Often, responsibility for the library’s map collection is a government documents department job. Maintains awareness and responsiveness to trends in the changing methods of the USA government’s delivery and allocation of government documents. Fosters good relationships with other USA government document depository libraries.

Desired skills include extensive understanding of a wide variety of print, CD-ROM, and electronic government documents. Knowledge of population and commerce census data. Experience using GIS programs would be helpful. Web authoring and HTML/XML experience helpful. Instruction experience and good communications skills are required.

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

The glossary of librarian job title descriptions continues. Any of these positions is likely to involve work on committees. These may be either a special committee working on a project related to librarians function, or on a standing committee, or a special purpose committee to evaluate applicants, etc. Depending on the institution, any of these librarians may also be required to be professionally active through publishing and other efforts to retain their faculty status position. And, any of these positions may involve supervision of full-time, part-time, or student employees.

- **Instruction Librarian** – aka Instruction Services Librarian. This librarian is responsible for teaching students and faculty how to use the resources of the library to accomplish their academic goals and specific research tasks. Ways that instruction is accomplished include identifying user needs, developing instruction programs, and evaluating the instruction effort. In a public library, instruction may include literacy programming. The instruction librarian's first focus is the new student or new faculty member who is not familiar with library research methods. Instruction is both formal and informal. Some instruction sessions may be given to larger groups in a classroom setting. Other sessions may include two or three students crowded around a terminal taking notes. Instruction can also be a formal semester length class earning credit hours towards graduation. This involves class teaching plans, teaching, grading, and office hours for students.

Depending on the size of the library, the instruction librarian may be expected to demonstrate research methods for specific subjects such as business, health, engineering, or social sciences. This kind of instruction would demonstrate how to find, access, and use the resources of the specific subject. Previous instruction experience is helpful. Teaching experience with the age level of the user is helpful. Web authoring skills are a common requirement to produce online instruction aids. May have liaison reference responsibility and reference desk duty.

- **Liaison Librarian** – The liaison librarian is primarily responsible for the needs of the constituency that uses their subject's resources. (Subject may include a whole department.) The library looks to the liaison librarian for leadership in the collection development and maintenance of their subjects. Depending on the size of the supporting school, the liaison librarian may have responsibility for one subject or several subjects. For example, a liaison librarian may be a Science Librarian, or a Chemistry Librarian, or a Health and Science Librarian. Librarians with varied backgrounds may be the liaison for several dissimilar subjects such as English and Geology, or Anthropology and Accounting. The liaison librarian is the primary contact at the library for faculty who have collection development responsibility in that subject area. Instructors who have special needs in that subject will contact the liaison librarian for help. Students with complex reference questions that are not completed by the reference desk will be referred to the liaison librarian for a complete answer.

The liaison librarian must have a demonstrated competency in their subject. A second masters in the subject may be necessary. For example, a business liaison librarian may be required to have an MBA. Since collection development is a core role for the liaison

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

librarian, a knowledge of the budget process and acquisitions is helpful. Depending on the library, previous experience in an academic library may be required. The liaison is considered a reference librarian and typically is expected to take their turns at the reference desk.

- **Managing Librarian** – This librarian is called the Director, Head Librarian, University or College Librarian, or Dean of Library Services. Lower echelon positions include Assistant Librarian, Head of a specific library department, Supervisor, or Coordinator. With any of these titles comes the library's investment of authority in the position. This librarian conducts the library's business at a higher level in terms of funding and personnel responsibility. Planning, setting goals, the budget, and overall responsibility of a department or the library are the typical functions of a managing librarian. Personnel responsibilities may include recruiting, hiring, approval or review of employee performance and discipline, and termination of library employees. Public relations, liaison with the university or community, and ambassador for the library are other roles of the managing librarian. Fund raising is another important job. Other responsibilities may include policy development, development of standards, evaluation of programs, and measurement of progress towards strategic objectives. Depending on the size of the library, a managing librarian may have some amount of functional responsibility such as a regular turn at the reference desk or handling calls if the office manager/administrative assistant is away.

Previous supervisory experience in a library is required. Previous experience in personnel, budget writing, public relations and other functional areas are preferred. A strong background in the automation and information technology aspects of a library are preferred. Often, five years supervisory experience is a stated benchmark of experience. A second masters degree or a management degree may be helpful. "Scholarly and professional achievement", aka writing in scholarly publication and work on regional or national organizations, may be required.

- **Preservation Librarian** – aka Collections Conservator, Preservation Technician, or Preservation Services Librarian. This librarian is responsible for maintaining the usability of the collection regardless of the age of the material. Functions include the repair of materials, the strengthening of some individual items through a variety of techniques and ingredient applications, and the transfer of the image of the material to a more durable medium. Management of this function includes planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the department's performance. May include responsibility for the library's binding function. Libraries with older collections, rare materials, or unique irreplaceable materials will naturally have more need for a preservation librarian. This position includes more physical contact with the collection.

Hands-on skills in a variety of preservation techniques are desirable. In some cases, physical dexterity is required for competent performance of routine tasks. Examples range from traditional book mending skills, fragile materials handling skills, to knowledge of collection treatments (i.e. chemical), preservation photocopying and microformatting. Experience in digital imaging and a variety of computer skills is

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

helpful. The successful candidate is knowledgeable of the trends in library preservation and conservation. Note: An MLS is **not always required** for this position.

- **Public Services Librarian** – The Public Services Librarian position is open to interpretation. The core components of this job include reference service, instruction services, and collection development. Depending on the size of the library, other responsibilities may include vendor relations, working with the budget process, library promotions, and interlibrary loan. Work that involves serving the public can include directional assistance, helping patrons to print, conducting tours, and perhaps circulation functions. Often, this is the first job that a new librarian accepts. The goodness in this position is the opportunity to develop skills in a wide variety of functions. The public services librarian position is much more prevalent in the public library than the academic library.

Expected skills include computer skills, keyboard/10 key skills, knowledge of the classification system in use at the library (Dewey, LC, or other), and a certain stamina to perform physically for hours at a time. People skills are especially important since the service responsibilities are provided to the widest variety of people from young to old, sophisticated, new to the country, or in immediate need of information services. A Jack/Jacqueline of all trades type of job? – well yes.

- **Reference Librarian** – aka Information Services Librarian. The Reference Librarian helps the library user find the information they seek. The finding part of this job includes physically locating requested materials. The traditional workplace for a reference librarian is at the reference desk where library users ask questions (live and unrehearsed) and the librarian provides “while you wait” service. Other sources of reference work include questions via the telephone, email, postal service mail, and referrals from other staff, management, or other libraries. The reference librarian is expected to have an in-depth knowledge of the library’s collection. Improving the reader’s advisory services, and collection development are usually included in the reference librarian’s responsibilities. Since the reference desk is in the public access area of the library, public services become a part of the job. Directional assistance, help using the machines, and random communications tasks are all part of a busy reference desk. On the spot bibliographic instruction is another daily task of the reference librarian.

The first requirement for this position is a thorough knowledge of the available information resources. This includes print and electronic resources. Providing bibliographic and research instruction is essential to the position. This position requires good people skills. Good communication skills including listening skills are needed to perform the reference interview effectively. Previous library experience in any other function such as cataloging or circulation is very helpful. A reference position in an academic library may call for previous experience in an academic library.

- **Systems Librarian** – aka Electronic Systems Librarian, Library Systems Coordinator, or Library Technology Coordinator. The Systems Librarian maintains and works to improve the library computing systems. The computing systems are often integrated

## A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles

systems. Integrated systems are a blend of older and newer software tools which support the library automation, opac, and electronic information distribution functions. Since most library systems have become networked arrangements, one of the core responsibilities of the Systems Librarian is the smooth functioning of the system to onsite and remote users. Depending on the state of the library's system, the Systems Librarian may be expected to develop new methods to distribute the information, integrate new technology with existing hardware and software, or plan for the next generation of systems. This librarian is often responsible for the maintenance of the local area network. As well, the distribution of any CD-ROM based databases is usually a Systems Librarian task. Other responsibilities may include coordination of user training, interface with the organization's Information Technology department, and handling vendor relations.

Systems experience is necessary. Experience with applications such as Windows/NT, Novell, UNIX, and VMS is often a stated requirement. TCP/IP experience is essential. Familiarity with Sybase, SQL, HTML and XML, JavaScript, and CGI is desirable. Web server management experience is very helpful. Since a library is not inclined to change their primary automaton vendor, many libraries will request candidates with experience in specific vendors products such as Sirsi, Endeavor, GEAC, or Oracle. Note: **MLS not always required** for this position, although the MLS can qualify the candidate for a higher paying position such as Professor status.

- **Web Development Librarian** – aka Webmaster, Web Administrator, Web Coordinator. The Web Development Librarian integrates the functions of the world wide web for the maximum benefit of the library user. The improvement of the library website is the overall objective. Depending on the size of the library and the complexity of the website(s), the Web Development Librarian may be responsible for developing new methods to use the WWW to the library's advantage. Or, this librarian may have a more entry level responsibility of ensuring that existing webpages are fully functioning and free of "dead links". Other responsibilities can include editing webpages to ensure consistency of navigation throughout the library's many webpages using established standards and style. Both public and academic libraries need Web Development Librarians.

Skills include experience at web authoring. Experience with HTML is essential. Experience with XML and other advanced scripting tools is desirable. Background with a large website including many webpages is desirable. A good command of the written language is essential. Some libraries desire knowledge of a network application (i.e., UNIX). Experience with relational databases is helpful. A thorough knowledge of the uses, capabilities and limits of the Internet is essential.

- **Youth Services Librarian** – aka Childrens Librarian. A related title is Young Adult Librarian. The Youth Services Librarian provides focused attention to the library needs of the young library user. Development of the Youth collection is a core responsibility. Equally important are the functions of storytimes for young readers and the very young who do not yet read. Other typical programming includes a summer reading program, entertainments such as puppet shows or musical performers, and group tours with



## **A Glossary of Librarian Job Titles**

storytime. Other responsibilities include maintaining readers advisories, organizing and maintaining the various school's accelerated reading lists, and networking with local schoolteachers, homeschoolers, and parents. Another important function is to develop programs that increase library use. Most Youth Services Librarians also take regular turns at the reference desk and perform many general public services functions for the library.

The most helpful skills for this position include an affinity for youth. Skills in the performing arts are very helpful. Skills in the graphic arts are helpful. Management of large numbers of children is essential. Special communications skills useful with young patrons is necessary for creating trust with the children and their parents or caregivers.