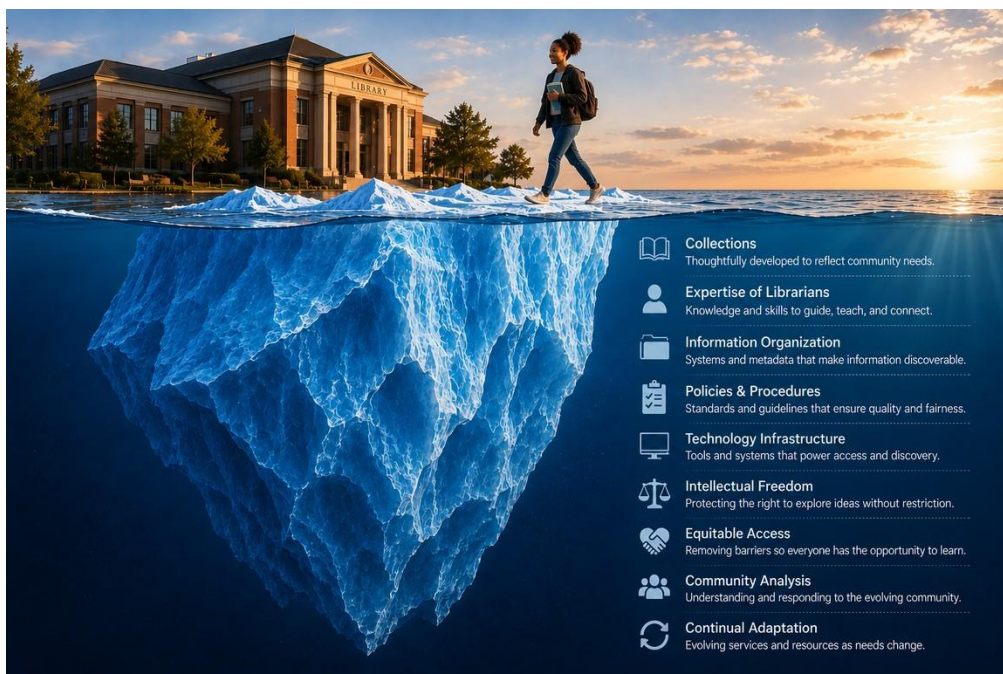




OVERDUE | ANSWERS

Originally published on July 14, 2026

Every day, people come into libraries in search of answers. Some are looking for a novel. Others need help printing a form, applying for a job, learning English, or finding reliable health information. Some are simply curious. Whatever brings them through the door, every search begins with a question.

Behind every answer is an entire framework designed to make it possible.

That framework doesn't happen by accident. It depends on collections that are thoughtfully developed to reflect the needs of the community, information that is carefully organized so it can be discovered, and librarians with the expertise to guide people toward the resources that best address their needs. It also depends on equitable access so everyone has the opportunity to learn, intellectual freedom so ideas can be explored without restriction, and continual adaptation as communities and their questions evolve.

Individually, these elements may seem unrelated. Together, they reveal a larger purpose. Collections, organization, expertise, access, intellectual freedom, and adaptation are not separate responsibilities. They are interconnected parts of the same framework, each helping connect people with reliable answers.

Most people will never see the framework working behind the scenes. They won't see the collection policies, the organization of information, the expertise of librarians, or the guiding principles that make their search possible.

They'll simply leave with the information, resources, or guidance they're seeking.

The framework stays invisible so the answers don't have to.

And perhaps that's the greatest achievement of all.

This concludes OVERDUE.

Thank you for joining me on this exploration of libraries and librarianship.

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OVERDUE | ADAPTATION

Originally published on July 7, 2026

People often ask whether libraries are still relevant, but that's the wrong question. The better question is, "How have libraries stayed relevant?" The answer lies in a pattern that has emerged throughout OVERDUE.

Libraries connect people with information, ideas, and one another.

Their mission never changed.

ACCESS: Removing barriers to information.

TRUST: Adapting services to community needs.

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM: Protecting the freedom to explore ideas.

COLLECTIONS: Continually evolving to reflect community needs.

EXPERTISE: Connecting people with the information they need.

Across all five pieces, one idea emerges: libraries preserve their value not by resisting change, but by adapting their methods while remaining faithful to their mission.

Libraries have adapted to the world around them. As technology evolved, they embraced digital collections, streaming media, and online databases. As communities changed, they expanded

multilingual services and workforce programs. Librarians expanded their expertise by teaching digital skills, assisting with government services, and helping job seekers.

The greatest strength of libraries isn't that they've resisted change.

It's that they've embraced change without abandoning the principles that made them valuable in the first place.

Their tools, collections, services, and even the role of the librarian have evolved.

Their mission has not.

For centuries, libraries have adapted to meet changing community needs without abandoning their mission to connect people with information, ideas, and one another.

That is why libraries are not relics of the past, but essential institutions for the future.

Next week, we'll conclude this series by bringing everything we've learned together.

This has been OVERDUE. Come back next week to keep your account in good standing.

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OVERDUE | EXPERTISE

Originally published on June 30, 2026

As OVERDUE begins to wind down, it's time to talk about the people who make everything we've discussed possible: librarians.

We've already discussed the qualifications that prepare someone to become a librarian, but not the expertise they bring to their work. Librarians aren't simply trained to find information; they're trained to evaluate it, organize it, and connect people with the information they actually need.

Sure, librarians spend part of their day sorting and shelving books, but that's only a small part of the job. Most of their time is spent helping patrons find what they actually need, and they're exceptionally skilled at it.

This is what librarians do all day.

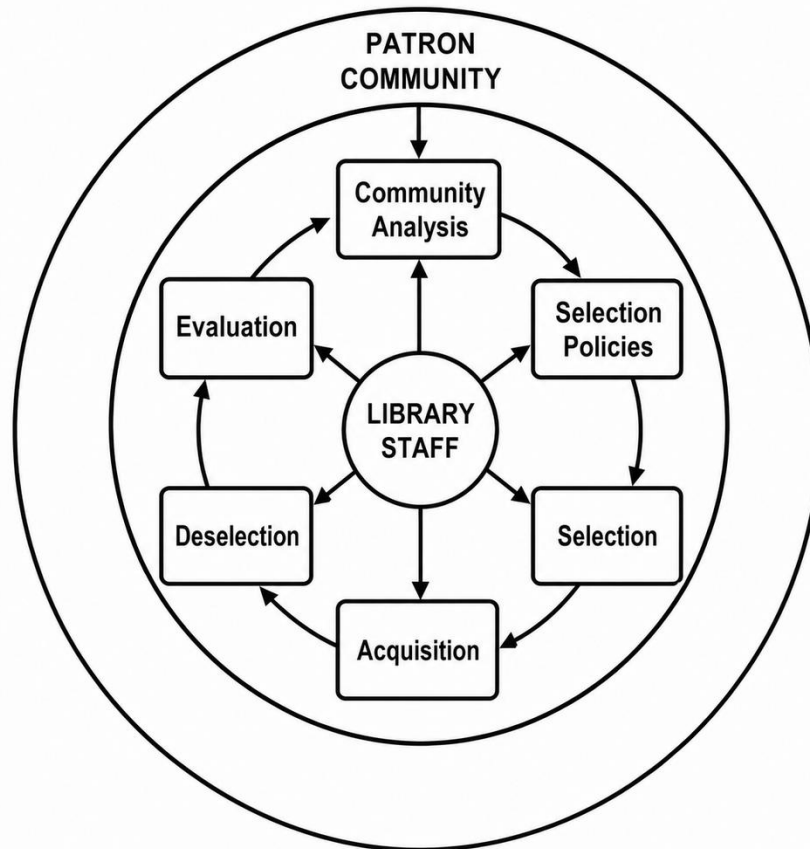
Librarians must understand people, information, systems, and communities. They know that patrons rarely ask for exactly what they need, that not all information is equal, that information is organized within carefully designed systems, and that every community has its own recurring needs. One practice that brings all of this expertise together is the reference interview.

During a reference interview, librarians look beyond the question they're asked to understand the need behind it. Before offering an answer, they ask a few questions of their own to clarify what will actually be most helpful.

Libraries are remarkable institutions, but their greatest resource isn't found on the shelves or in the catalog. Its greatest resource is the people whose expertise turns their mission into everyday service, connecting information with the needs of their communities.

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OVERDUE | COLLECTIONS

Originally published on June 23, 2026

Have you ever wondered how libraries choose their collections? I used to think whoever ran the library simply decided what to buy and what to replace. The reality is far more deliberate. In fact, it is easier to describe library collections as managed rather than accumulated.

Collection decisions begin with a library's mission and collection development policies, both of which are shaped by the needs of the community. One of the first questions asked when considering new materials is whether they support that mission.

Collection development policies outline how materials are selected, challenged, and removed. Libraries also rely on reviews, patron requests, and usage data. In large library systems, collection decisions are often made by committees; in smaller libraries, they may be made by a single administrator.

Most libraries follow a six-stage cycle:

Community Analysis → Collection Development Policy → Selection → Acquisition → Evaluation → Weeding (Deselection)

The cycle matters because it ensures that collections evolve alongside the communities they serve. Materials are added, evaluated, and sometimes removed based on changing needs, usage patterns, and available resources.

What makes this process so important is that it demonstrates that library collections do not happen by accident. Every item on a shelf or in a digital catalog is there because someone evaluated how it serves the community.

In other words, libraries are not simply repositories of information. They are carefully managed collections shaped by policy, professional judgment, and community needs. What may look like a room full of books is actually the result of thousands of decisions made to serve a community's changing needs.

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OVERDUE | INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Originally published on June 16, 2026

Libraries are often associated with books, technology, and community programs, but one of the profession's most enduring commitments is something less visible: intellectual freedom.

The American Library Association defines intellectual freedom as “the rights of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment,” and honestly, I could not have said it better myself. Few public institutions are as committed to protecting an individual's right to seek information and form their own conclusions.

People visit libraries seeking information, resources, and expertise. Libraries make those resources available without requiring patrons to justify their interests or adopt a particular viewpoint. They support this principle not because they endorse every idea contained in their collections, but because access to information allows individuals to form their own conclusions.

Without intellectual freedom, access to information becomes dependent on someone else's decision about what is appropriate, acceptable, or worth knowing. Intellectual freedom recognizes that people cannot evaluate ideas, challenge assumptions, or expand their understanding if they are prevented from encountering information in the first place.

Intellectual freedom ensures that individuals can pursue their questions without someone else deciding which questions are acceptable to ask. Whether a patron is researching a health concern, exploring a career change, studying history, or satisfying simple curiosity, the role of the library is not to determine the right conclusion but to support the search for information. In practice, that means creating an environment where inquiry is encouraged and a wide range of perspectives can be explored. The library's role is not to direct thought, but to ensure that individuals have the freedom and resources necessary to think for themselves.

For librarians, intellectual freedom is closely connected to professional ethics. Like everyone else, librarians have personal beliefs, opinions, and preferences. Professionally, however, they are expected to separate those views from their obligation to serve the public. Collection decisions are guided by established policies, community needs, and professional standards rather than personal beliefs. The goal is not to tell people what to think, but to ensure they have the opportunity to think for themselves.

Libraries earn trust not by promoting a particular viewpoint, but by protecting every individual's right to explore ideas, ask questions, and pursue knowledge freely. In a society where information is abundant and opinions are often polarized, the commitment to helping people think for themselves remains one of the library profession's core values.

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OVERDUE | TRUST

Originally published on June 9, 2026

In an era when trust in institutions, media, technology platforms, and even expertise is increasingly fragmented, libraries remain among the most trusted public institutions. We've established that libraries are far more than repositories for books, so what keeps people coming back? Is it computer access, support from skilled staff, or volunteer-led programs? The truth is that these services are possible because libraries and librarians have spent generations earning trust.

In 2021, the American Library Association reaffirmed that libraries exist to provide free and equitable access to information, resources, services, and technology for everyone in the communities they serve, especially those facing barriers to education, employment, housing, and opportunity.

This commitment matters because trust is often built through consistency. Libraries have spent generations serving people regardless of income, background, education, or circumstance. Equitable access is about more than making resources available. It requires understanding that communities face different challenges. By identifying barriers and adapting services to meet local needs, libraries demonstrate that they are invested in the success of the people they serve. Over time, that combination of reliability and responsiveness helps transform a public service into a trusted community institution.

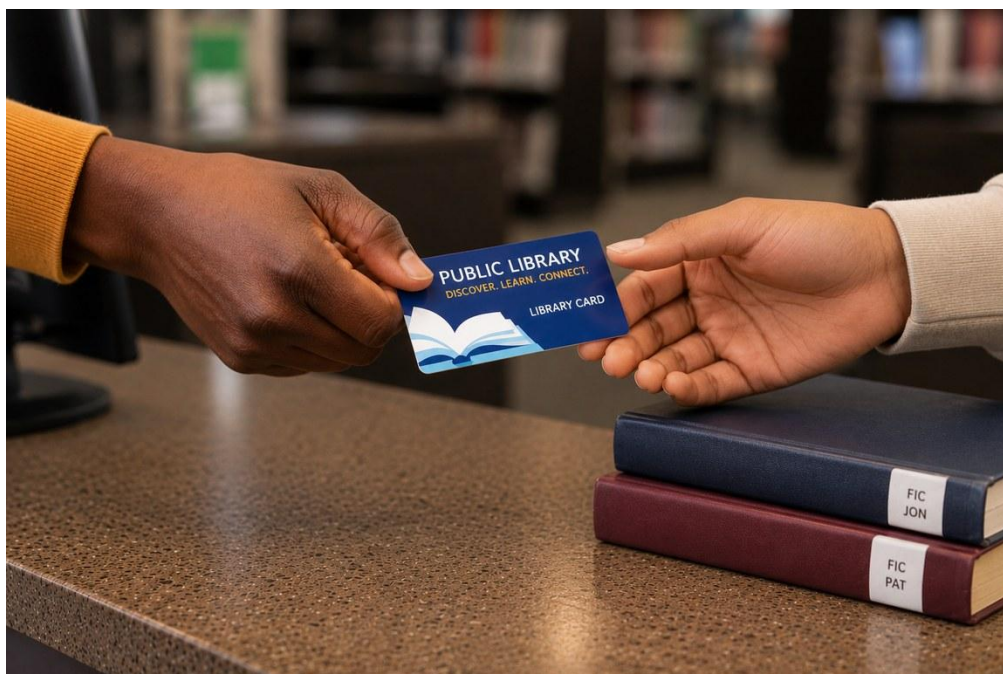
I once asked a KCLS library employee what made their 50-library system so successful. They closely examine the communities they serve and identify local needs, then adapt programs and services to address those needs. In other words, their purpose is not to offer the same services everywhere, but to connect people with information, resources, and opportunities that are meaningful to them.

Trust is rarely built through grand gestures. More often, it develops through countless small interactions over time. A librarian helps someone find reliable information. A volunteer helps a newcomer practice

English. A patron receives assistance navigating technology or applying for a job. Individually, these moments may seem unremarkable. Collectively, they build trust. Libraries earn it by showing up for their communities, adapting to changing needs, and providing access to information, resources, and opportunities without judgment or expectation. I have come to believe that this trust is not a byproduct of their work, but one of their most important achievements.

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OVERDUE | ACCESS

Originally published on June 2, 2026

In the context of libraries, most people hear "access" and think, "The library lets me borrow books for free." As I've continued researching libraries, though, I've started to notice that access appears again and again as a guiding principle behind many library services. Whether the service involves information, technology, expertise, or language support, libraries seem to address a much broader access problem than I initially realized. Here are some examples:

Access to Information – Libraries provide books, periodicals, and databases that many people could not reasonably purchase on their own. A single academic database subscription can cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars annually, while a library card can provide access at no cost.

Access to Technology – Many libraries provide access to computers, the internet, and printing and scanning. In a world where employment, education, government services, and communication increasingly happen online, access to technology has become a prerequisite for access to information.

Access to Expertise – Libraries don't just provide resources, but also people who know how to navigate them. Librarians can be the difference between spending hours learning how to navigate a system and finding information quickly and confidently.

Access Across Languages and Cultures – Many libraries provide multilingual collections and resources. This may include ESL programs, conversation groups, and even translation resources. Information is only useful if people can understand and engage with it.

Why is all of this important?

Each of these services removes a barrier that might otherwise prevent someone from finding information, learning a skill, connecting with a community, or accomplishing a goal. Access to information removes financial barriers. Access to technology removes technical barriers. Access to expertise removes knowledge barriers. Access across languages and cultures removes communication barriers.

Taken together, these examples reveal a broader purpose. Libraries are often described as places that provide resources, but they also provide pathways. They help people move from questions to answers, from uncertainty to understanding, and from need to access.

That is what makes libraries vital community institutions. Their purpose is not simply to store information, but to connect people with it. Rather than repositories of knowledge alone, libraries are systems designed to create pathways between people and the resources they need.

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OVERDUE | INFORMATION LITERACY

Originally published on May 26, 2026

In the mid-1900s, humanity entered a stage in history known as the Information Age, a period marked by the rapid expansion of information technology and, eventually, the internet. It is also called the Digital Age because information fundamentally changed. Where information was once limited to select groups, it is now accessible to nearly everyone. But access to information does not automatically create informed people. Instead, we now live in a world where individuals, organizations, platforms, and algorithms all compete to share information and their interpretation of it. The sources people trust increasingly shapes how they understand health, education, institutions, communities, and one another.

This is where librarians step in. Because libraries serve as community hubs, librarians become familiar with both the questions patrons ask and the resources best suited to answering them. Their role is not simply to locate information, but to guide people through information overload, competing interpretations, and source evaluation using the most reliable resources available. In other words, librarians no longer simply preserve information. They help people critically engage with information. As information becomes faster, fragmented, and harder to evaluate, that role has only grown more essential.

When I attended university, the World Wide Web was still in its infancy, and even within my school library there were already countless online sources to choose from. Accessing information was never the difficult part. The challenge was determining which sources were trustworthy and accurate. At the time, I did not fully appreciate the number of available choices or the complexity involved in evaluating them. But librarians consistently helped me understand the nature of online and published sources. They always knew which publication, database, or journal held the answers I needed. Looking back, I realize they were not simply helping me locate information. They were teaching me how to evaluate it.

Librarians do not simply know where information exists. They continuously evaluate, organize, contextualize, and make information accessible so communities can better understand, engage with, and succeed in the world around them. In an age where everyone competes for your attention, information literacy has become more than an academic skill. It is now a civic and personal necessity. The information people consume increasingly shapes how they understand institutions, communities, and each other. Librarians help people separate insight from noise, evidence from opinion, and trustworthy information from misinformation. More importantly, they help communities think critically about the information they share and consume.

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OVERDUE | COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Originally published on May 19, 2026

In a previous version of OVERDUE, I talked about how libraries are more than simple book repositories. This time, though, I wanted to better understand what libraries are actually expected to be, so I turned to an unlikely resource: recent librarian job descriptions.

More specifically, I looked at positions requiring candidates to hold an MLIS degree, since not all library jobs are librarian roles, nor does all library employment require an MLIS.

After reviewing several recent librarian job descriptions, I noticed recurring themes in what employers were looking for. Today's librarians are being hired not simply as circulation experts, but as crucial liaisons between library patrons and the community at large. The roles librarians fill include systems thinkers, community connectors, and information stewards.

These jobs consistently emphasize leadership, community responsiveness, and cross-functional coordination. While books and collections do matter, they are often framed as infrastructure for larger human goals. So forget the mental image of the librarian behind the desk shushing you when you talk. Today's librarians are expected to connect patrons with resources and support information journeys.

Observation 1: Libraries appear increasingly responsive to community needs.

One role discussed developing relationships with community organizations and connecting neighbors with relevant resources. Another emphasized designing programs around the specific needs and interests of local populations, particularly teens, young adults, and underserved groups.

Taken together, the postings suggest that modern libraries are not operating as one-size-fits-all institutions. Instead, they appear increasingly shaped by the unique needs of the communities they serve.

What stood out most was the emphasis on adaptability. Librarians are not simply expected to maintain systems and collections. They are expected to listen, respond, adjust, and evolve alongside their communities.

Observation 2: Libraries increasingly function as civic infrastructure.

One role described libraries as spaces centered around literacy, lifelong learning, equity, and community wellbeing. Another emphasized creating welcoming environments where people could access resources, educational opportunities, and support services.

What surprised me was how often the language resembled civic infrastructure more than traditional educational institutions. The postings framed libraries less as passive repositories of information and more as active public systems designed to support communities in practical and human ways.

The more I read, the less libraries begin to feel like buildings filled with books and more like community-centered institutions focused on access, support, learning, and connection.

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OVERDUE | INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

Originally published on May 12, 2026

Librarianship overlaps heavily with a category of work known as information architecture. To better understand information architecture, I looked at several definitions, but one stood out to me:

“Information architecture (IA) is the discipline of making information findable and understandable. It includes searching, browsing, categorizing and presenting relevant and contextual information to help people understand their surroundings and find what they’re looking for online and in the real world.”

This definition captures the breadth of IA in both technical and non-technical settings. In technical roles, think user experience (UX) design, taxonomies, and data architects. In non-technical roles, think content strategy, business analysis, and librarianship.

The more I learn about IA, the more I realize how much of my own career has revolved around it without me fully recognizing it at the time.

In one role, I built and maintained SharePoint Online sites that housed sales information used by employees to sell software and services. I also created tags and taxonomies for those sites and their documents. Applying metadata improved search visibility and made information easier to discover.

In another role as a content strategist, my job was to make support content easier for customers to find and use. I accomplished this by reviewing user feedback, listening to support staff discuss their experiences with customers, and analyzing how content performed to better understand what people actually needed.

Now imagine you're standing in a library looking for signs of information architecture. Look around because it's everywhere.

You search an electronic catalog for a book about gardens, and the system returns a call number showing where the book is located. Alongside it, you may also see books about horticulture, trees, and greenhouses because related subjects were intentionally connected to help users discover more information.

When you walk to the shelves, you notice books on similar topics grouped nearby because library systems were designed to keep related subjects together.

Libraries are often described as places that store information, but I've realized that misses the point. A library is not just a storage system. It is a retrieval system.

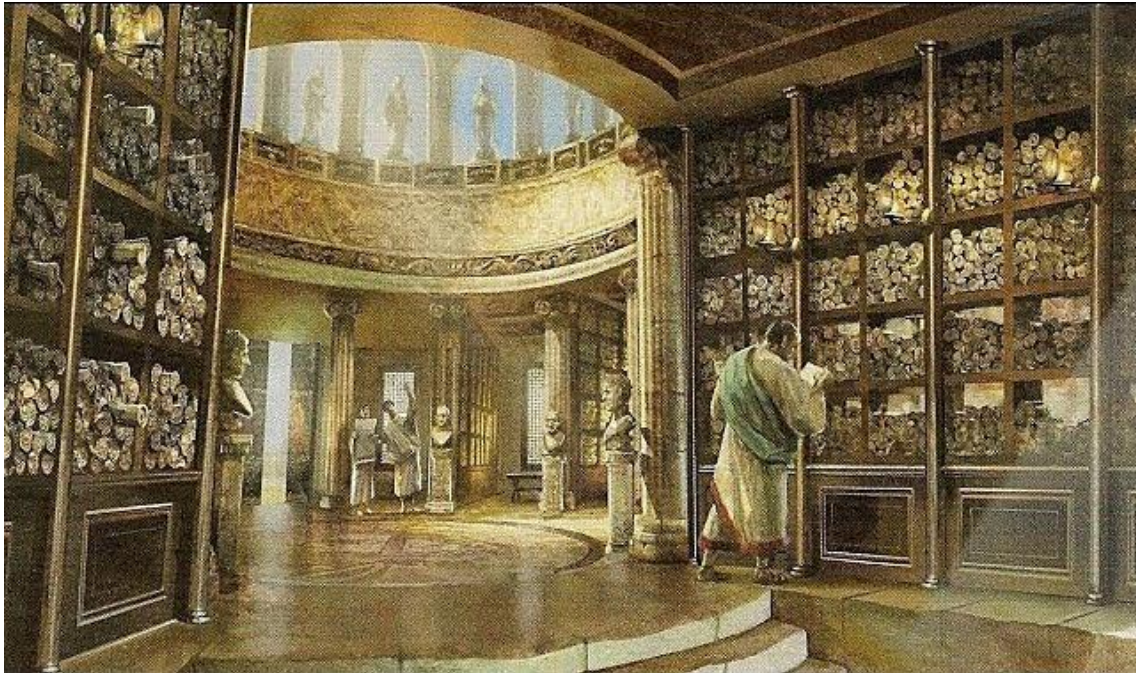
The shelves, metadata, catalogs, taxonomies, databases, and even the librarians themselves are all part of a larger structure designed to answer a single question:

"How do we help people find and understand what they need?"

That, at its core, is information architecture.

This has been OVERDUE. Come back next week to keep your account in good standing.

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OVERDUE | MYTH BUSTING

Originally published on May 5, 2026

I used to believe libraries were, in the strictest sense, book repositories. What I've come to understand is that they are far more than that, now serving as vital community resource centers. That gap felt worth exploring through a few common misconceptions and sharing what I've learned.

Myth #1: Libraries were always meant for public use

Libraries didn't begin as places for public use. Often cited as the very first major library, The Library of Ashurbanipal, built in the 7th century BCE, was a royal collection, built to gather knowledge from conquered lands and was reserved for the king and his inner circle. The Library of Alexandria, founded in the 3rd century BCE by Ptolemy I Soter, also served a select group of elite scholars rather than the public.

For much of history, knowledge wasn't something you accessed. It was controlled.

Access began to shift in the mid-1800s, when the United Kingdom's Public Libraries Act of 1850 enabled free, tax-supported libraries. Over time, libraries evolved from quiet collections into active, living spaces that teach, connect, and support their communities.

Today, libraries offer far more than information. They provide guidance, opportunity, and a sense of place for those who need it.

Myth #2: Librarians can only work in a library

Each U.S. state has its own requirements, and many require formal training, including an MLS or MLIS.

Graduates are trained as information professionals with skills that translate across industries. For example, tech companies hire taxonomists to shape how content is organized, discovered, and understood at scale, improving how people interact with information every day.

You'll find MLS and MLIS graduates in technology, data, marketing, publishing, museums, archives, government, and nonprofits. Anywhere information needs to be organized and shared clearly, they have a role.

In many ways, they are architects of information.

Myth #3: Libraries are places to read and study only

Libraries will always be known for books and quiet spaces. But that's only part of the story.

Many offer career support, training, meeting spaces, workshops, classes, language programs, and internet access. They are evolving into community engagement centers shaped by the needs of the people they serve.

For some, that means help finding a job or building new skills. For others, it's access to technology, language learning, or a place to connect with others.

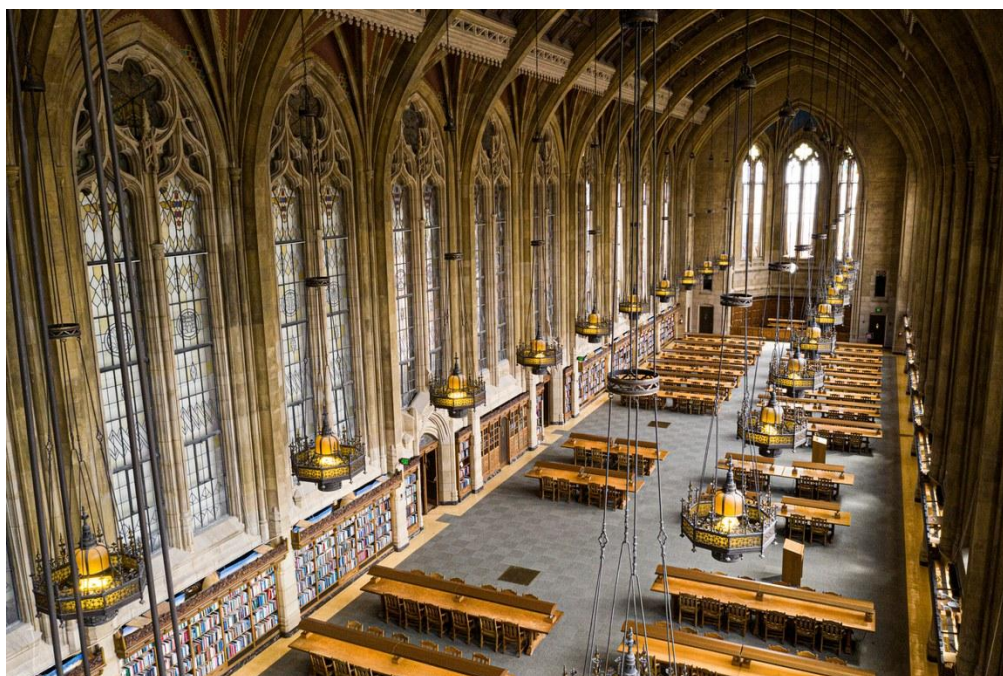
And for many, it's something even more basic: a reliable, welcoming space in a world that doesn't always offer one.

In many cases, libraries are not just resources but anchors within their communities.

I hope you've enjoyed exploring these myths. Next week, I'll explore the tech side of an MLS/MLIS and how it connects to my experience.

This has been OVERDUE. Come back next week to keep your account in good standing.

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OVERDUE | INTRODUCTION

Originally published on April 28, 2026

Welcome to **OVERDUE**.

A couple of weeks ago, I subscribed to the American Library Association, hoping to learn more about libraries. Then, it turned out that last week was National Library Week. Why was I excited about this? Why do I care at all? Let me share a little bit about my background.

I've spent much of my career writing, editing, and curating content for enterprise companies. I love making order out of chaos, so organizing and refining content deeply appeals to me. I find joy in taking existing content and either making it easier to find or improving it in a way that makes it more valuable to readers. More than this, I love writing new content and shaping it into something instantly clear and impactful.

Through this work, I've also discovered that I love to build and maintain relationships, particularly when the goal is to make content better or build better content. You may ask, "What's so special about this?" The answer is that I am a lifelong introvert, which means that I don't go out of my way to socialize or spend extra time communicating with others. However, building relationships to make content better is something I truly enjoy, even though it feels completely counterintuitive to my introvert nature. Yes, this surprised me, too, but it truly is something I find meaningful.

"Well," you may ask, "what does this have to do with libraries?" I'm so glad that you asked. I like to read...a lot. While doing all of that reading, I have often wondered what draws people to become librarians, and what else goes on at libraries beyond simply housing books. Earlier this year, I started looking into those questions and made some surprising discoveries, such as how libraries combine

organization, information, and service. I also began to see how closely libraries align with what I already value. I've discovered that my next chapter may have been waiting for me all along: becoming a librarian.

Beginning next week, I'll be sharing more of what I've learned about libraries and librarians. Once a week for the next 11 weeks, I'll post a brief segment designed to inform, entertain, and perhaps surprise you.

This has been OVERDUE. Come back next week to keep your account in good standing.

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