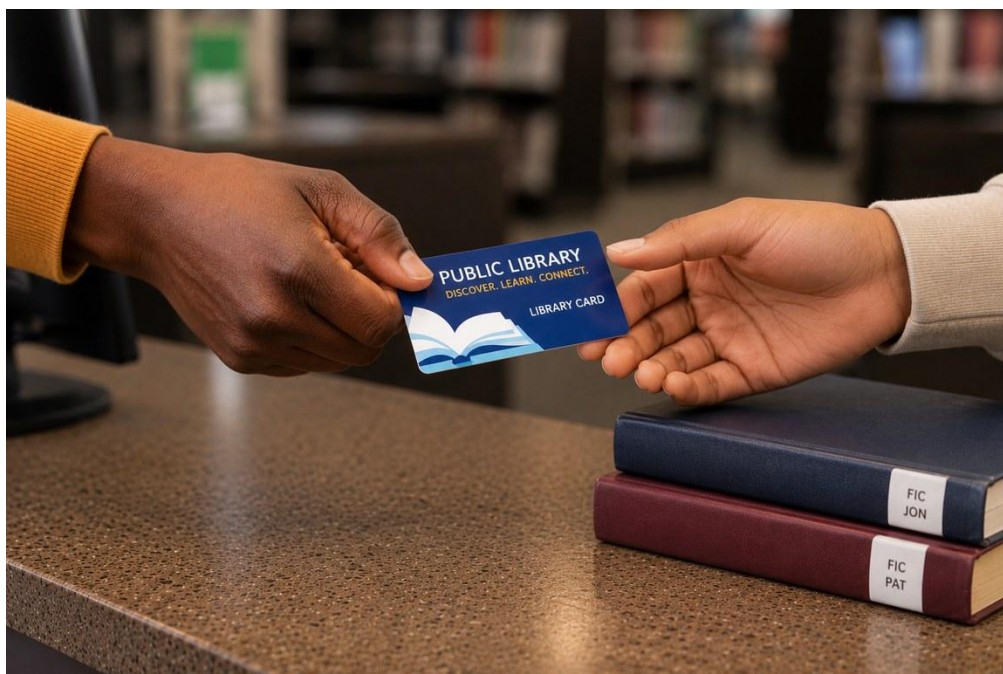




OVERDUE | ACCESS

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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.

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

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