



CHAPTER 4

Troubleshooting the Job Search

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After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- explore a variety of persona scenarios in order to better understand how to troubleshoot the job search from multiple vantage points;
- consider how to reframe a job rejection into a learning experience in order to improve future prospects;
- contemplate practical tips for self-care in order to dive into your job search while maintaining your own well-being;
- become aware of the barriers to entry within academic librarianship in order to overcome and understand these hurdles; and
- examine your own privilege as it pertains to an academy library job search in order to build empathy and alter future hiring practices.

Introduction

The academic library job search is rife with barriers to entry. At the very least, it can feel time-consuming and tedious. Depending on the institution and type of position, receiving a single offer can take anywhere from several months to a year. It's no wonder job seekers may find the experience to be stressful, demoralizing, and a serious challenge to balance with work, school, and their personal lives. Before we scare you off, the job search is also full of excitement and possibility when considering the available opportunities for potential academic librarians. Successfully completing the job search is the first step toward a long and rewarding career in a profession ripe for new professionals and fresh ideas.

Success begins by embarking on the job search early, with an eye toward overcoming the obstacles job seekers will inevitably face. Some of these obstacles may be anticipated while others may be overlooked and unexpected. This chapter discusses how job seekers can troubleshoot their academic library job search in order to minimize pressure points while maximizing the opportunities these challenges create. We examine—and provide solutions to—a variety of roadblocks to

a successful search, such as geographic immobility, and learning from rejection. Additionally, we discuss practical strategies for maintaining self-care throughout this process.

Job Seeker Personas

Every job search is unique to each job seeker's situation. Most job seekers, however, are able to self-identify with one persona or another—certain backgrounds, experiences, or expectations that color their view of LIS (library and information science) and what they hope to accomplish as an academic librarian. By taking inventory of your background and circumstances, you can create a course of action that complements your persona and develop a job search strategy that works for you. While every situation is unique (again, this will depend on the job opportunity, your background, and your individual circumstances), there are certain courses of action that can strengthen your chances as a candidate. Consider the following six personas and our search strategy recommendations.

Persona 1: Straight from Undergrad

Students coming straight from earning an undergraduate degree are typically but not always in their early twenties. Their undergraduate experience is fresh in their minds and they are accustomed to homework, classes, and student life. The transition to graduate school may be easier for them than for classmates who returned to school from the workforce or from having earned their bachelor's degree several years ago. On the other hand, immediately entering library school after earning a bachelor's degree may not afford many opportunities for professional experience. Such students may have been student workers in their college or university library or perhaps worked in the public library of their hometown as a first job. Maybe they never worked in a library but learned about the career after using the library as a student or possibly on the recommendation of a professor or advisor.

If you are coming to library school straight from undergrad, your focus should be on gaining as much library and/or professional experience as possible. Practica, volunteering, internships, assistantships, or part-time positions can all be of great benefit. These activities offer an idea of what it is like to be part of a workplace and how to interact with others in a professional setting. Once you have taken a semester or two of courses and have started exploring your career options, find a mentor through your library school, university library, or online.¹ Taking leadership roles within your library school is also a great way to meet others and gain experience that will build your skills and experience base for future jobs.

Persona 2: Career Changer

If you have spent some time, often five or more years, doing non-library work, you may be a career changer. Many people transition into librarianship from careers in education and publishing, but career changers can come from virtually any profession. They are typically motivated to go through the program quickly and have maturity due to their years in the professional world. Career changers may need to learn and adapt to new library technologies, though they have significant professional experience.

Brainstorm how your previous work experience will be an asset to an academic library. When describing your past work in your curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter, use library terminology and how it relates to areas of librarianship. For example, if you were previously a teacher, you can talk about how your skills translate well to student-centered library instruction, public services, and serving a diverse user community. Perhaps you haven't previously worked in a library, but what you did will serve you well when you do. Spell out the connections to potential employers in your application materials. All of your past work experiences can be pitched as an asset if you think creatively.

If you are a career changer hoping for a fresh start as an academic librarian, look to gain specialized experience in the exact area of librarianship you wish to pursue. Because of your experience and focus, finding a mentor at the beginning of your program can be essential to making the transition. Many LIS schools have mentor programs, or you can join a professional organization that offers such a program.²

Persona 3: Library Veteran/Paraprofessional

Libraries differ greatly in terms of work requirements for staff. In many cases, those without a master's degrees provide reference services if they have sufficient experience. Library veterans have worked in a library in some capacity for at least a year. They understand that an LIS degree will help them move up in their organization, expand their job functions, or allow them to switch to a different department within their library. In many cases, library veterans are very familiar with how libraries work and may know a great deal about LIS practices. They may be interested in the master's degree in order to gain new skills in technology, take classes that will support them in their current position, or to qualify for a higher pay grade at their organization.

If you are a library veteran, look for opportunities to explore other areas of librarianship within your organization and to learn new technologies or skills. You may also want to speak with colleagues or supervisors about shadowing or conducting informational interviews to supplement their coursework. A supportive supervisor will be open and encouraging of your professional development and future goals.

Persona 4: Geographically Bound

In today's complex world, many students are limited in terms of where they can apply due to an inability to relocate. In many cases, this is due to family obligations in a particular city, region, or state. For those who are unable to do a nationwide job search, your strategy for successfully landing a position in an academic library must differ substantially from those who are able to relocate. If you are geographically bound and hope to become an academic librarian, having realistic expectations is essential. There are simply fewer academic library jobs in some areas. Assuming you live within commuting distance of an academic library, do everything you can to build your network in that organization if you are not already employed there.

Consider practicing the “three-tiered” approach to job hunting. This model acknowledges the challenges facing geographically bound students and opens the door to a variety of positions that may or may not be traditionally within LIS. The first tier includes any and all “dream job” positions. Imagine you are interested in becoming a metadata librarian at a university. The first tier for the job search would be any professional positions where working with metadata is the primary job function.

The second tier includes positions in libraries in the area, but the primary job function is not in the area of metadata. To have the chance to eventually move into your dream position, consider all vacant library positions at the academic library in your geographic area. You will still be employed in an academic library but in a capacity that you plan to grow out of eventually on your way into the first tier. You will gain valuable experience and make connections in the right setting that will help you be successful when that metadata position becomes available.

In the third tier, we challenge you to truly think outside of the box. Many skills in LIS are transferable to other fields, especially in regard to technology, customer service, and project management. This final tier includes job opportunities outside of academic libraries but in positions are still relevant to the LIS background. Example opportunities include an outreach coordinator for a non-profit, adjunct teaching, or other administrative work that is full time. The idea here is that rather than holding out for your dream job, you are gainfully employed, supporting yourself financially and gaining experience that will be valuable for future work in an academic library. This doesn't mean giving up on that dream position as a metadata librarian but making realistic choices to find employment in the meantime.

This three-tiered approach helps geographically bound students in several ways. It keeps students active on the job market while still being aware of a variety of positions within and outside of academic libraries. This approach makes the assumption that being employed in some capacity is better than not being employed at all. As we mentioned before, the academic library search can take several months or more after an application has been submitted. It may take you a year or two to obtain a position due to a variety of factors. Many job seekers are

financially unable to wait for months or more for their dream job right out of library school. People must sustain themselves through alternative avenues and that is nothing to be ashamed of. This is a large problem with academic library hiring and many students have been through similar experiences. Research indicates that the longer you are unemployed, the harder it is to find work.³ Do what you can to stay employed in some capacity, if possible, while continuing to search for that dream position.

Persona 5: Dual Degree

Dual-degree students hold at least one additional graduate degree in a different field. Additional degrees may be earned before entering an LIS program or simultaneously at the same institution. These students have experience navigating systems of higher education and typically understand the correlation between education and work.⁴ Dual-degree students are drawn to LIS for its emphasis on praxis and foundational principles that may not be prominently featured in their other fields. These students may or may not have previous work experience in a library, but they should identify opportunities that connect librarianship to the skills and knowledge of their additional degree. Often, their firsthand experience with the complexities of the research lifecycle makes them strong candidates for academic librarianship.⁵

For dual-degree LIS students, tempered strategizing is the ideal approach to preparing for the job hunt. Like the library veteran, develop a clear understanding of what you want to do in an academic library. Look for opportunities to build upon the knowledge and experiences from your previous degree. Like the career changer, effectively articulating the narrative of your journey to LIS from a different field is crucial. Seek out experiences that capitalize on your previous degree while simultaneously strengthening your affinity to LIS. Use your coursework as an opportunity to explore the links between your past studies and current pursuit of LIS education. Not only does this provide an opportunity to deepen your understanding of research topics in LIS, it provides fodder for articulating a research agenda to search committees later on. Look for positions that will view an additional degree as an asset. Often, these are specialized positions within academic libraries that require subject- or discipline-specific expertise.

Persona 6: Lateral Shifter—Degreed Librarians Working in Non-Academic Libraries

The lateral shifter holds an LIS degree but started their career in a non-academic library such as a public, school, or special/corporate library and now wishes to transition into academic librarianship. They aren't quite a career changer and perhaps they aren't currently students. How do they "pivot" their career and make

the case that they are prepared to thrive in an academic environment? If they have already come to the conclusion that they would prefer working in an academic library over their current library position, they have already done some introspective thinking and hopefully have compelling reasons for making the switch. Whatever their reason for making this transition, the fact of the matter is that they will have to be strategic in their approach to ensure they achieve their goal.

Begin by scanning all of the academic library positions at institutions at which you are willing and able to work.⁶ As you search online, identify current peers or connections at libraries of interest. If you don't already know someone, look for fellow alumni from your LIS program. The "See Alumni" feature on LinkedIn can help you reach out and get a sense of the library landscape at this particular academic institution.

After you have scanned all job postings and reached out to colleagues for more information about how best to make this transition, start thinking critically about your application materials and how to make sure your CV and cover letters are well-suited for the academic landscape. For example, if you currently staff a reference desk in adult services of a public library, draw from experiences where you helped students or patrons doing personal research, whether for class or personal interest. Do you have any conference presentations, publications, or other teaching experience? If these items are not currently on your CV, you will want to include them, emphasizing anything that could be considered instruction. Did you develop a series of computer literacy workshops for older adults in your library? Did you tutor youth or do any other teaching in your past, possibly as a student? All of these examples can help demonstrate how you understand instruction, information literacy, and other major trends in academic librarianship.

Even if you have a compelling reason for transitioning into academic libraries, you will likely have to explain your decision to friends, family, or colleagues. Use these opportunities to think through how you might answer more targeted questions from search committees about your fit for a position, despite a lack of experience in this type of library. To accomplish this, identify connections between what you currently do and what your new job might entail. For example, someone who is currently a children's librarian and interviewing for a position as a reference librarian at a university can make the case that even though they primarily focused on serving youth, they had daily interactions with parents, caregivers, teachers and other adults who were using the department. Have examples ready to articulate how comfortable you are with working with a student population and how you understand that population's needs.

↳ Try This:

- Imagine you are on a hiring committee and an applicant submitted your cover letter and CV. What questions would you have for the candidate?

- Based on your persona, you may expect to receive certain kinds of questions in interviews. You may not be asked these questions in an interview, but thinking in advance about how you might answer them will still be helpful in preparing you.

For the “straight from undergrad” candidate,

“How have your experiences as a student prepared you for a professional position?”

For the “career changer,”

“What made you decide to pursue your LIS degree and leave your past career as a _____?”

For the “library veteran,”

“How will you handle transitioning to a different unit or department of the library and out of your paraprofessional role?”

For the “geographically bound,”

“Why are you applying for a position in an acquisitions department for a civil service position when you received your LIS degree two years ago?”

For the “dual degree,”

“How does your degree in _____ inform your understanding of librarians and academic research?”

For the “lateral shifter,”

“Why do you want to work in an academic library?”

Making the Leap: Transitioning from Paraprofessional Work to Academic Libraries

Many students pursue an LIS degree because they have worked in a library for many years as a staff member or as a paraprofessional. Others come to the degree because some aspect of librarianship resonated with them in the academic environment. Perhaps they worked as an administrative assistant and realized they would like more direct contact with students and faculty. Perhaps they discovered academic librarianship through their work as an instructor or research assistant. How to make the transition into a professional LIS position from these other roles should be considered early on in the search process.

You may continue to work part- or full-time in your paraprofessional position, which could make gaining professional experience difficult. From one perspective, you have an advantage over other applicants who have little or no library experience. It is likely you enjoy the culture of the institution and wish to continue working there, just in a different capacity. In this case, you may have connections on campus who know you as a good colleague and will vouch for you to potential supervisors in the library. In other ways, you may be at a disadvantage in that you have always been seen as a paraprofessional and it is sometimes difficult for people, especially those who lack an open mind, to accept the idea of you in a new role. This is an unfortunate trend in some library systems.⁷ However, many librarians have successfully made the transition and are eager to share their personal experiences.^{8,9}

If you are not a paraprofessional in a library but in another setting within higher education, similar challenges apply. For staff, instructors, or researchers who want to switch into a library setting, that library experience is even more important. If you have an understanding supervisor, be very clear and communicative with them about your plans to pursue an LIS degree and your need to gain experience in a library during your program. Ask if your supervisor is willing to modify your hours so you can spend time volunteering, shadowing, or interning in the library. Alternatively, if you work at a large university or on urban campus, the library will most likely need extra help in the evenings or on weekends. Try to gain experience during those times if you're able to do so. You can also ask your supervisor for additional responsibilities within your unit that are related to LIS and leverage those skills when you begin applying to academic library positions.

Telling Your Story: Leveraging Transferable Skills

If your job title has never been “librarian” or “archivist,” but you have several years of work experience, you have likely done things in your past positions that would be considered transferable skills. Transferable skills can be acquired at any point in your life—jobs, classes, projects, parenting, hobbies, sports—as long as they are applicable or relevant to what you want to do in your next job. Here is one framework for thinking about some transferable skills relevant to LIS professions: communication skills, interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and leadership skills.

Communication Skills	Interpersonal Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising • Explaining • Persuading • Public speaking • Translating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating well with others • Responding to concerns • Motivating people • Assisting others • Having social Awareness

<p>Communication Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Instructing • Presenting • Training • Writing and editing 	<p>Interpersonal Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolving conflicts • Being a team player
<p>Organization Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-through • Multitasking • Setting and attaining goals • Meeting deadlines • Planning • Time management 	<p>Leadership Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making • Evaluating • Managing • Planning • Supervising • Delegating • Initiating • Motivating others • Problem-solving • Team-building

Although none of these skills are explicitly linked to librarianship, search committees prefer candidates who articulate how their transferable skills translate to the position they are hiring. Periodic self-assessment can help you identify your transferable skills and think about how to frame your past experiences using an LIS lens. This is helpful for all six personas but especially the career changer.

One example would be a job candidate with retail experience. When prompted to think about the work performed in retail, this applicant may indicate on their CV that they “helped customers find gifts.” To frame this same experience using an LIS lens, the applicant could instead say, “Interviewed customers to understand needs in order to recommend appropriate products.” This second statement looks more like a reference interview, strengthening the case that the applicant is comfortable with that type of work. As another example for those interested in doing instruction, imagine you once worked at a summer camp. Instead of saying that you “managed arts and crafts activities,” you could instead write that you “developed programming to provide instruction in the arts.”

In both of these cases, the person hasn’t exaggerated their previous work experiences but merely modified the statement to be more in line with the types of work expected of an academic librarian. Research shows that people, especially women, undervalue their skills when applying for jobs.¹⁰ Be confident when you write and speak about what you bring to the table. Ask a friend or colleague to evaluate your CV and cover letter in order to clarify the extent of your knowledge and skills. This is not the time to downplay or be modest about your strengths!

Transferable skills are also important for the person who has held multiple part-time positions but is now seeking full-time employment. In this case, develop a narrative or common thread that connects your part-time positions in order to

strengthen your application materials and interviewing outcomes, such as obtaining reference experience. Many students worry that multiple part-time positions or a gap in their CV will be scrutinized and hurt them in their job search. Again, everyone's situation is unique and there are many justifiable reasons for these gaps. Whether you were a caregiver to a family member, had a unique opportunity to travel the world, or had a child or chronic illness, the search committee will understand. If you are a great fit for the position, it won't matter.

Lying or making things up about your past is never advisable. Alternatively, don't rely too heavily on personal anecdotes or telling your life story. At the end of the day, a search committee will want to see that you have the skills required to do the job well. Especially when meeting potential future coworkers and supervisors, remain concise and discreet about your personal life.

↳ Try This:

- Identify career-based information on Lynda.com, Coursera, or TED Talks to help you work on “telling your story” and craft a professional narrative for yourself.
- Practice your story in the mirror, or for family and friends. It may seem silly or intimidating at first, but the more you work at it, the easier it will come to you.
- If you don't have anyone available to help you practice, record yourself using a computer or phone and play it back. This is a tough lesson and none of us like hearing ourselves talk, but it is worth it to improve.
- Continue to do periodic self-assessments. We all grow and change. Reflect on the most current version of yourself. This includes thinking about not just what you are good at but what you are passionate about as well.

Gaining Experience

How does a paraprofessional gain experience to become an LIS professional? As we've previously discussed, opportunities like internships and practica can be important if you're able to take advantage of them. It's important to note that there has been much discussion in higher education about the ability of students to take on extra work outside of coursework, especially if it's unpaid or underpaid work.¹¹ The LIS student community has been especially vigilant about documenting their critiques.¹²

Many organizations are open to providing a paraprofessional worker with additional job responsibilities if they express interest. Some tasks will not be possible or appropriate, but being thoughtful about how to expand your duties can provide valuable experience. For this reason, practica are highly recommended for people in this situation.

Graduate programs typically coordinate with students to offer practica in addition to traditional coursework.^{13,14} Some advocates go so far as to propose that practica be required in LIS education. A credit-earning internship brings you closer to the goal of graduation but also allows for professional or near-professional-level work without having an LIS degree in hand. The array of benefits is diverse and far-reaching.¹⁵ The ability to co-teach an information literacy class, sit at a reference desk and provide answers to students, faculty, and researchers, or catalog a unique collection is extremely valuable to the student who has only been a paraprofessional.

Seek practicum opportunities at a nearby academic library—ideally at the same institution in which you are enrolled. Online students have more options since they are able to complete a practicum at any higher education institution that is physically convenient. Distance students who have a full-time job while attending online classes may find this challenging, but some programs allow students to complete their practica over the course of multiple semesters. This flexibility creates more chances for students when they have limited options. Inquire about the options available to you for a practicum and how much flexibility is available. Some students are able to pursue a practicum over a summer term at a prestigious university or an institution in an area they want to relocate to upon graduation.¹⁶

The most valuable practica are those where the site supervisor is able to devote time to the student's professional development through mentoring. Practicum site supervisors will ideally serve as a professional reference for that student when they begin their academic library job search. From the outset, clearly state your goals and your library school's requirements for the practicum and express genuine interest and curiosity in the work of your supervisor. Site supervisors often have good ideas for skills you should acquire as well, so keep an open mind, as long as the work is near-professional. If you are unsure that the work being proposed is a good fit for a practicum, ask a practicum coordinator, advisor, or faculty member at your library school for input.

Once you've begun a practicum, consistent and open communication with your site supervisor is essential to having a meaningful relationship. It should go without saying that practica should be treated as a professional job. Show up early or on time, and always give advance notice if you need to be late or miss a shift. Find ways to engage with others in order to demonstrate your ability to thrive in the workplace. Express interest in the tasks you are doing or in the library/university as a whole. Ask to shadow staff at meetings or on other projects to gain a better sense of how the organization functions and the various roles employees play. This sends a clear signal to your practicum supervisor that you are committed to the field.

As you near the end of your practicum, sit down with your supervisor(s) and discuss your performance. If time allows, ask them to review the practicum as it appears on your CV to ensure you have included all important tasks and effectively communicated your accomplishments. Finally, apprise your supervisor(s) of

your job search process, especially if you plan to use them as references (and you should!). The better you can coach your references, the more effective they will be.¹⁷ If you see a job you are especially excited about, send a copy to your supervisor so they have a better idea of what you are looking for.

Even after the practicum has ended and you have landed a job, you will want to periodically check in (every three to six months would be a good goal, but it depends on your relationship with and proximity to your supervisor), especially in the beginning years of your career. Mentors are valuable not just for securing employment but also for that second or third job down the line. Always remember to be respectful of your supervisor's time and use their preferred method of communication.

Of course, credit-earning internships such as practica aren't always feasible. The same advice for having successful mentor relationships holds true whether it is in an official program like practicum, an internship, part-time library work, etc. There is a reason why nearly every job under the sun asks for "excellent communication skills," and that is because being able to clearly communicate with others is one of the most important skills out there.

↳ Try This:

- Set a goal for yourself to reach out to three to five LIS professionals each semester for an "informational interview." Use these interviews to learn more about their work and the field as a whole. It may just be information gathering, but it could also yield a valuable mentor relationship.
- Think about ways in which you can improve your communication skills. Do you review emails before sending them for accuracy and conciseness? When you speak in meetings or to the public, have you practiced limiting non-essential words such as "um," "like," and "so"?
- Find ways of gaining library experience. Ask your peers and others you trust which experiences may be most helpful for you in the long run.

Learning from Rejection

Even the most well-prepared candidate will face rejection during the academic library job search. Even someone who follows all of the above recommendations will experience rejection at some point. As a job seeker, many variables can be outside of your control. The important thing to do after facing a job rejection is not give in to negative or self-destructive thoughts. It can be difficult. You put yourself out there and were rejected. It can feel humiliating and painful. You may feel too insecure to imagine going through it again. *But remember that this has happened to everyone.* Try to find a positive spin. Getting to the interview stage, whether in-person or over the phone, is valuable experience. You will feel less anxiety the

next time around because of that experience. In the meantime, you can work on figuring out how you can do better in the future to improve your chances.

Remember that the academic hiring process is a complicated one. There could be dozens of reasons why you were not the successful candidate. It's important not to dwell on your rejection or to take it personally. In some cases, it simply comes down to the amount of experience you possess. When you are new to the field, you will often be among candidates who have several years more experience than you. Perhaps another candidate possessed the perfect skill set for the job or other skills you haven't yet acquired. And, unfortunately, implicit bias or other factors may have been at play during the hiring process.

While some HR departments are able to give you feedback on why you were rejected, many others will be unable to for policy reasons. Thus, it's important to reflect honestly on your application materials and your phone and in-person interview skills. Consider writing a reflection of your interview shortly after it occurs to highlight areas for further development. There are many components to the job search, and it can be difficult to pinpoint where things could have been improved without such reflection.

Perhaps during the interview there were a few questions that caught you off-guard. Maybe you've applied to ten jobs and haven't heard back months later. Maybe your job presentation didn't seem to resonate with your audience. Take note of these areas for improvement and get to work! Here are a few common scenarios that deal with rejection and our suggestions for coping.

“I didn't know how to answer some of the questions I was asked during my interview.”

This happens to the best of us. Some libraries provide interview questions in advance so the candidate can take the time to think and reflect. Most do not offer that luxury. Try not to linger too much on it if you answered a question or two poorly and move on. Interviews are long. A few mistakes among many other perfectly acceptable answers is not a disaster.

↳ Try This:

- Do your interview question research beforehand. Brainstorm answers to common questions.¹⁸ Write out your answers and practice saying them out loud—it will help your narrative stick in your mind. Practice responding to questions with a friend, colleague, or family member. You may feel silly, but the more comfortable you feel telling your own story and talking about yourself, the more articulate you will be in an interview.
- Tie interview answers to specific projects, services, or resources you supported or helped initiate. For each question you anticipate being asked, write down a project or example that you can tie your answer to.

- Bonus tip: You can always use these written notes during phone or video interviews. (We won't tell!)

“I still haven't heard back from anywhere I've applied.”

Remember that the academic hiring process can take many months, and sometimes up to a year. It isn't uncommon for job seekers to hear back a month or two after the application closing date. If you have completed quite a few applications and you haven't heard anything after several months, this could be a sign that your materials are not making the cut.¹⁹ Review your application materials and make sure to tie your cover letters very explicitly to the job descriptions.

↳ Try This:

Have other LIS practitioners, professors, and colleagues review your materials; ask them to be honest with their feedback. Having friends and family review your materials is fine, but unless that friend or family member has experience with academic hiring or library hiring, their advice will not be as valuable as a practicing academic librarian. Make an appointment to review your application materials with the career services center or student affairs staff at your program. Attend résumé review sessions at conferences hosted by professional library organizations.²⁰ Campus career counseling or career preparation offices/centers are open to all students on-campus. Take advantage of these services, but keep in mind that some centers are more prepared to assist those seeking jobs in corporate settings than in academia.

“I might be considered a ‘frequent job-hopper.’ Is this hurting my chances?”

There are many reasons why someone would need or want to switch jobs. Perhaps your partner or family required you to relocate. Maybe you found a position with better pay or benefits or switched fields. Maybe you were a contract or project-based employee. Maybe you left because your workplace was a toxic environment. Some academic librarians must switch jobs and institutions in order to take on positions with greater management responsibilities, opportunities for growth, or in order to learn and develop expertise in other areas of librarianship.

The amount of time an individual “should” stay in an academic library job is subjective and will vary by librarian and hiring committee. Some might say you should move on if you are unhappy, if you are able to do so, or if your life requires it—no matter how long you have been employed. Maintaining employment somewhere that is detrimental to your well-being is not worth it, although we acknowledge it takes privilege to uproot yourself and possibly your family.

↳ Try This:

- Aim to make your CV and cover letter more functional in nature. Focus on project work and accomplishments rather than time. What projects did you lead or complete? What skills did you gain? These should be questions you can answer and elaborate upon regardless of how long you were employed at a job. If you were hired for a project or on a contract basis, or were in a fellowship or residency for a predetermined amount of time, make sure that is clear on your CV.
- If you are asked for an interview, that means your materials were seen as impressive enough to warrant a discussion. Still, you should be prepared to discuss the topic should it be broached in the interview. You will want to be able to talk confidently about why you are seeking a new position, and make sure to convey that you are seeking *this* position because you believe it will be a good fit for longer-term employment.

“I have a feeling I was rejected because my presentation didn’t go very well.”

As with any presentation, practice in front of a live audience beforehand and be open to their suggestions and constructive criticism. It may help to record yourself with a phone or camera and watch yourself. (We understand how painful this is!) The more you practice beforehand, the better you will be when the time comes to present. If you have a librarian colleague or mentor, have them critique your slides, any written talking points, your presentation style, and pacing. You want your presentation to have an impact and be memorable. What is unique about you and your past experiences? Bring those points into your talk and what you plan to do at the prospective institution. Everyone who has been invited to interview on-campus has proven they are at least minimally qualified—you must now set yourself apart. What special skills, perspectives, and experiences will you bring to this institution? The presentation is a great opportunity to showcase your knowledge about the library. Do your research.

↳ Try This:

- If you are still an LIS student with a university library nearby, ask to attend interview presentations over the course of the school year. Note the strengths and weaknesses of the presentations you see to inform your future presentations.
- Create your presentation materials using the college or university’s branding. Many colleges and universities have a website dedicated to campus branding including slide deck templates, logos, and recommended fonts and colors for official publications, presentations, or promotional materials.

- Make the research you've done apparent in your presentation when appropriate (and throughout your interview). When researching your prospective institution, start broadly and work toward the library. Begin with understanding the campus mission, vision, and values and how they relate to where it is located. Search for current news involving the campus, read press releases and campus blogs. Research the populations you will be expected to serve, whether internal or external. Do the same research on the library but go deeper if you can. Try to identify recent initiatives, projects, or strategic directions. Think about how your potential job might intersect with these. Research the librarians who currently work there, their research interests, and what their work entails.

“We both applied for the same job.”

The library world is small, and the academic library world is even smaller. If another student discloses that they happen to be applying to the same job as you, then the reality is that even in the best-case scenario, one of you will receive an offer and the other will not. Although never ideal, this happens from time to time, and not just in library school. How you handle this situation now will be a good lesson for when it inevitably happens again in the future with someone else you know. If your classmate is offered the position, try not to take it personally. Being gracious goes a long way, and so does discretion. Use your best judgment and act accordingly.

“This looks like a great job, but I don't think I meet all the qualifications.”

Sometimes, rejection is self-inflicted. How many times have you been excited by a job posting, only to talk yourself out of applying after reading through the list of preferred qualifications? If you find a job that really motivates you, don't dismiss your chances before reading the application closely and in its entirety. Don't treat anything in the description as a deal-breaker unless the posting explicitly requires a qualification you don't possess.

Some required items are easy to quantify, such as having a particular degree. Others are more open to interpretation, such as “project management skills” or “strong interpersonal skills.” Some job postings are purposefully vague in order to draw as large an applicant pool as possible. Don't sell yourself short! Imposter syndrome is real, especially among those with high levels of education.²¹ Compose your application accordingly and address each qualification with concrete examples of previous experiences or descriptions of how you intend to address these qualifications as you grow into the position.

↳ Try This:

- Keep a list on hand of your accomplishments, passions, and interests. When you find a position that interests you, write a couple of sentences for each qualification that make a clear connection between what you think the hiring committee is looking for and what you have to offer. Remember: your application is intended to get you to the next stage of the process: the interview.²² Don't write yourself off before you even apply!

Overall, learning from rejection means focusing less on “I'm awful, nobody wants to hire me” and more on “Let's see how I can improve my skills for the next opportunity.” You will learn something with every application and job interview if you critically reflect on each experience. It's important to take care of yourself during the process. Rejection hurts! Be sure to follow up with our self-care tips in the next section.

Self-Care

The job search process can be grueling and psychologically draining. Whether learning from rejection, playing the waiting game, or coping with day-long interviews, job search burnout is real.²³ It is important for candidates to take care of themselves in order to put their best foot forward in the competitive field of academic librarianship. This chapter is full of tips to help you think differently about your job search journey. In an effort to practice self-care, we hope you will take part in the following activities, as you're able:

- Cultivate and maintain peer-to-peer relationships and support networks and check in regularly.
- Share your experiences with other job seekers. Support each other!
- Journal or blog for reflection.
- Participate in group CV-writing or interview practice.
- Utilize the support and wisdom of your mentors and colleagues.
- Devote time to friends, family, and activities that bring you joy.
- Sleep, eat, rest, repeat.

Your well-being and mental health matter. Establishing self-care as a priority before you start your job search is a win-win situation. Not only will you be more prepared to maneuver the overall process once you start applying, but you will be better equipped to cope with anything unexpected that comes your way.

Building a Strong Support Network

Self-care takes many forms. Arguably, the most adaptable is a strong support network. Expressing your job search worries and woes prevents those stressful moments from growing into greater burdens that hinder and occasionally halt the job

search process altogether. A support network—and fellow students in particular—is an excellent sounding board for job search strategies and for holding yourself accountable during your search. They will know better than most what you are going through and can provide valuable insight from their own experiences.

Finding Your People

If possible, cultivate relationships with other library students early on. Graduate school is a perfect opportunity to expand your job support network. Not only are you entering a new academic endeavor together, you are also learning to situate your professional aspirations within a new social sphere. Make yourself visible to others and seek out communities of library students, both online and in-person, when possible.

Establish a virtual presence for yourself as a library student. Update your online profiles so other library students recognize you as a peer. Seek out online communities of library students and ask questions about the job search process. Join ongoing conversations or start your own.²⁴ If one-on-one conversations are more your style, email people directly to make personal connections. Making yourself visible in online spaces also makes it more likely to make connections face-to-face.²⁵

↳ Try This:

- Join a student group to meet others with similar professional goals.²⁶
- Inquire as to whether your school hosts speakers or workshops about the academic job search and if not, request one.

On the Market, Together

Often, students are encouraged to treat the search process as a competition, a game we play against friends and colleagues where the most qualified candidate “wins” the job offer. A competitive edge can certainly motivate job-seekers, but a winner-take-all attitude can also lead to being overly critical of your accomplishments, loneliness, and occasionally even resentment or envy, especially if your search process isn’t going the way you expected. It is a difficult balance to achieve, but strive to support your fellow classmates while on your own search journey. To do so successfully not only increases your peace of mind but also makes you a stronger candidate—and a stronger colleague—in the long run.²⁷

Many of your classmates will be in similar situations. Acknowledging that shared stress with someone else can lower anxiety, strengthen your support network, and create mental space to strategize your next steps. Stay connected with fellow students to establish accountability and strengthen collegial relationships. Attend professional development opportunities together to draw inspiration and

stay motivated. Check in with classmates for mutual support. It can make a big difference in your attitude and mental health.

↳ Try This:

- Schedule a regular check-in, perhaps every other week, with another student who is also applying for jobs. Discuss current job listings, review application materials, and practice interview questions. Consider sharing a “high-low” for the previous couple of weeks: one high moment and one low moment in your job search. Use the conversations as opportunities to troubleshoot, support one another, and plan ahead for the next couple of weeks.

Establishing Healthy Habits and Routines

Applying to jobs is a stressful and time-consuming process. Balancing your search alongside family, coursework, health, and other obligations is doubly challenging. Establishing routines and healthy habits that integrate your job search into your ongoing obligations will help you stay organized and minimize the chance that your search will take over your life.

It is important to be proactive in planning your search and its impact on your time, well-being, and personal and professional relationships. Be realistic about the impact of the job search and establish a routine for your search early on. Outline specific milestones and schedule a realistic amount of time to accomplish them. Below is one strategy that makes daily, weekly, and monthly commitments to the search process:

Look for open positions on a daily basis. Job boards allow you to search by position title, institution, date posted, and job type.²⁸ When you see a position you like, save a personal copy in a designated folder on your computer (making sure to note the application deadline). You can integrate this activity into habits you already have, such as drinking your tea in the morning or while watching your favorite television show. Do this every weekday for ten to twenty minutes.

A good rule of thumb is to apply for one job every week. Each week, designate a specific time and day(s) to work on your applications. Start with scheduling three hours a week and adjust to accommodate for your workflow. When scheduling your writing time, take your work style into consideration. Are you more focused in the morning or the evening? Do you prefer to write at home or in a more public space? Do you work better over long periods of uninterrupted time or short bursts of productivity?²⁹ Whatever your style, schedule your job search activities while also taking into consideration your other responsibilities.

At the end of every month, schedule time to assess whether you are meeting your milestones. If so, congratulations! Reward yourself with a small treat. Engage

in an activity you enjoy, make yourself a milkshake, or watch an extra episode of your favorite television show. If you are struggling to meet your milestones, try to identify the problem. Are you writing cover letters at night when you are more of a morning person? Did your work schedule change unexpectedly? Adjust your routine as you go and remember to be kind to yourself—and be flexible.

↳ Try This:

- Create a master spreadsheet to track each job you apply for. Include application deadlines and your projected application submission dates.
- If you struggle with time management, track your activities—work ones and social ones. Record how much time you spend on these activities throughout the week. Afterward, see which activities take more time than you expected. Adjust your schedule and expectations accordingly.
- Reserve at least one day a week to be “search-free.” Don’t look at job postings. Don’t review your application materials. Offer your brain a break and give yourself permission to think about something else for a while. Establishing mental boundaries like this can help you feel more in control of your search process. It also provides the mental distance required to clear the mind and produce fresh ideas once you return to the search.

Acknowledging Barriers

It’s important to take stock of the barriers that can be encountered during the academic library job search. Now that you’re prepared to troubleshoot *some* of the difficulties that occur during the job search, it would be irresponsible to suggest that *all* barriers to employment in academic libraries can be cleverly avoided. We must acknowledge that the literature has provided further criticism of the structures and hiring practices that create barriers for entry into academic libraries. Please refer to the bibliography at the end of this chapter for readings from *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, and *Feral Librarian* that address the barriers experienced by librarians of color, queer librarians, and other marginalized voices in academic libraries.

Academic libraries and library hiring practices have well-documented issues, and they’re not immune from the oppressive structures within which they exist. Academic libraries mirror many of the problems facing our world and higher education today—racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and white supremacy. Certain academic hiring practices continue to put people of color and those with fewer socioeconomic means at a disadvantage.³⁰ Both academia and librarianship are still overwhelmingly white.³¹

Since academic library positions are competitive, the job search is especially difficult for those who are unable to relocate. Some job seekers may be locked into

a particular geographic location due to personal or family reasons. Mobility is one kind of privilege. For those who benefit from privilege in various ways, the barriers to academic librarianship will be much lower. For example, an academic library job search process assumes that potential candidates can afford the costs associated with a national job search. Do you own professional attire?³² In some instances, you might be expected to pay for airfare and hotel expenses until you're reimbursed weeks or months later.³³ Do you have the ability to take off work? Are you able to leave dependents or pets? These barriers may simply be insurmountable for those from less privileged backgrounds or circumstances and impact their entry into the profession.

All practitioners need to be aware of this and should work to create more accommodating and flexible policies for all potential applicants. As much as the field of librarianship wishes to be inclusive, the reality of some academic hiring practices tells another story.

Other barriers such as implicit bias within academic library hiring committees can be impossible for the interviewee to overcome.³⁴ There is no way to anticipate and counter all of the peculiar (and sometimes contradictory) views present in an academic library search committee. No matter what you do, someone might find a way to fault your cover letter, mannerisms, appearance, professionalism, attitude, or simply the way you formatted your CV. As amazing as we know you are, you will never please everyone. It is easy to suggest that you "be yourself, and you'll do fine." But research from the corporate world suggests that people tend to hire others who are culturally similar to themselves.³⁵ If you're culturally different than many or most academic librarians, how does that affect your ability to get hired? What if your identity makes it more difficult for you to be hired as an academic librarian?³⁶ What if, in the eyes of a hiring committee, you just don't "fit" the organization?³⁷ When librarianship is 82 percent white, what does "fit" mean for those who are not?³⁸

We have discussed strategies for "finding your people" during library school and within the profession, which can be essential for building support networks as you navigate the job search barriers you cannot change. While there are no easy answers to these problems, having an awareness of the issues surrounding the field of academic library hiring can be informative, helpful, and eye-opening.

↳ Try This:

- If you're unable to afford professional clothing for a job interview, locate your local affiliate at Dress for Success, a global non-profit organization that provides professional attire for low-income women.
- When arranging an on-campus interview, be upfront with human resources if you would have trouble paying for travel costs yourself or waiting for reimbursement. Many colleges and universities will pay for certain, if not all, travel costs. If it is not initially offered, ask.

- If you are unable to attend an on-campus interview for any reason and you're comfortable doing so, let human resources know and request a video interview instead of an in-person interview.

Conclusion

In detailing many of the issues you might face during the academic library job search, we hope we have not deterred you. While there are many barriers to knowledge and hurdles to overcome, academic librarianship is an incredibly rewarding and thrilling career. In many cases, it is worth the effort. We will continue to advocate for hiring practices that uphold the same principles of access, diversity, and social responsibility espoused by the library profession.

We hope you will take note and remember the challenges you faced. Once you begin to serve on hiring committees yourself, we hope you will do your best not to perpetuate exclusionary practices. After you've entered the profession (you've got this—it will happen!), we hope that you will work to challenge, question, and disrupt the practices that have kept librarianship a largely white profession. You are the future of librarianship, after all, and we have great faith in that.

Finally, we hope that your job search is smooth, full of empathy, and an opportunity to learn more about yourself and the academic library profession. We wish you the best of luck.

Additional Resources

- ALA Electronic Discussion Lists: <https://lists.ala.org/sympa/>
- ALA JobList: <https://joblist.ala.org/>
- Association of Research Libraries: <https://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/job-listings/>
- ChronicleVitae: https://chroniclevitae.com/job_search/new/
- Dress for Success: <https://dressforsuccess.org/>
- Hack Library School: <https://www.hacklibraryschool.com/>
- HigherEdJobs: https://www.higheredjobs.com/?locale=en_US/
- Hiring Librarians: <https://www.hiringlibrarians.com/2013/03/11/new-survey-interview-questions-database/>
- I Need a Library Job: <https://inalj.com/>
- Indeed: <https://www.indeed.com/>
- Open Cover Letters: <https://opencoverletters.com/>
- Tomato Timer: <https://tomato-timer.com/>

Endnotes

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13. Rebecca Hodson, "Practicum," School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, accessed April 6, 2018, <https://ischool.illinois.edu/current-students/practicum/>.
14. Nora Bird, Clara M. Chu, and Fatih Oguz, "Internship in LIS Education," *IFLA Journal* 41, no. 4 (2015): 299.
15. "Practicum," *Hack Library School*, accessed December 14, 2017. <https://hacklibraryschool.com/tag/practicum/>.
16. Reference and instruction practica should be pursued during the fall and spring because greater demand for this kind of work occurs during these academic terms. Summer is ideal for practica revolving around project work such as developing special collections or digital humanities.
17. To "coach a reference," provide a sense of what you are looking for in a job, so as to strengthen your references' ability to write a strong and relevant endorsement on your behalf.
18. The online archive of HiringLibrarians.com offers examples of résumé and CV reviews.
19. Internet resources such as Open Cover Letters post anonymized cover letters from hired librarians and archivists to model application successful application materials.
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33. Some academic positions pay for airfare and hotel costs up front, but many will require a candidate to pay the costs initially and then apply for reimbursement afterward. Other employers may not compensate for travel costs at all. If you're a position to decline, we recommend you not interview with employers who do not compensate for travel costs.
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36. Madison Sullivan, "Librarianship Doesn't Need Professionals," *ACRLog*, last modified January 19, 2016, <http://acrllog.org/2016/01/19/professionalism/>.
37. Meredith Farkas, "The Insidious Nature of 'Fit' in Hiring and the Workforce," *Information Wants to Be Free* (blog), last modified September 28, 2015, <https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2015/09/28/the-insidious-nature-of-fit-in-hiring/>.
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