

Subject Requirements for Effective Bibliographical Services

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One of the primary functions of a library is to provide bibliographical services. Bibliographical services deal with the organization, control, access, retrieval and supply of information. An ideal bibliographical service comprises at least five elements: (1) it should be a complete list of records of human communication; (2), it should not be limited to time, place, language, or form; (3) it should provide a key to the smallest part of contents; (4) its access should be in a timely fashion; and (5) it should be able to meet the needs of users.

The final element is the core of effective bibliographical service. Information supplied must be relevant, pertinent, and accurate. As such, bibliographical services act as layers of a sieve, retaining different sizes of materials for different purposes and use. To achieve this, grasp of subject fields is of sheer necessity.

In the United States, a librarianship degree designates completion of four years of undergraduate work and an additional yearlong course of study in library science. In the 1950s universities began making library science a professional degree comparable to medical science and law. In the fields of medical science and law, their professional training requires an undergraduate degree in a subject field. Traditionally, professional librarians studied subjects in the liberal arts, such as literature or history, before beginning their professional education. An increasing number of librarians now have undergraduate degrees in the natural sciences, computer science, business, or other areas.

The development of three literature courses in the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences was intended to stress the contents of subject disciplines. The purpose of the course structure is to provide students basic concept, ideas, contents, and trends in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Winifred Linderman, mentioned the distinct advantage of studying the subject field, such as sociology or political science.

In commemoration of the Special Libraries Association's 75th anniversary, the Association's Illinois chapter produced *Information and Special Libraries in 2009*. It stressed the subject field in that librarianship deals not simply with media but messages in the media. Knowledge of the subject matter of the messages is essential to providing effective bibliographical services.

In recent academic librarian wanted advertisements, subject expertise is required, just to name a few. Princeton University seeks an archivist with an advanced degree in a subject area. Rutgers University is looking for a physical science librarian who has a degree in chemistry. UC Santa Barbara requires a candidate with advanced degree or coursework, or work experience in art history, architecture or related discipline. University of Texas at Austin prefers a candidate to have an advanced degree in an applicable subject area. University of Michigan needs a women studies librarian who has a relevant advanced degree and experience in a discipline of gender studies. It is common that academic libraries hire subject librarians, such as education librarian, political science librarian, law librarian and the like. A librarian is both a professional and a subject expert.

For the effective use of government publications, for instance, a basic knowledge of government structure and functions is essential. A librarian will be better prepared to

know not only government publications but also the legislative process, including the relationship between Congress and the President and other executive branch agencies. In the use of legal resources, it is preferable that a librarian has the first-hand knowledge of the field of law, regardless of what form the sources are in – electronic, paperless, or optical. A law librarian, for instance, must know the difference between *on appeal* and *certiorari* for cases to the Supreme Court.

In some academic libraries, librarians without an additional advanced degree can not be awarded tenure. In law libraries, a reference librarian is usually required to have legal training, preferably a J.D. degree. Subject concentration is also necessary in public libraries. A public library is a school for the young and college for the adult. Librarians have teaching responsibilities.

A librarian with no subject expertise can not work competently on even simple information processes, such as distinguishing pros and cons and right and wrong available on the subject, choosing the most appropriate sources of information, and interpreting and retrieving information so as to be useful to user. No wrong information should be supplied.

Reference sources are indispensable tools for bibliographical services. Not all reference sources provide accurate information. A few examples may be given.

World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties (4th ed., NY: Facts on File, 2006), a three-volume work, states Nauru's per capital income as one of the highest in the world. Yes, it was in the 1990s. Nauru currently lacks money to perform many of the basic functions of government, the national Bank of Nauru is insolvent, and GDP per capita has fallen to US\$2038 per annum. It states that Taiwan was restored to China

recently. Taiwan was returned to China in 1945. *Peoples, Nations, and Cultures: An A-Z of the Peoples of the World, Past and Present* (NY: Sterling Publishing, 2005), mentions Hong Kong's capital called Victoria.

Human: The Definitive Visual Guide (N.Y.: DK Publishing, 2004), gives dated illustration such as rickshaw to describe Shanghai's present day economy. Rickshaw is extinct except for tourist attraction. It also uses Japanese computer keyboard with Japanese alphabets to depict Chinese computer. *World Quality of Life Indicators* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-Clio, 1991) mistakenly states that "the institutions of the government in Taiwan are headed by a National Assembly. Even well-known reference, *The Statesman's Yearbook* (N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) has mistakes. It lists Palestine under Israel. It is a wrong that Hong Kong was leased to Britain. Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. And, there are mistakes on spelling and titles of some Chinese government officials.

The essence of American library science education does not lie in mere applications of modern technologies, but in returning to basics to strengthening traditional library science. Emphasis must be placed on the knowledge of the subject discipline. It is necessary that library science courses not just deal with media, but messages, not sources, but their content. To make librarianship a viable, respected profession, library schools must stress the librarian's competence in using resources effectively, and the librarian's teaching role.

The subject competence is a *sine quo none* of effective bibliographical services. Librarians without an additional advanced subject degree should seriously consider working for one or take a few courses in a subject field. For students without advanced

subject education, it is advisable to add two to four courses in a subject field of student's choosing. For instance, in political science, may add courses such as American Government, American Constitution, Public Organizations, and International Relations. Two to four courses in law may include Legal Writing, An Introduction to American Law, U.S. Constitutional Law, and International Law.

In conclusion, two Chinese proverbs are presented for professional development: xue-hai-wu-ya 学海無涯 (sea of learning has no coastland); xue-wu-chi-jing 学無止境 (learning has no boundary).