



**Core Technology  
Competencies for  
Librarians and  
Library Staff**

**A LITA Guide**

**Susan M. Thompson**  
**Editor**



**Guide #15**

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# Preface

**C**ore *Technology Competencies for Librarians and Library Staff* provides a practical look at the skills, technological know-how, and personal attributes that enable librarians and staff to take full advantage of technology to deliver dynamic library collections and services. The rapid pace of change in technology and library services has made it difficult for libraries to determine just what technology skills various types of library personnel *should* know, much less actually ensure that they *do* know them. By identifying core competencies we are trying to separate out from all the possible and desirable abilities those key skills that are considered essential to working effectively, in this case working effectively in the technological environment of the modern library.

This book discusses both the core technology competencies needed by all library staff and the specialized technical skills needed in the library's technology support department, commonly referred to as the "systems department." Defining technology competencies helps both librarians and non-MLS staff understand what is expected of them in terms of technological skills and knowledge. Having adequate technical competencies empowers library staff to control and make the best use of the various forms of technology their jobs require. The higher the skill levels are of the librarian and staff, the more they can take advantage of technology to improve library collections and services. High levels of technical expertise developed by staff in traditional library function areas also creates opportunities to distribute expert help throughout the staff and may allow some technical work to shift out of the systems department to other areas of the library.

Library systems departments have come into existence relatively recently, in the past 20 years or so, but there have already been significant changes in what these departments do and in the technology their staff need to understand in order to develop the next generation of library applications. In addition to changes in traditional library technologies, the expansion in the variety of technologies available in libraries today has also impacted the type and level of skills needed in systems departments, particularly because many of the new technologies come with little or no vendor-provided support.

Core competencies for the library systems personnel depend on and build out from the level of technical competency of the library staff as a whole. General

librarian and staff competency levels significantly impact the work in library systems. A knowledgeable library staff can lessen the amount of basic support provided by systems personnel. However, as staff become more sophisticated technology users, support needs change, requiring that systems staff skills keep pace with more complex technology levels.

The information in *Core Technology Competencies for Librarians and Library Staff* should be of interest to any librarian, staff member, and new professional entering the library field who would like to know what technology skills are expected in libraries today. Library administrators, technology managers, and systems librarians will find the definition of core competencies particularly useful in three areas:

1. Updating job descriptions and hiring specifications
2. Establishing employee orientation and assessment criteria
3. Developing training and professional development programs

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, “Overview of Technology Competencies for Today’s Librarians and Library Staff,” provides an overview of technology competencies expected of librarians and non-MLS library staff today. To give some context, Chapter 1, “History and Overview of Technology Competencies in Libraries,” looks at changes over time in library technology and the kinds of technology competency expectations that currently exist for both traditional library positions and new jobs that have appeared over the past few years. Chapter 2, “The Library School’s Role in Preparing New Librarians for Working with Technology,” examines how library education programs are meeting some of the general technical competency standards and includes a sample syllabus and an assignment to design a library automation system. Both chapters include extensive literature reviews and data based on surveys of practitioners in the field.

Part II, “Core Competencies for Library Technology Specialists,” discusses the kinds of skills needed by the library’s technical specialists, particularly those who head library technology departments. Chapter 3, “Management and Technology Competencies for the Systems Librarian,” and Chapter 4, “Core Competencies for Non-Librarian Systems Managers,” look at core competencies for systems librarians and non-librarian technology managers, respectively, and include job descriptions for the two types of positions. Chapter 5, “Social Survival Skills for the Lone Information Technology Librarian,” presents the unique competency issues faced by solo systems librarians, in particular focusing on the social communication skills needed.

Part III, “Successful Competency Implementation Programs,” presents three case studies describing the best practices of academic and public libraries and how they use the concept of core technology competencies to determine job classifications, develop training and professional development programs, establish employee assessment criteria, and improve technology support, among other things.