How to Stay Afloat in the
Academic Library Job Pool

Edited by *Teresa Y. Neely* Foreword by *Camila Alire*

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CONTENTS

v

FOREWORD

As a colleague who delivers workshops on job search strategies for library and information science (LIS) students, I say it is about time a book like this was written! Teresa Neely and her contributor-colleagues have done a great service to new LIS graduates, to graduates who are changing careers, and to librarians who want to move from working in some other type of library to working in an academic library. It's one thing to complain about candidates' performance anytime during the search process; it's another thing to do something about it. That is exactly what Neely and her contributors have done.

As a person who is new to academic librarianship, you will benefit by taking the time to read this book. They have demystified the academic library search process, so please pay close attention.

This book is a *must read* for anyone who wants to work in an academic library as a professional librarian. Everything you need to know about the academic library job search process—ranging from dissecting the job ad to negotiating after the job offer—is included. The contributors left nothing out. Much of what they included (especially in providing the *don'ts* and *what to avoid*) I have expressed over and over as a hiring authority in three university library systems. This book can be validated by any academic librarian who has served on a search committee.

Anyone who reads and follows the advice provided by the authors will have a competitive advantage by understanding what really transpires in the academic library search process and by following the advice offered. The authors provide excellent, real-life examples, many times with a good sense of humor.

I must say that I couldn't put the book down; hence, you can read it in a day's time!

Camila A. Alire, Ed.D.
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WELCOME TO LIBRARY LAND

Teresa Y. Neely

Although this book was conceived and written primarily for new library science graduates entering the academic workforce for the first time, those interested in a career change to academic librarianship will also find it useful. Years of experience chairing and serving on search committees, particularly those for entry-level positions in academic libraries, revealed that many newly minted library science graduates need help learning about the process of successfully securing a position in an academic library, or at the least mounting a competitive attempt. From selecting which available positions they qualify for to preparing an application packet, to arriving on campus for the interview, new graduates make mistakes and blunders at every stage; and what is more astounding and frustrating is that they seem oblivious to the impact of their decisions, actions, behaviors, and words.

A marked decrease in available entry-level positions over the years, along with a relatively stable number of new graduates seeking positions in academic libraries, compounds the issue of finding and securing employment in academic libraries.[1] From fall 1996 through fall 2003, the greatest annual increase in American Library Association (ALA)-accredited degrees awarded, according to the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), was only 6.11 percent, or an increase of 252 degrees awarded in

fall 2002. Table 1.1 shows the number of LIS graduates each year, beginning with the 1995–1996 academic school year up to the 2002–2003 school year. Although the number of degrees earned declined four times during the period under review, overall, 35,460 degrees were awarded, which constituted 32.73 percent of total enrollment numbers in LIS programs for the same time period.

On the prospect of jobs in librarianship, the 2008–2009 *Occupational Outlook Handbook* reports that "more than 2 out of 3 librarians are aged 45 or older, which will result in many job openings over the next decade as many librarians retire. However, recent increases in enrollments in MLS programs will prepare a sufficient number of new librarians to fill these positions."[2] Table 1.1 also includes enrollment numbers as reported to ALISE and shows an increase (4,227) in enrollment numbers when fall 1996 and fall 2003 numbers are compared. Enrollment decreased slightly until fall 1999, when numbers dropped by 1,560; rebounding in the next year, numbers climbed steadily, reaching 16,876 in fall 2003. A look at ALISE enrollment numbers between 1980 and 2000 also shows a slight increase in the number of individuals enrolling in LIS programs, confirming, in part, some of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* predictions.[3]

It has been noted that Stanley J. Wilder's prediction that jobs in libraries would grow as a result of potential retirements by an aged profession have not yet been realized.[4] A review of job advertisements from 2007 and 2008 in chapter 2 of this book reveals that if librarians of retirement age are actually retiring, they generally are not being replaced by entry-level librarians. Poor or limited job-seeking skills, a decrease in the number of entry-level jobs available, plus increased competition from relatively consistent LIS enrollment and graduates, do not make an environment conducive to producing a successfully employed beginning librarian in an academic library. Adding to the competition factor, active job seekers looking for entry-level positions should be aware that, unfortunately, there is no such animal as an entry-level position in academic libraries. Although there are job ads that are advertised as entry-level, or include statements encouraging new graduates to apply, or do not list minimum requirements for work experience, or include language such as "no experience necessary," hiring libraries still need a mechanism to decrease the pools of potential job applicants.[5] This is generally done by listing preferred or desirable (as opposed to minimum) qualifications, and odds are, those qualifications require some level of experience or expertise. ("Minimum qualifications" are those qualifications that are essential, and that the employee must have, while "preferred" or "desirable" qualifications are those that the employer would prefer to see but that aren't required.) In a 1985 study of the requirements for entry-level positions, Sheila Creth and Faith Harders sought "to clarify for both the educators and the graduate library school student the

TABLE **1.1**

LIS enrollment and degrees awarded from ALA-accredited schools

ACADEMIC YEAR	ENROLLMENT	CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR	DEGREES AWARDED	CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR IN DEGREES AWARDED
1995–1996	12,649 (fall 1996)		5,271	
Fall 1996– Fall 1997		–169		–203 (–3.85%)
1996–1997	12,480 (fall 1997)		5,068	
Fall 1997– Fall 1998		–321		–44 (–0.86%)
1997–1998	12,801 (fall 1998)		5,024	
Fall 1998– Fall 1999		1,560		22 (0.43%)
1998–1999	11,241 (fall 1999)		5,046	
Fall 1999– Fall 2000		1,886		–93 (1.84%)
2000–2001	13,127 (fall 2000)		4,953	
Fall 2000– Fall 2001		916		–30 (–0.60%)
2001–2002	14,043 (fall 2001)		4,923	
Fall 2001– Fall 2002		1,074		252 (6.11%)
2002–2003	15,117 (fall 2002)		5,175	
Fall 2002– Fall 2003		1,759		
2002–2003	16,876 (fall 2003)			
Total	108,334	(3,585)	35,460	(32.73%) (–96)

Source: ALISE Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004.

requirements (in addition to the MLS) that academic research libraries have established for beginning librarians." The authors surveyed members of the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL's) Discussion Group of Personnel Officers and found that overwhelmingly, those surveyed "agreed that previous library experience was an important requisite for an entry level position. The majority also indicated that the experience should be in an academic library." The researchers concluded that "the MLS cannot be considered a terminal degree or as the end of the educational process for librarians in the academic research library."[6]

This is a huge revelation, confirmed by Sproles and Ratledge in their 2004 study analyzing job ads. They concluded that "applicants seeking to enter the profession without paraprofessional experience will find themselves at a major disadvantage." The researchers reported on qualities an entry-level librarian would have possessed then, in 2004, but these still seem relevant today in 2010:[7]

- Entry-level librarians will have an ALA-MLS degree.
- They will have a high level of computer/automation knowledge and experience. At a minimum they will be skilled users of the Web, e-mail, desktop computer hardware, peripherals, and software. They may also have a fair degree of basic computer troubleshooting skills and the ability to create relatively complex websites.
- Most will have a significant level of knowledge of, and experience in, their specific area of specialization or interest.
- They will exhibit a high degree of communication ability and interpersonal skills.
- They will have a high degree of diversity awareness and ability to work with others regardless of background.
- They will show evidence of scholarship or scholarly ability.[8]

Like I said, there is no such animal as an entry-level position in academic libraries. These findings should be a monster wake-up call for new graduates and anyone else interested in a career in academic librarianship. In fact, a 2006 survey of the ALA's Spectrum Scholarship recipients found that "the single most predictive indicator of whether a scholar would enter an LIS program was prior experience working in a library." Additionally, "almost 80% of those responding indicated they had experience working in a library either in paid positions or as a volunteer. Nearly 37% of the Spectrum Scholars responding were pursuing degrees in LIS, and 50% indicated academic libraries as the type of organization where they thought they would work initially."[9] How's that for competition?

These findings should impact the way LIS education programs recruit, and also the course and experiential offerings they make available for their students. Ensuring that new graduates have taken the appropriate coursework, but also making sure they have had the opportunity to acquire and master practical library experience, will make them more marketable in today's competitive academic library job market.

THE ACADEMIC SEARCH PROCESS

Unbeknownst to many new graduates, much of the work that goes into recruiting—including developing the position description, reviewing applications for minimum and preferred or desired qualifications, conducting telephone interviews, and winnowing down the pool—is done by committee. A search committee, to be exact. There are a number of published studies and literature on the effectiveness and work of search committees, as well as an abundance of published information and advice for job seekers on applying for academic library jobs and surviving the search process.[10] Additionally, Gregory K. Raschke reminds us that "academic libraries take too long to recruit, to interview, and to hire librarians," an unfortunate by-product of work conducted by committee; thus, applicants should be aware that the process for securing a position in an academic library could, on average, take up to five months, according to a 1987 study by Tedine Roos and Diana Shelton.[11]

Specific search committee practices and procedures vary depending on the library and local practices, the host institution rules, and state and federal laws. Local practices and procedures affect the size and makeup of the search committee; however, a typical committee could include a mix of faculty and staff (depending on the type of positions represented in that library), and some committees encourage or require the inclusion of representation by a person of color. Search committee members can be nominated or appointed, again, mostly dependent on local practice and procedures. What is important to potential applicants is that in many cases, the decision to hire or power to negotiate does *not* usually lie with the search committee, nor with the person to whom the job would report. At the University of New Mexico University Libraries (UNM UL), for example, search committee members do the work and make a recommendation to the dean. The dean considers the committee's recommendation, along with a number of other factors, including feedback from library faculty and staff outside of the search committee, and references provided by the applicant.

The work of the search committee can be grueling and is not for the faint of heart. Between 2005 and 2008, four separate search committees for the UNM UL's resident in research and instruction entry-level position made their way through 449 applications. Table 1.2 shows the number of applications received and the number deemed "bona fide," the UNM term used to describe those applications that remain once the minimum qualification review has been completed. The intent of each of these searches was to hire one resident, and with the exception of the 2008 search, each of these searches resulted in one hire and thus was considered successful.

Once the job description has been written and approved, depending on local practices and requirements for the position level and type, the description is published in library-appropriate publications, posted on websites, and distributed via electronic discussion lists. At the UNM UL, the search committee is involved in the development of a recruitment plan which spells out

TABLE **1.2**

Searches for resident and access services librarian positions at the University of New Mexico's University Libraries

	TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS MEETING MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS
Resident 2005	84	80 bona fide (95.23%)
Resident 2006	137	84 bona fide (61.31%)
Resident 2007	118	66 bona fide (55.93%)
Resident 2008	110	98 bona fide (89.09%)
Subtotal	449	328 bona fide (73.05%)
Access Services 2009	137	94 bona fide (68.61%)
Total	586	422 bona fide (72%)

where the position will be advertised, distributed, and posted. Searches at the UNM UL are assigned a search coordinator who, in the past, was responsible for receiving applications and making them available to the search committee for review. Recently, like many other institutions, the University of New Mexico has streamlined the application process for all position types, and now all applications are accepted through the UNM human resources portal, UNMJobs. Much of what was done on paper is now being done online. This should speed up the search process considerably.

OVERSTEPPING BOUNDARIES

Some practices from nonacademic job searches do not translate well to the world of academia. As I write this chapter, I am cochairing the search for a faculty librarian for the access services department. My experience with this search, and others, provides a number of examples of what applicants should *not* do in the pursuit of an academic position. For example, I was e-mailed directly by an applicant who wished to provide additional information for her application, even though she had already submitted her application via the UNMJobs online system. Another applicant decided to snail mail her application to me directly, even though my name was not listed on the job advertisement, and instructions to applicants directed them to visit the UNMJobs online system to apply for the position. Unfortunately for this potential applicant, her application was never seen by the search committee because she did not follow posted instructions. Although I applaud applicants for taking the initiative to review the job description for the title of the person they would be reporting to, and then tracking down that person's name and contact information, it is nevertheless disconcerting to receive direct e-mails and telephone calls from applicants who believe it is acceptable to communicate directly with their potential supervisor. Although communicating in any way with applicants for an available position at UNM is not illegal, and may be handled differently on other campuses, it is, in the grand scheme of things, not appropriate and I would personally recommend it be avoided at all costs. At UNM, searches are confidential until applicants are invited to campus, and an offer is extended and accepted. At that point, anyone can have access to the names of those who apply for a particular position. Down the road, if an individual is not selected for the position or perhaps even an interview, and they have knowledge that the successful candidate had the "inside" track with the search chair, the legal implications are too many to contemplate.

OPEN UNTIL FILLED

That said, depending on the number of applicants for a particular position, the search committee may begin their work prior to the "closed" or "best consideration" date posted on the job advertisement, particularly if the applicant numbers are large. At this point, their work involves confirming the minimum or required qualifications for the position, a practice called "bona fides" at UNM, as noted previously. In general, if you meet or exceed the preferred or desired qualifications, this is a good thing! It ensures you a place beyond the bona fides process, although there is some research that questions the effectiveness of search committees in advancing candidates who meet minimum and maximum qualifications, particularly when candidates make it difficult for search committees to locate the required information in their cover letters or curricula vitae.[12] Most importantly, if you do not meet *each* of the minimum or required qualifications, the search committee is unlikely to review or discuss your remaining qualifications. Job descriptions list minimum qualifications for a reason. These are the minimum qualifications established for being hired into a particular position. For entry-level positions in academic libraries, there is often one consistent requirement: the ALA-accredited MLS degree by the time the position begins.[13] There may be additional minimum requirements in job advertisements, categorized by Sproles and Ratledge as "personal abilities," such as

- ability to work with others/diversity awareness
- public service commitment
- supervision or leadership ability
- interpersonal skills, such as oral and written communication skills
- ability to participate in scholarship and professional development[14]

It should be noted that in the authors' experience at UNM, most search committees cannot and will not base their decision on personal characteristics such as the fact that you "love Mexican food," or you "hope to learn to speak Spanish," or that you "have always been interested in Native Americans so you read fiction books." These are real examples voluntarily offered during telephone interviews or in cover letters for the resident searches mentioned earlier.

Next, the search committee will need to apply some sort of weighting or ranking to the preferred qualifications, depending on the job duties and responsibilities. This ranking could include a point system or a numerical value; it will vary from library to library. These rankings are important and are generally determined by the preferred qualifications and how important they are if held by the successful hire. Table 1.2 shows that the four resident searches

yielded a total of 449 applicants. Once bona fide status had been established, 328 applicants remained, which made up approximately 73 percent of the total number of applicants for these four searches. These numbers show that for these searches, before qualifications beyond the minimum applications had been discussed or applied, more than 25 percent of the pool had been eliminated. These findings are relatively low compared to the case studies presented by Womack, where she reported that 61 percent of applicants for Case Study One did not meet the minimum requirements for a position; 78 percent did not meet the minimums for Case Study Two; and in Case Study Three, 62 percent did not meet the minimums.[15] Meeting the minimum qualification requirements and heeding the results of the research findings reported earlier from Creth/Harders and Sproles/Ratledge will position applicants well for an entry-level position in today's tough academic library job market. Applicants must realize that once they've reached bona fide status, however, the process begins anew, with all qualified candidates on a level playing field as preferred qualifications are weighted or ranked.

The remaining chapters of this book address and discuss major aspects of the academic search process. Chapter 2 presents the results of a content analysis of job ads published in *American Libraries* and *College and Research News* in order to determine the current availability of entry-level positions, as well as examine any trends in job advertisements for entry-level academic library positions. In chapter 3, Sever Bordeianu and Christina M. Desai impart the art of reading and deciphering a job advertisement, and how to use it to write your cover letter. In chapter 4, Sarah L. Stohr shares with readers "how to compile an application packet that doesn't make the search committee want to kill you." I believe this title speaks for itself. Chapter 5 explores the use and misuse of online tools and social networking during the job search process. Chapter 6 deconstructs the telephone interview process, along with advice on things you probably shouldn't say or do during the interview. In chapter 7, Daniel Barkley offers a discussion of what to expect during the on-campus interview. Sarah L. Stohr coauthors chapter 8 with Bruce Neville and examines the do's and don'ts of preparing and making a presentation during the on-site job interview. Chapter 9 discusses job offers and negotiations and is coauthored by Neely and Evangela Q. Oates. Silvia Lu rounds out this volume with chapter 10, "The Eight-Month Marathon: From Library School to New Librarian," which brings everything together.

It is absolutely possible to apply for and get offered a professional library position in an academic library without the advice provided in this book. However, we hope the advice and information provided here increases your odds for success. Enjoy the journey.

Notes

1. Rachel Holt and Adrienne L. Stock, "The Entry-Level Gap," *Library Journal* 130, no. 8 (2005): 36–38.

2. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Librarians," in *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008–09 Edition,* http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos068.htm (accessed December 9, 2009*).*

3. Teresa Y. Neely, "Minority Student Recruitment in LIS Education: New Profiles for Success," in *Unfinished Business: Race, Equity, and Diversity in Library and Information Science Education,* ed. Maurice B. Wheeler (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005), 108.

4. Penny M. Beile and Megan M. Adams, "Other Duties as Assigned: Emerging Trends in the Academic Library Job Market," *College and Research Libraries* 61, no. 4 (2000): 336–47. See also Stanley J. Wilder, "The Age Demographics of Academic Librarians: A Profession Apart," *Journal of Library Administration* 28, no. 3 (1999): 1–84.

5. David W. Reser and Anita P. Schuneman, "The Academic Library Job Market: A Content Analysis Comparing Public and Technical Services," *College and Research Libraries* 53, no. 1 (1992): 49–59.

6. Sheila Creth and Faith Harders, "Thirty Academic Research Libraries Report Their . . . Requirements for the Entry Level Librarian," *Library Journal* 105, no. 18 (1980): 2168–69.

7. Claudene Sproles and David Ratledge, "An Analysis of Entry-Level Librarian Ads Published in *American Libraries,* 1982–2002," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 5, nos. 2–3 (2004): n.p.

8. Ibid.

9. Loriene Roy and others, "Bridging Boundaries to Create a New Workforce: A Survey of Spectrum Scholarship Recipients, 1998–2003," American Library Association, 2006, www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/diversity/spectrum/spectrumsurveyreport/BridgingBoundaries.pdf (accessed December 9, 2009). See also Teresa Y. Neely and Lorna Peterson, "Achieving Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Academic and Research Librarians: The Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement of Librarians of Color: A White Paper," Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007, www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/ACRL_Achieving Racial.pdf (accessed December 9, 2009).

10. Phillip C. Howze, "Search Committee Effectiveness in Determining a Finalist Pool: A Case Study," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34, no. 4 (2008): 340–53; Kay Womack, "Applying for Professional Positions in Academic Libraries: Meeting Minimum Requirements," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 23, no. 3 (1997): 205–9.

11. Gregory K. Raschke, "Hiring and Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries: Problems and Solutions," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 3, no. 1 (2003): 53–67; Tedine J. Roos and Diana W. Shelton, "The Cost of Hiring an Academic Librarian," *Journal of Library Administration* 8, no. 2 (1987): 81–91.

12. Womack, "Applying for Professional Positions"; Howze, "Search Committee Effectiveness."
13. Creth and Harders, "Thirty Academic Research Libraries"; Reser and Schuneman, "Academic Library Job Market"; Sproles and Ratledge, "Analysis of Entry-Level Librarian Ads."
14. Sproles and Ratledge, "Analysis of Entry-Level Librarian Ads."
15. Womack, "Applying for Professional Positions," 206–8.

YOUR PRESENTATION

It Should Not Be Ridiculous

Bruce Neville and Sarah L. Stohr

At virtually every academic job for which you interview, you will be asked to prepare a presentation on a designated topic. The presentation is a critical part of the interview process. It allows you to showcase your knowledge or expertise regarding a specific topic and gives audience members an opportunity to assess you not only as a candidate but as a public speaker or potential instructor. For many organizations, the presentation component is the only portion of the interview process that is open to all library employees rather than just the search committee, or other individuals and groups scheduled to meet with the candidate during the interview. You need to be able to impress them all with your presentation skills, your knowledge of the subject matter, and your ability to think quickly during the question-and-answer portion of the presentation.

When you are invited to an interview in an academic library, potential employers will often ask you to prepare a talk to give at some point during your time on campus. In many cases, you will be given a specific topic to address during your presentation. The topics usually relate to the position for which you are interviewing or to a wider issue or problem within your field of interest. For instance, if you are applying for a position in the instruction department of an academic library, you might be asked to offer your thoughts

97

on the latest trends in assessment or to demonstrate how you would conduct an instruction session for students using a specific electronic resource. Search committees typically give considerable thought to the presentation topics they assign. Assigned presentation topics are usually quite open-ended. This allows the search committee and others viewing your presentation to see how you interpret the question or examine the topic at hand. The committee isn't trying to trick you; rather, the presentation is designed to offer you a chance to distinguish yourself from other candidates. It is important that you seize the opportunity.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE PRESENTATION

Not all search committees will assign you a presentation topic; some will leave the choice of topic up to you. If you are allowed to choose your own topic for a presentation, make sure that you select a topic that is of relevance to the organization and that will be interesting for your audience. Adapting your presentation topic to the organization will let the audience members know that you've done your research as a candidate. If you must come up with your own presentation topic and you're unsure of where to start, search the library literature and blogs related to the position for which you are interviewing. Are there current trends, hot topics, or controversies that might be explored during your presentation? Don't forget that your friends, professors, and colleagues can be a great source of help and inspiration when it comes to choosing a topic or figuring out how to tackle a presentation topic you were assigned. Bouncing ideas off of them is an excellent way to figure out how you want to proceed with your topic.

As you put your presentation together, pay attention to the directions given to you by the institution regarding the session. If you are given 30 minutes for a presentation, with a 15-minute question-and-answer session to follow, do not give a 15- or 45-minute presentation. We've witnessed countless candidates stand up and give presentations that were much too short or much too long. It's always embarrassing to watch as they are asked "Is that all you have?" or told "We have to cut you off because we're out of time." Practice giving your presentation so that you know without a doubt that you have the appropriate amount of material to cover within the given time frame. The search committee will certainly notice whether you went significantly under or over time. Don't let a situation that's so easy to avoid work against you, and please, if you are told that you're out of time, don't keep presenting!

Sometimes it will be necessary for you to use a resource that the library subscribes to as part of your presentation. You may need to demonstrate

a particular database or software application. If that is the case, make sure you know exactly how the resource works and how to connect to it from the computer you will be using during your presentation. Audience members will be unimpressed with a candidate who doesn't know how to effectively use a tool that she has been asked to demonstrate. If you're asked to demonstrate a resource that you don't have ready access to, don't immediately panic. Search for nearby libraries that have a subscription to the resource and practice there. Be sure you're basing your presentation on the same *platform* that you'll be demonstrating. Each vendor packages databases differently, and you will need to know how to present for the appropriate platform. If you can't find a nearby library with the specified database on the specified platform, make sure you practice with and know the features of *both* the database and the platform, even if you can't practice them together beforehand. If you aren't able to arrange access to the tool locally, explain that to your contact at the institution and ask about remote access so that you can practice. Many libraries customize their databases to suit their users' needs, which may result in interfaces being dramatically different from library to library. Familiarize yourself with the tool you'll be using as much as you can beforehand so that any fumbling you might do during the demonstration will be kept to an absolute minimum.

DEVELOPING A PRESENTATION

So how do you give a presentation that will land you your coveted job? Ideally, your presentation will be both informative and engaging and will leave the audience interested and wanting to know even more about the topic and what you have to say about it.

You may have as much as a month to prepare your presentation, but you may also have as little as a week. In any case, you will need to work quickly.

Choose a facet of the topic that is of personal interest. If you are interested in the topic, it is more likely that you can interest the audience as well. If you're already interested in the subject, it's likely that you will have some background knowledge and a familiarity with the literature. It will make it that much easier to prepare a presentation under pressure. Presumably, you have some knowledge of the area of librarianship, or you would not be interested in or applying for this job. You may have personal experiences that you can work into the presentation. A personal investment in the subject goes a long way toward minimizing "stage fright" during the actual presentation.

Your audience will represent a cross-section of the library staff and all of its operations. Do not be too dependent upon acronyms in your presentation or expect your audience to be familiar with all of them. This is especially true

if you are applying for a technical position. Many of the library staff will be unfamiliar with the inner workings of the technology. You should be prepared to explain any of your concepts in layman's terms, as well as know enough "jargon" to impress those in the information technology department. At the same time, avoid casual language.

Well-chosen graphics can be an excellent addition to any presentation. Charts or graphs can be made quickly and give the audience relief from slides full of text. A few *carefully chosen* and appropriate graphics can add a touch of humor to the presentation, but don't overdo it! Too many graphics on a slide can make your presentation look busy and confusing.

Be sure to stay on topic! Within the assigned topic, there will be room to explore tangents, but don't stray too far. As you develop your presentation, go back to the information you've been given. Make sure you are answering the question you have been asked to address. The audience will definitely notice if you wander too far from the topic you were assigned.

Perhaps the single most important thing to remember about giving a good presentation is that you must engage your audience. They may have already heard three other candidates discussing the same presentation topic, and you want to make sure that you stand out as exceptional. To keep your audience caring about *you* during your presentation, you need to work hard to engage them with the material. Try to incorporate active learning techniques into your session if appropriate. If you don't know much about active learning, there is a huge amount of literature published on the subject that can point you to ideas to use. Consider asking the audience to brainstorm ideas, or having them work with partners to discuss a question you pose to them—anything to get them participating so that they don't feel like they're merely being lectured at.

THINGS TO AVOID IN YOUR PRESENTATION

Before we leave the subject of preparing your presentation, perhaps it's fruitful to examine what doesn't work during a presentation. In this regard, try to avoid the following during your presentation.

Avoid Reading Your Presentation

The best presentations come across as conversations, and it's difficult to have a conversation with someone who is reading all their lines. During the presentation, don't simply read from your slides. Even worse, don't read from a paper script! This doesn't mean that you can't have what you are going to say written down in case you panic and can't form words. If you forget what you want to

say, dig down deep and use your best acting skills to pretend that you're just glancing at your notes occasionally and not reading from them verbatim.

Avoid Having Text-Heavy PowerPoint Slides

Making the audience read slides full of dense information is cruel and takes their focus away from you. Do you like reading slides full of information when you're watching a presentation? If you do use slides, focus on one or two main points per slide, keeping text to a minimum. Bulleted lists are okay, but use them in moderation. "Build" the list as you make your points, rather than having a single, static slide. Make sure the font size you choose will be easy for someone in the back of the room to read. Make sure the color choices for your text and background will be suitable to either a poorly lit or a brightly lit room. Whether speaking from note cards or PowerPoint slides, a good presenter generally uses brief phrases and fills in the text during the presentation. With PowerPoint, you can add notes to each slide that print out on your own notes, but don't show to the audience. Don't be afraid to mark up your own notes with pauses, emphases, or factoids, either. Only you will see them. If you want to see examples of great slide-based presentations, check out Internet sites like Presentation Zen (www.presentationzen.com) for inspiration.

Avoid Making Assertions You Aren't Prepared to Fully Defend or Explain

You never know what questions audience members are going to ask at the conclusion of your presentation. Don't allow them the opportunity to ask anything that you won't be prepared to answer! If you make an assertion during your presentation, you can bet that someone in the audience is going to stand up at the end and ask you to defend, explain, or expand upon what you said. If you've done your research, you'll be prepared to handle that situation without a problem; if you know little about a topic, though, keep your discussion of it to a minimum so that you don't have to worry about getting hammered with questions relating to it. Familiarize yourself with the literature on your topic and you should be able to handle most questions that come your way.

Avoid Using a Software Program or Tool with Which You Aren't Comfortable

We've witnessed candidates begin their presentation by saying they've never used PowerPoint and asking the audience to "bear with them" as they "figure it out." This is a mistake on multiple levels. First and foremost, if you don't

have experience using a piece of software that most in our profession would consider a basic tool, do not admit to it unless you are specifically asked about your experience with it. Second, if you decide to use a piece of software or a database during your presentation, make sure that you practice using it beforehand so that you project yourself as polished and capable. You don't have to use all of the bells and whistles, but you should be able to put together a basic presentation and move smoothly between it and your other screens.

Murphy's Law applies with deadly force to presentations. A live demonstration of the resource is great, but be prepared for the worst to happen. Always "can" your demonstration using screen captures so that if something goes terribly wrong with the Internet connection during your presentation, you can proceed without missing a beat. While screen captures are not as good as the real thing, they sure beat making your audience wait while the computer technician tries to reestablish the connection. Even worse is the embarrassment of not having a demonstration at all. Using screen captures shows your potential employer that you are prepared for these possibilities. Make sure you get *all* the necessary screen captures to demonstrate the entire process of what you are showing your audience. Even if you only stop on a screen for an instant, the audience will need a capture of each click you make.

Don't forget to make double or even triple backups of your presentation. Save a copy to a flash drive or on compact disc—even better, save a copy on one of each. Carry these with you on the plane to avoid the possibility of their being lost should there be a mishap with your checked baggage. When you're finished tweaking the slides, send a copy of your presentation files to yourself by e-mail. If all else fails, you should be able to download the e-mail version to the computer you'll be using for your presentation. Of course, be sure that you can get to your e-mail remotely on the Internet if you are going to rely on this method. If you don't already have one, now might be a good time to set up an e-mail account on one of the free e-mail servers available on the Web.

In the end, there may be just one thing to keep in mind when it comes to putting a great presentation together: "Present unto others as you would have them present unto you." You don't want to sit through a boring, uninspired presentation—neither does anyone at the institution interviewing you. If you've prepared in advance, you should have no problem giving an insightful and thoughtful presentation that your audience will remember.

ENSURING YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED TO PRESENT

Before you head off to the interview, check with your contact at the institution to be sure that you'll have what you need upon your arrival. A computer and projector are standard equipment for interview presentations, but it never hurts to double-check that they will be available. Will you need other equipment? Will you need speakers? Make sure you let your contact know of any special needs in advance of presentation day. A remote "clicker" to advance the slides is useful and gives you freedom to move about during the presentation. You should ask if one is available, or check to see whether your school or current employer has one you can borrow. Will you want a podium? Some speakers prefer to use a podium, while others prefer to work without one.

Will you be using a microphone? Is one available? If your voice doesn't project well, you should request one. If you're not used to using a microphone, try to get your hands on one beforehand so that you can get some practice. Are you accustomed to your "microphone voice"? If you've never heard yourself broadcast over a public address system before, you may not recognize your own voice! Everyone's voice sounds different over a set of speakers from what they hear inside their own head.

Make sure you will have the correct version of your presentation software and any other software you will need. Remember, some newer software releases are not backwards-compatible. If you've used the latest version of a program to prepare your presentation, some of the newest features may not "translate" to the version you have available on presentation day. If you are using PowerPoint, there is a free viewer available from Microsoft that will let you project and print your presentation, but not edit it (Google "PowerPoint viewer" to be taken to the Microsoft download page). The viewer is small enough to fit on your flash drive with your presentation.

Make sure you ask your contact about Mac vs. PC. The morning of the presentation is not the time to worry about incompatible hardware! For better or worse, PCs are becoming the industry standard, so Mac users are more likely to need to arrange for appropriate equipment. Many libraries prefer Macs, however, so PC users should not necessarily assume that a PC will be available. You can always avoid the issue entirely by taking your own laptop with you. If you are going to rely on your own computer, however, make sure you know how to connect it to projection equipment and which keystrokes you must hit in order to get your presentation to actually project.

Are you planning a live demonstration? Will you need a live Internet connection? Be sure to ask about these things well beforehand. Make sure your

examples work and that they demonstrate what you want them to show. When you get to the presentation location, run through your examples again quickly before the audience arrives in order to be sure they work on the local library's version of the resource, especially if the search platform is different. Many databases are available on multiple host platforms, so be sure you know what is being used at the interviewing library and how to use it.

WHAT TO EXPECT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE PRESENTATION

You should receive a schedule for the day of the interview before you arrive on campus. Generally, search committees try to schedule the presentation around mid-morning. Sometimes, though, the only time to schedule it is right after lunch or even toward the end of the day. Make sure you plan your own energy level to be at a personal best at presentation time.

You will typically be given some time right before your presentation to set up and get yourself ready. Make sure you have water handy. Use the bathroom! Even if you don't think you need to, go. At least use the time to make sure your appearance is in order and there are no remnants of lunch in your teeth. (Audiences generally don't worry as much about a candidate's appearance as the candidate does, but a check to reassure yourself doesn't hurt.) Now, take a couple of deep breaths. You can do this!

You've developed an excellent presentation and you've practiced on your friends, so there's nothing to worry about, right? Stage fright, or performance anxiety, happens to everyone—even to the most experienced speakers—from time to time. A survey reported by Peter Watson in the *Sunday Times* on October 7, 1973, listed fear of "speaking before a group" as the *number one* fear among those surveyed (41 percent), higher even than fear of flying or of death itself! "Speaking in public" tops another list of phobias published in *Health* magazine.[1] There's a lot riding on this presentation, so it's natural to be anxious. It's probably little consolation to the novice speaker to say that it generally gets easier with practice, but it does. Usually.

There is a large amount of literature published on stage fright and many theories about its causes. Regardless of the theory, there is general agreement that it includes psychological, physiological, and behavioral components and all are present to varying degrees. There is disagreement as to how much learning and innate biology respectively contribute to stage fright. There are things you can do to reduce your stage fright, but you're probably not going to eliminate it completely.

On The Day, you'll be given a little time before the audience arrives to familiarize yourself with the equipment you'll be using. Use it to your advantage. Stage fright comes from a feeling of being out of control, so control those things that you can. Bring up your presentation and run through a couple of slides to be sure all of the features work. If you have animations or embedded material in the slides, make sure they work on the new system. Make sure the Internet is working, both at the local institution and at the websites you plan to visit. Make sure you know how to move through the slides, either with the keyboard or the remote clicker.

One of the best ways to avoid stage fright is to know your material. This means *practice!* Run through your presentation *at least* once in its entirety before you leave for the interview. This will give you a sense of the time your presentation will take, so that you can be more or less within the allotted time frame. It also reassures you that you can make it all the way through. If you can, practice with a small group of friends who can give you experience speaking in front of a friendly audience and provide constructive feedback on your presentation. If they're very familiar with the topic, ask them to try to listen with "fresh" ears for jargon or faulty logic on your part. Ask them to be brutally honest. "It was great" doesn't really help you. Ask someone to count the number of times you say "um" and note any other nervous habits you might unconsciously display.

Don't tweak the presentation the night before. You've done all you can, so relax. It's easier said than done, but a good night's rest goes a lot further toward warding off stage fright than staying up late obsessing over it. Take a warm bath, watch a movie in the hotel room, or read something totally off topic to take your mind off of tomorrow.

Just before the presentation is also an excellent time to give yourself some positive self-reinforcement. If you go in with a confident attitude—I can *do* this!—you stand a much better chance of having a successful presentation. Your confidence will also make a good impression on your host as you get your presentation set up, which may help in the search committee's deliberations.

Your opening is the most important part of your presentation. It is your only chance to make a first impression on your audience. Stage fright usually peaks, however, in the moments just before and just after you start speaking. Anticipate this and be prepared. Use this initial period of stage fright to energize yourself for your presentation. A tasteful joke or a relevant personal anecdote is a good way to get the audience on your side.

There are a number of traditional tricks to reduce stage fright. The article by Auerbach gives excellent, concrete advice for handling stage fright both before and after the presentation.[2] Some tricks work and some don't. Do *not*

imagine the audience in their underwear—librarians are generally not former underwear models! Instead, imagine that you're speaking to those friends on whom you practiced earlier. If you find your hands shaking, stand behind the podium and hold onto it. If you shake so much that the podium rattles, take a few more deep breaths! Taking a sip of water is another way to buy yourself a little time and help yourself relax.

During the presentation, movement is often a good thing, but make your movements natural. Once you've gotten over any initial panic, relax your vise-like grip on the podium and move around the area. Point to something on the screen if it seems appropriate. This has the added benefit of directing attention toward what you are trying to say and away from you.

Eye contact is important in any presentation. It helps put the audience on your side. Try not to stare at the wall behind the audience or blankly into space. Attempt to make eye contact with everyone in the audience at least once during your presentation. You should hold eye contact with a person for about 3–5 seconds, then move on. If you are feeling anxious, once you've found a "friendly" face, return to it occasionally throughout the presentation but don't look at them to the exclusion of everyone else in your audience. You will feel more like you're talking to one person than to a group, and a friend, at that.

Vary your voice's pitch, speed, and tone. Use pauses to punctuate your thoughts. A soft voice highlights your points. The most important parts of your presentation are the beginning and the end. Be energetic in the introduction. Use a strong voice. At the conclusion, a soft voice will make the audience "hang on your every word." Try to end softly, but without trailing off. Practice speaking slowly. Most people talk more quickly when they are nervous as they frantically try to get through their presentation and sit down. Taking a few breaths along the way not only calms you but may help slow you down as well.

It's hard to say how many people will be attending your presentation, even based on the size of the institution. They are taking valuable time away from their duties, so thank them for coming. Busy schedules make it difficult for folks to stay at your presentation the entire time. They may have to leave during the presentation to attend another meeting or sit on the desk, so don't be offended—or thrown off—if they come and go during the presentation.

You are being graded by each of the audience members, which can only add to your level of anxiety. This is your one chance to make a good impression on the entire organization. They will all have been provided with a copy of your resume or vita. They will know enough about you to be dangerous! They will likely have evaluation sheets that they will turn in to the search committee after your presentation, so you need to impress them all, not just the search committee.

Remember, though, that the audience *wants* you to succeed, or you wouldn't have been asked to the on-site interview. They know you're nervous, so most will give you the benefit of the doubt. They are looking to see how you stay on topic and if you can make it through the presentation without making a fatal faux pas. If instruction is part of the job description, they may be looking to see how you would perform in front of a class. *How* you present is at least as important as *what* you present.

You probably don't know these people or the local culture, so avoid topics, illustrations, or humor that might be offensive to someone in the audience. Taking your clothes off during a presentation (hey, it happens—we've seen it!) is not generally considered good form.

After the presentation, there will be time for questions. *Lots and lots* of questions. Some examples of questions that have come up in real interview presentations are given in figure 8.1.

There are things that can't be asked for legal reasons. You can't legally be asked any question that would indicate any of those equal opportunity protections, such as age, religion, marital status, or sexual orientation (among other things). Nor should you volunteer such information, besides what's in your resume or vita. The questions should relate to the activities of the job.

Lots of questions are a good sign; a lack of questions could be a bad sign. You will probably be asked to expand on some of the things you said in your presentation, which is why you don't want to bring anything up during the presentation that you cannot fully explain later. If the moderator doesn't ask the questioners to introduce themselves and their function in the organization, ask them yourself. Unless you're a real people person you won't remember everyone, but it will give you a context for your answer. If you can remember a few names and use them, it leaves an extremely positive impression on everyone present.

Don't ramble, and don't blurt answers. If you're having trouble with a question, don't be afraid to take a moment to think. A legitimate comment like "That's an excellent question. Let me think about it for a moment" will not be frowned upon (unless you tell the audience you need to think about every single question posed to you). You will be seen as someone who takes the time to work through a difficult question. If you're having real trouble with a question, try saying "I'm going to have to think about that and get back to you" to buy yourself some time, with the added benefit that there probably *won't* be time to get back to it! Think about an answer, anyway, in case you run into the speaker in another context later on.

Try to avoid a simple "yes or no" answer, even to questions that seem to require one. These are often "trap" questions. Always try to give a balanced

FIGURE **8.1**

Sample questions from the audience

Candidates should be prepared to answer a large variety of questions from the audience during the presentation portion of their interview. We've included a list of some of the most common questions we've heard during our own experiences here.

What part of this job appeals to you most? Least?

Can you describe your training or experience in bibliographic instruction/collection development/reference/electronic resources?

How do you keep current in your field?

How do you handle competing priorities?

Please describe a situation where you demonstrated leadership/initiative/creativity.

What can you bring to this position that other candidates may not?

Please describe your experience working with patrons from diverse backgrounds.

What would be your top priority if you were hired for this position?

(For tenure-track positions) What areas of research would you like to pursue?

How do you deal with frustrated patrons?

When working on a team for a project, what role do you generally play?

What are your professional goals for one year? Five years? Ten years?

Describe yourself in three adjectives.

What would you feel is your weakest area with respect to this job? [Caution: trap!!! Also worded as: In what part of the job do you think you would need the most training?]

In twenty-five words or less, please describe how you would effectively address the issues of race, class, and gender in issues of library accessibility.

What experience do you have with government documents? How do you see them fitting into your work environment? [Even if you aren't applying for a gov docs job, the gov docs librarian will ask this one!]

Please tell us about your professional affiliations or involvement with professional organizations.

answer, especially to a question that seems like a "trap" or one that might portray you in a negative light. If possible, give a brief example from personal experience.

Be sure to ask if your response answered the question and satisfied the questioner. Keep track of multipart questions. If you can do this mentally, fine. If not, don't be afraid to take notes. Saying truthfully, "I'm writing this down to make sure that I answer all parts of your question," gives a positive impression.

You will probably be asked if you have questions for the audience. Again, it's a bad sign if you don't. Have a few questions prepared in advance that you can ask the audience members. You should already have reviewed the library's website and that of the greater institution. These should provide you with enough fodder for plenty of questions. Be sure you don't ask questions on topics that are readily apparent on the institutional website—it *will* be noted! Some additional question suggestions are also provided in figure 8.2.

After the presentation, thank the audience for their time. You'll probably be mentally exhausted and won't want to talk to anyone for a week, but people will come up to greet you or introduce themselves. Be polite, even if you've temporarily turned your mind off. If you are offered the position, and they mention it later, you can always say (truthfully) that "I'm sorry, there were so many people that day, it's hard to remember everyone." You're probably ready for a nap, but there's more interview left. Part of the interview process is proving that you can be delightful, intelligent, witty, and lively even when you're totally exhausted.

It all sounds a little daunting, right? It doesn't have to be. If you know your material and know your audience, your presentation should be a successful one. It may not go perfectly (and you shouldn't expect it to), but if you've done your homework, you should survive relatively happy and unscathed. And don't forget that the reason you were invited to interview in the first place is because the search committee saw potential in you—they are interested in what you have to say. If you have any doubts at all after preparing for this part of the interview experience, keep it in mind that the search committee wants you to succeed, too.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rob Abernathy and Mark Reardon, *Hot Tips for Speakers: 25 Surefire Ways to Engage and Captivate Any Group or Audience* (Tucson, AZ: Zephyr, 2002).

Jeremiah J. Sullivan, "Six Hundred Interviews Later," *ABCA Bulletin* 43, no. 1 (1980): 2–5.

FIGURE **8.2**

Sample questions for the audience

Candidates should be prepared with a list of questions for the audience after the presentation portion of their interview. We've included some sample questions here.

What's the biggest challenge currently being faced by this library system?

Why do you like working here?

What do you think are this library system's best qualities?

Where do you see this organization in five years?

Does the library provide a formal or informal mentoring program for new librarians? (This is valuable for both tenure-track and non–tenure-track positions.)

What kind of support does the library provide for professional development, such as conference travel?

Could you describe the relationship between the library and the departmental faculty in the university?

For those of you who have been here at least ten years, what keeps you here?

I noticed a really interesting [some prominent object in the library or on the website] . . . Could someone tell me the story behind it?

Notes

1. Cassandra Wrightson, "America's Greatest Fears," *Health* 12, no. 1 (1998): 45.
2. Alan Auerbach, "Self-Administered Treatments of Public Speaking Anxiety," *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 60, no. 2 (1981): 106–9.

INDEX

137

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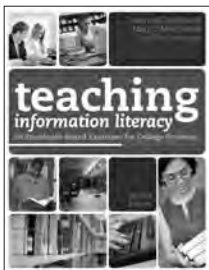
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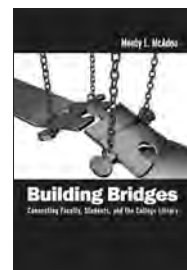JOANNA M. BURKHARDT AND MARY C. MACDONALD WITH ANDRÉE J. RATHEMACHER
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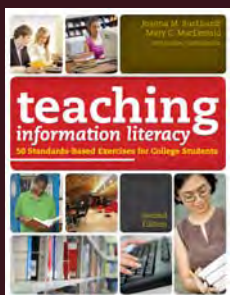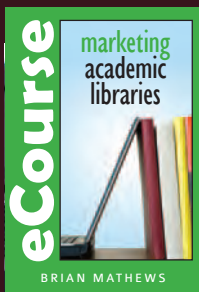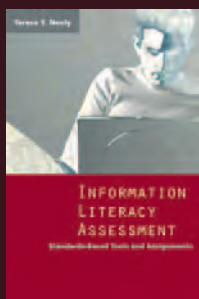
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