

Library Assistant interview questions

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What to expect

Library Assistant interviews focus on your customer service, practical shelving and processing skills, and comfort with library management systems. Employers want to know you can help patrons politely, work accurately and stay calm when the library gets busy.

- **Customer service:** Questions about helping patrons, handling complaints and making people feel welcome.
- **Process and procedure:** Questions about shelving, loans, returns, cataloguing and maintaining the collection.
- **Technical:** Questions about library management systems such as Koha or Alma, and digital tools like Microsoft Office.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for past examples of teamwork, problem solving or handling competing priorities.
- **Scenario:** Questions about difficult patrons, missing items or unexpected situations.
- **Teamwork and safety:** Questions about working with colleagues, manual handling and keeping library spaces safe.

The interview usually starts with an introduction and a tour of the library. Then a panel, often including a supervisor and a colleague, asks a mix of the question types above. You may be given a practical test, such as sorting a trolley of returns or finding a book in the catalogue. The interview ends with your chance to ask questions about the role and the library.

1. Can you walk me through how you would shelve a trolley of returns?

Why they ask

This tests your process knowledge and attention to detail, which are central to the role.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe each step in order, from checking the trolley to final shelving and reporting issues.

Example answer

"First I would check the trolley for items that need special handling, like interlibrary loans or reserves. Then I would sort by collection, such as fiction, non-fiction or junior, and by call number. I would shelve in Dewey order, checking the shelf for any items out of place. I would also look for damaged items and set them aside for repair. Finally I would record any questions or issues for the supervisor."

2. Tell me about a time you helped a patron who could not find what they needed.

Why they ask

This looks at your customer service and problem solving in a real situation.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"At my previous library, a patron came in looking for a local history book that was not on the shelf. I listened to what they needed, checked the catalogue, and found it was listed as available. I searched the returns trolley and the sorting room, then discovered it was misfiled in the wrong section. I retrieved it, apologised for the wait, and showed them how to place a reservation for future items. The

patron left satisfied and returned the next week for another request.”

3. How would you handle a patron who is upset about a late fee?

Why they ask

This checks your judgement under pressure and your ability to follow policy while staying calm.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: stay calm, listen, explain policy, offer options, escalate if needed.

Example answer

“I would stay calm and listen without interrupting. I would acknowledge their frustration and explain the fee policy clearly, without arguing. If the fee was wrong, I would check the record and correct it. If it was correct, I would offer options like a payment plan or a one-time waiver if policy allows. I would also remind them about renewal options so it does not happen again. If the patron became aggressive, I would call a supervisor.”

4. What experience do you have with library management systems such as Koha or Alma?

Why they ask

This assesses your technical fit and how quickly you can use the library's systems.

How to structure your answer

Technical: name the systems, describe specific tasks, mention troubleshooting and escalation.

Example answer

“I have used Koha daily for two years to manage loans, returns, reservations and patron records. I also processed new items, applied barcodes and labels, and updated catalogue records. I am comfortable troubleshooting basic issues like a scanner not reading or a patron record showing an error, and I know when to escalate to IT. I have also used Microsoft Office for rosters and reports.”

5. Describe a time you had to manage competing priorities during a busy period.

Why they ask

This shows how you organise your work when the library is under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

“During school holidays, the library was very busy with children's activities while a large delivery of new books arrived. I made a quick list of what was urgent: the front desk needed coverage, so I stayed there for the first hour. Then I processed the new books in batches between patron requests. I also asked a colleague to help with shelving. By the end of the day, all new items were ready for borrowing and no patron waited more than a few minutes for help.”

6. What would you do if you noticed a colleague repeatedly leaving books unshelved and the shelves becoming messy?

Why they ask

This explores your teamwork, communication and commitment to shared standards.

How to structure your answer

Scenario with judgement: check for reasons, offer help, escalate constructively if needed.

Example answer

"I would first check if there was a reason, such as they were covering a busy desk or feeling unwell. I would offer to help them catch up, rather than complain. If it continued, I would mention it to the supervisor in a constructive way, focusing on the impact on patrons and staff. I would also model good shelving habits myself."