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## Code of Ethics for Librarians

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Authors	The Japan Library Association
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Download date	2026-06-20 07:05:36
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/212145">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/212145</a>

## [Japan Library Association](#)

# Code of Ethics for Librarians

*Approved at the Annual General Conference of the Japan Library Association  
June 4, 1980*

*Translated by Research Committee On the Problems of Librarians*

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### Introduction

This Code of Ethics for Librarians, 1980, is the discipline of governing ourselves as librarians, intending to accomplish our duty through the realization of the responsibilities of the library in the society, in accordance with the "Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries," revised in 1979.

1. This code has a common philosophical foundation with the "Statement," which was originally advocated in 1953, and revised in 1979 at the Annual General Conference of the Japan Library Association. The social responsibilities of the library declared in the Statement should be performed in our daily library services, and the performance should be carried out by our group effort of improving our professional capability as librarians. The Code is our own criterion toward attaining the goal through clarifying our responsibility in the society. Therefore, the Code is not a mere presentation of moral issues or assertion about ourselves. It intends to develop a professional philosophy for librarians which can be applied to the librarians in every type of the library, to emphasize the mutual foundation common to all the librarians, and to assist in making libraries a useful organ in the society. It offers, not a static picture of librarians, but an active and forward-looking one.

The term "librarian(s)" here used denotes any library staff member in a library, regardless of his or her professional qualifications or official rank. It should be noted here that the library directors' \*1) resourcefulness and leadership are especially needed to realize each item of the Code.

2. The substance of the Code has been generated from wide-ranging professional experiences in the Japanese society. These experiences have been discussed, selected, summarized, and edited as the Code of Ethics for Librarians. The necessity for such a Code was keenly realized as the Code of Ethics for Librarians. The necessity for such a Code was keenly realized recently because the devotion of a single enthusiastic librarians or the efforts of a single library, however excellent they may be, cannot always well satisfy the demands of users, and group effort of librarians has come to be regarded as a good solution to the problem. Moreover, it has also been realized that library development in Japan has reached such a stage that the ideal image of librarians should be discussed by the librarians, library users, and the member of the governing authority as a topic of mutual interest.

3. The foundation of the Code is our self-awareness as librarians. Without this, there is neither validity nor sanction to enforce this Code. However, it should be noted that, by the publication of the Code, we are disclosing to society our common goal, our effort to reach that goal, and our criteria of judgement and behavior as members of the library profession. Moreover, it means that if we are to promise to society that we will devote ourselves to the realization of our ideals prescribed in the Code, any gap between the ideal and the reality will bring us severe criticism firstly from those people who place their trust on our library services, and secondly, from society as a whole.

Our professional self-awareness can utilize these criticisms and use them as a stimulus in the development of libraries. Such effort, if continued, will engender public trust in librarianship generally. The professionalism of librarians will be firmly established among library users once librarians are supported by public trust, and then, professionally will be recognized by the government as the official status of personnel in libraries. \*2) The establishment of the professionalism of librarians will result in better services to users, but all the fruits of better services will be given back to society. The adoption of the Code is the first step toward this goal.

4. It is expected that through the adoption of the Code, all library staff members will understand the role of the library and will devote themselves to realization of each item of the Code, regardless of type of library, status and type of work in the library, and whether the certificate of the librarian\*2) has been gained or not. It is also expected that

4. It is expected that through the adoption of the Code, all library staff members will understand the role of the library and will devote themselves to realization of each item of the Code, regardless of type of library, status and type of work in the library, and whether the certificate of the librarian\*3) has been gained or not. It is also expected that volunteer workers in libraries, staff members working in institutions with functions similar to libraries, and people who devote themselves to home- and local private library movements for children\*4) will show their sympathy with the Code.

5. The Code begins with the discipline for the individual librarian, then refers to the role of the librarian as a member of a professional organization, deals with cooperation among libraries and cooperation between librarians and people, and ends with the role of librarians in society.

### **The Fundamental Attitude of the Librarian**

1. The foundation of a Librarian's work lies in pursuit of his duties in accordance with the known expectations of society in general and the needs of the users of his library in particular.

A library is established on the basis of the expectations of society and the known needs of users. From this, the object and the main function of the library can be deduced. The object is to assure the people's right to know; the main function is to make library materials available to the people. Accordingly, it must be the fundamental professional concern of the Librarians to endeavor to predict, grasp, analyze and materialize such expectations and needs.

### **Responsibility for Users of the Library**

2. A Librarian should not discriminate between or against library users.

All people in the community have an equal right to use the library. A Librarian should devote him/herself to maintaining a standard of unrestricted, impartial and active service in the provision of library materials, and should not discriminate between or against library users on account of nationality, race, creed, sex, age, etc.

A Librarian should also endeavor to afford library facilities to those people who have not yet enjoyed library services as yet.

3. A Librarian should respect the confidentiality of each library user.

In order to assure people's freedom to read, a Librarian should respect the privacy of each library user, and should not divulge his/her name or details of books or other library materials used to third parties, and should resist all pressures to do so except as required under due process of law.\*5) This duty is carried out by all the staff members, both professional and non-professional, and both full-time and part-time.

### **Responsibility for Library Materials**

4. A Librarian should honor the Freedom of Libraries in collecting, preserving, and proffering library materials.

A Librarian should collect, organize, preserve and proffer library materials on the basis of professional knowledge and judgement. In pursuing this goal, he should not yield to pressure or attempts at censorship of any kind. He should not collect and proffer library materials on the basis of his own private interests, nor in an attempt to gain personal financial benefits.

5. A Librarian should make it his professional aim to familiarize himself, as far as possible both in and out of his library, with the materials recording human knowledge and experiences.

It is not an easy matter to be familiar with all the materials in a library, but a Librarian should be unceasing in his efforts to do so. The Library user expects the Librarian to have adequate knowledge of the materials he proffers. The stronger the demand for library materials, the bigger the expectation as to professional knowledge. Moreover, it is necessary to recognize that professional knowledge will be constantly under test in collecting and proffering materials that will satisfy all reasonable demands, including those of present non-users.

### **Responsibility in Training**

6. A Librarian should apply himself/herself to necessary professional training, both as an individual and as a member of a group.

In order to satisfy the requirements attendant upon the status of a professional person, a Librarian should study and acquire knowledge regarding the following:

1. Library users,
2. Library materials, and
3. techniques for organizing and proffering library materials, and relating such materials to library users in appropriate ways.

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3. techniques for organizing and proffering library materials, and relating such materials to library users in appropriate ways.

### **Responsibility as a Member of an Organization**

In achieving this goal, a Librarian should train himself both individually and in association with others.

The results of these efforts will cumulate in a professional knowledge, which will develop library services as a whole. In this sense, training himself is a Librarian's professional duty and right. The librarians' endeavors in training himself should preferably be established within the government's administrative system for personnel.

7. A Librarian should actively participate in the formulation of policy in the operation and service program of his library.

Without the Librarian's active participation in library service planning the library cannot operate smoothly and appropriately. A Library needs adequate knowledge of, and sympathy with, the operation policy and the service program. So far as is possible the librarian should identify with, and take an active role in, all planning procedure.

8. A Librarian should cooperate with other Librarians in efforts to develop group professional competencies.

In fulfilling the function of a library, the contribution of the individual Librarian, however great, is insufficient, and therefore group professional competencies need to be developed. To this end, a Librarian should cooperate with Librarians in other libraries whether of similar type or not, and should endeavor to understand the role of Librarian in other types of library. A Librarian should participate in local and national associations of Librarians and should aim to acquire a comprehensive body of professional knowledge and experience. In present circumstance, the professionalism of Librarians has not been officially established as yet, and Librarians are frequently required to change from library work to clerical posts.\*6) This frequent change of position can have a serious effect on the gathering of professional knowledge and experience. Librarians should endeavor to rectify such a policy and should promote the professionalism of librarians in the government system.

9. Librarians should make efforts to secure labor conditions that are appropriate for the development and pursuit of professional library services.

Librarians cannot respond sufficiently to library user demands under poor labor conditions. In aiming to improve working conditions that are suitable for adequate library services, Librarians should endeavor to secure minimum staff, members for the realization of professional objectives, so as to preventing labor distresses, liability to illness, and to ensure the protection of motherhood, etc. Librarians should do their utmost to promote recognition of the distinctive nature of library work.

### **Cooperation among Libraries**

10. Librarians should make it their aim to develop and maintain understanding and cooperation among libraries of all kinds.

In order to achieve the object of the library as a social institution, libraries should endeavor to work systematically together, irrespective of type, locality and governing body. Such understanding and cooperation should be regarded not as an institutional objective but as a characteristic of professional librarianship. It should be noted that all library cooperation should be carried, in the first instance, on the basis development of services within the individual libraries.

### **Contribution to the Creation of Culture**

11. Librarians should make due efforts, in association with others, to stimulate the development of the cultural environment in society and the community which they serve, by cooperating with local residents and with members of appropriate groups and organizations.

The library, as it is itself a social institution, must not be isolated from society. Cooperation with the members of the local community is indispensable for the development of a healthy and democratic cultural environment. On the other hand, the development of the fundamental function of the library is itself greatly promoted by this cultural environment. Librarians need to have a deep understanding for any voluntary movements among local residents for developing reading habits and promoting private library services for children, and should respond sympathetically and active to any criticisms relating to existing library services and demands for the provision of new libraries. Moreover, Librarians should contribute to the development of local culture through close cooperation with educational, social and cultural groups and organizations in the locality.

12. Librarians should make every effort to contribute to the development of the whole culture relating to publications and publishing that is responsive to the needs and viewpoints of the public.

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publications and publishing that is responsive to the needs and viewpoints of the public.

The freedom of publication does not simply mean the freedom of a publisher to publish materials or information; more fundamentally, it refers to the reader's freedom to know. In this sense, Librarians need to identify with the reader's viewpoints, and to ensure that the library has a social role and a responsibility to meet actively the problems of the production and circulation of publications. Moreover, Librarians need to be aware of the importance of the Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries. Adherence to this by Librarians will ensure a close relationship with activities necessary for the defense of freedom of expression in the fields of publishing, press reporting and broadcasting. Constant identification with the interests of readers should mean that Librarians would always maintain cooperation with these fields that have such a close connection with the library and its work.

The Japan Library Association is putting forward, and advocating the adoption of this Code of Ethics, which has been produced as a result of examining the present situation of libraries in Japan. The Association will strive to maintain this Code, and to defend its philosophy, whenever it is threatened by any matter arising in connection with the pursuit of professional librarianship.

*\*1) In Japan, the position of a library director can not always be occupied by a certificated, well experienced librarian. In the case of an academic institution, the position is always occupied by a professor. In the case of a public library, the authority in charge of personnel appoints an official to the position, regardless of his library experience and his own interests, but based on his administrative ability as a government employee. In such circumstances, the understanding of the Code by such library directors is regarded as the most desirable from the viewpoint of library staff members.*

*\*2) Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Japanese librarians have asked government to establish their professional status within the government oriented to user oriented policy.*

*\*3) The regulations for the certificate for librarians are provided by the Library Law of 1950. Its Title 5 provides that a college or university can be given a certificate to be a librarian. The basic level of education is that of junior college, and the number of credits required is 19. As of 1985, seven institutions offer a short training course, and 174 institutions offer minor elective courses in librarianship. The total of certificate recipients is estimated as more than 10,000 in a year. The improvement in education of librarians has long been discussed but has not materialized as yet, except for the establishment of the University of Library and Information Science by the government in 1979.*

*Now in 1998, training courses require 20 credits including children's services and information retrieval courses. 6 institutions offer graduate programs in both master and doctors' level.*

*\*4) Intending to develop a better reading environment for children, local parents and volunteers form groups to collect books, circulate them, and pursue various activities. The number of such groups reached 4,557 in 1980. Since then the number has been decreased.*

*\*5) The library legislations now in force are:*

*The National Diet Library Law of 1948*

*The Library Law of 1950*

*The School Library Law of 1953*

*\*6) Because of the high literacy rate (99.1%) and of the trend of the general public to buy books and keep them at home, the public library service has not been given priority in the policies of local governments. Moreover, it has been thought by government officials that one who can read and write can handle books, and any professional knowledge is not needed in maintaining a library. Accordingly, most of the local governments have not developed the professionalism of librarians in their system of personnel administration.*