ASK ELLEN – How can I keep my professional skills sharp?

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Q: What should library school graduates be doing to keep their librarian skills sharp while they are looking for work?

A: Maintaining marketable skills is a necessary goal for all librarians, new or experienced, job-seeking or employed. You need to practice your existing skills and keep informed regarding new skills you may want to add to your resume.

Volunteering is a great idea for info pros at any stage in their careers. You can also become active in professional organizations (local, regional or national). These are good ways to keep current, put your professional skills to use, and possibly acquire new skills. Potential employers like to see such service, and it offers networking opportunities too.

Read professional journals to stay informed. Follow some library trendspotters or those whom Malcolm Gladwell calls "mavens" (Joe Murphy is one example). You can use your research skills to find others, and here’s a tip: see who is speaking at conferences for the kind of work you do or are interested in doing, and read what they are writing. Joining professional groups on LinkedIn and reading and participating in discussions is another way to stay informed and engaged.

You may notice that there is a certain new skill that is being discussed by trendspotters and that employers are requesting in job descriptions, and, and may decide you want to learn more about it or acquire that skill. Continuing education is a necessary part of career development, and should be ongoing.

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Thank you and good luck!

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