There are some library jobs that require minimal contact with other people; catalogers, for example. Other librarians talk to and assist patrons, but in what situations do librarians speak?

Firstly, librarians speak to help library patrons use the library and find sources. This is consistent with the second of the two purposes of the library: to provide access to materials. This type of speaking is not entirely informal. Some formalities exist due to it being an interaction of a client (patron) with someone providing a service (librarian). The speech consists of answering patron’s questions and asking questions to clarify the patron’s needs.

Secondly, librarians speak with patrons seeking answers to their questions. This form of speaking is referred to as the reference interview. The patron asks for information and a librarian questions the patron to clarify their request. The librarian suggests an information source. If the source does not meet the patron’s needs, the questions/answers are refined until other sources are suggested.

Thirdly, occasionally groups come to the library for tours, training, or presentations. Sometimes a librarian is asked to speak at a convention or conference. Speaking to these groups is an important part of the library’s community outreach efforts. In an academic environment, there are many opportunities to give presentations in classes, meetings, and conferences. The speaking topics may vary widely, but speaking in front of groups can be intimidating.

The basics of speaking are, for the most part, consistent across disciplines. Knowing the expectations of a discipline is an important part of adapting to your audience, however. The papers in the “Speaking, in my opinion…” series do not represent an official statement from the department. They do, however, give you an introduction to different faculty opinions on effective speaking.