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A Primer for New Teachers

Candice Benjes-Small

William & Mary Libraries, cbsmall@wm.edu

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CHAPTER 7

A Primer for New Teachers

Candice Benjes-Small

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- recognize the growing role of instruction in academic libraries in order to develop a teaching identity;
- discuss the benefits and challenges of collaborating with teaching faculty in order to build successful relationships;
- analyze the instructional environment and student needs in order to identify audiences;
- design a lesson plan in order to meet workshop goals;
- assess learning experiences for success in order to evaluate workshop effectiveness;
- describe the peer observation process in order to employ it for self-improvement;
- consider ways to build a teaching portfolio in order to document professional learning; and
- identify ways to be a lifelong learner in order to grow as a teacher.

Introduction

Academic librarians often find themselves with teaching responsibilities. As liaison to an academic department, you may be responsible not just for related collection development but also reference and instruction. If you are in a more general public services position, it will probably entail quite a bit of library instruction. Detmering and Sproles found that virtually all advertisements for academic library reference positions required instruction duties.¹ In the *Ithaca S+R Library Report*,² library directors predicted the most growth in their institutions would be for positions related to information literacy and instructional design. The idea of teaching may fill you with excitement or dread, or quite possibly both. By the end of this chapter, hopefully, you will feel more comfortable with the idea of having a role in the classroom.

Most commonly, librarians teach course-integrated workshops in which the librarian serves as a guest speaker to a class. In these sessions, the librarian teaches

research skills needed by the students for a particular assignment or for general success in the course. Although the librarian may be invited back for multiple visits, more often she teaches just once, leading this instructional experience to be known as a “one shot.”

Sometimes, librarians are the instructor of record for a credit-bearing class. In this situation, the librarian is the professor for the length of the course, which can vary in the number of credits. She usually creates the syllabus (although sometimes this might be standardized within the library), plans all of the lessons, teaches the class meetings, and grades the students’ work.

Each type of teaching has its benefits and challenges. One-shots can be very effective when they are timed for the students’ point of need, and the opportunity to collaborate with teaching faculty can have all kinds of long-term benefits. It can be frustrating to have a limited amount of time to teach students about the library and information literacy, of course. A for-credit class allows you to explore research skills and concepts more in-depth, but it’s also much more time-consuming for you as a librarian. Teaching in the curriculum can also be very political as departments jockey for turf.

In this chapter, I focus on one-shots, also referred to as workshops or sessions, because they are by far the most prevalent in library land. But note that many of the skills and abilities you develop in these workshops can be transferred to other teaching situations and can be useful with other work responsibilities.

When you are first charged with teaching a class, the task may seem overwhelming, but applying instructional design principles will make it easier. According to the ACRL’s “Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians,”³ instructional design includes analyzing the instructional environment and audience, developing the learning goals and accompanying lesson plan, and designing appropriate assessments to ensure the goals have been met. There are numerous instructional design models; perhaps the most well-known is the ADDIE framework. ADDIE stands for Analysis, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate. Other models are usually variations of ADDIE.

Following the ADDIE model, let’s begin with analysis. When will you teach, whom will you be teaching, and what is it that you’ll be teaching? It all starts with your partner in teaching, the professor of record.

Collaborating with Teaching Faculty

Sometimes a one-shot can be a difficult experience: the students do not behave as expected, the technology crashes, or the professor may not support you in your role. There’s not much you can do about being at the mercy of the technology gods, but you can improve your chances of having a good rapport with the participants by communicating with the professor beforehand.

When a professor requests a face-to-face library session, it is essential that you have a conversation about the goals. If you ask an experienced teaching librarian

about “one-shots gone wrong,” you’ll hear tales about being asked to babysit while a professor was at a conference, or the time the students lashed out because they were frustrated at a poorly understood assignment, or the nightmare tour of the library given simply because the professor thought “my class should know where the encyclopedias are.” All of these scenarios lack a strong pedagogical reason for the students to be in the library, and it’s no surprise the results were negative.

Instead of viewing an instruction request as an order, you should see it as the opening for a discussion. Teaching faculty don’t want you or their students to have a terrible experience; they often just don’t understand what you can offer or what their students may need. You bring your expertise to the conversation, and by talking about what the professor hopes will happen as a result of the library workshop, you can jointly design the learning objectives.

For example, I recently met with a new professor who wanted a “library day” as soon as possible. He said he needed a session in which the librarian taught his students how to find scholarly articles. But when I discovered that he had mostly first-semester freshmen and that his assignment did not actually require scholarly articles, I turned the conversation toward what he was hoping the students would learn from the workshop. The professor said he wanted them to read articles to help them understand current events. I suggested the workshop instead focus on general interest databases like CQ Researcher and Opposing Viewpoints that would provide background information and that time be devoted to allowing the students to explore their topics, with the librarian and professor available to help guide them. The professor was thrilled to learn about these new-to-him databases and loved the idea of students looking for articles with help available. “But I should probably schedule it in a few weeks,” he reflected, “since they don’t have their topics yet. I haven’t told them about the assignment yet.” Remember that he wanted this workshop as soon as possible? Can you imagine how confusing this workshop would’ve been to students if they didn’t even know the parameters of the assignment? This thirty-minute, impromptu conversation saved a lot of heartache.

In this initial conversation, you should be prepared to tell a professor when a workshop is not suitable. Professors may be under pressure not to cancel classes, even when they need to be absent, and may see the library as a good alternative. You should talk to your colleagues as to whether such a use of your time is prudent. At my library, we will teach graduate classes without the professor in attendance, but we do not do so for undergraduates. Students were disengaged without the instructor present, and they often had questions about how the session related to the course which the librarian could not answer. Once again, you need to use your professional expertise as well as knowledge about campus norms to judge whether a library workshop is appropriate.

You may feel intimidated by the idea of having difficult conversations like these with professors. You are not alone. Librarians often struggle with feelings of inadequacy around professors. They may have more advanced degrees than you,

they may have more years in higher education than you, and sometimes they are not used to being told “no”! To combat these feelings, first remember that you have your own area of expertise: information literacy. You are not a support staff to the teaching faculty but a partner in students’ education. You are being invited to speak to the students because of your knowledge and skills.

Sometimes you can draw strength from reframing the conversation as student advocacy. You are not arguing with a professor for your own gain, but to ensure that students’ class time is used well. Providing your perspectives and suggestions is intended to make the workshop as relevant and useful to the students as possible—and if the workshop would not benefit the students, that’s not serving them at all.

Finally, consider turning the discussion to things to which you can say “yes.” Let’s think about what you could offer to the professor who will be out of town and wanted you to teach a workshop for her students. You can ask whether the professor has a colleague or graduate student who is familiar with the course and would be willing to attend in her place. Perhaps you could create an asynchronous library assignment for students to complete. Or what about having a drop-in workshop for those who would like more personalized help with an upcoming assignment? People, not just professors, tend to react better to options than they do to flat refusals.

If after your initial conversations you jointly decide to move forward with the library session, ask about the class details. How many students attend? Are they mostly freshmen, seniors, graduate students, or a mix? What time is the class held? Does it make more sense for you to come to their classroom or for the class to come to the library? If appropriate for your lesson, can laptops be brought to class?

Talk explicitly with the professor about the student learning outcomes for the session. What should students be able to do after they leave your class? Again, your experience will come into play. Professors may not have a strong handle on their students’ skills and you may need to guide them away from expecting freshmen to have already mastered documentation styles, or you can suggest to them that learning how to do a subject search in medical databases is time well spent.

With the class details and an agreed-upon set of goals, you can then move to the second phase: design.

↳ Try This:

- Read K. Leeder’s two-part series, “Collaborating with Faculty,” published by *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*.⁴ It provides a great roadmap for connecting and partnering with teaching faculty members.
- Invite an instructor or two to coffee to hear about the “life of a professor” on your campus. What is rewarded by the administration? What are the instructor’s teaching goals? In her eyes, what do students struggle with?

- What would make you uncomfortable as a teacher that professors might request of you? Write down some realistic scenarios and situations. Then, reflect on how you could guide the discussion to a more positive space. Consider writing down some scripts so that if such situations arise, you will be ready with responses.

Designing Your Lesson Plan

As a librarian new to instruction, you may be tempted to include “Everything Students Need to Know About Research” in your one-shot. After all, you only have “one shot” with these students; might as well tell them as much as you can, right?

Wrong. Ironically, the more you tell people, the less they actually remember. Cognitive load theory posits that a learner’s memory is limited and she can only process so much material at one time. If a learner becomes overloaded, not only will she stop learning, but she may forget what she had just learned. As Char Booth writes, “Managing cognitive load is like pouring liquid into a funnel: information must be introduced gradually and with an eye to capacity, or you run the risk that a learner will not be able to incorporate it.”⁵ To avoid this, you must be strategic when planning your workshop.

Rather than starting with what you want to teach, begin by asking yourself, what should participants be able to do as a result of the workshop? Ideally, library instruction is tied to a class assignment, so then the question becomes, What do students need to know in order to succeed at the assignment? From that list, identify which ones most closely align to your expertise and the domain of librarianship; for example, a research project will include communication requirements (either written or oral) that may not be tied to information literacy.

ACRL’s *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*⁶ can be a very helpful starting point. If you are doing much instruction, you should definitely carve out some time to review the Framework. Very briefly, the Framework identifies threshold concepts for information literacy—big ideas that are challenging for a learner to absorb, but once they are understood, create a kind of paradigm shift for the learner, forever changing the learner’s way of understanding a discipline. There are six threshold concepts, called frames:

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

When I talk to professors about their research assignments and what they hoped the students would learn from the class, I always look for connections to the frames. For example, a professor was frustrated with her students’ seeming resis-

tance to using subject headings in her discipline's database. A number of students relied on colloquial keywords, and when that search approach failed, the students were stymied. I immediately saw a connection to Scholarship as Conversation and suggested I use part of the already-scheduled library session to explore how discipline-specific vocabulary acts as a communication device between experts in the same field. The professor was very excited about this idea and afterward reported that her students' search skills improved drastically.

After you have considered which frames would be most appropriate for your lesson, you need to develop student learning outcomes. Again, these are focused on what students should be able to accomplish because of your instructional intervention. While the Framework is a rich and thought-provoking document, it does not actually provide learning outcomes, so you'll need to develop them for your needs.

Learning outcomes are generally worded as "Students will be able to" + action verb. For example:

- Students will be able to find news articles in LexisNexis
- Students will be able to identify appropriate subject headings in MEDLINE
- Students will be able to cite websites using MLA style

You can also structure your outcome to include "in order to" at the end to make more explicit why the student would want to do the action verb, or you can use the ABCD method, which prompts you to consider in more detail the audience, behavior, conditions, and degree of success.⁷ Just be sure to use an action verb that reflects the student as an engaged participant and not a passive listener. Avoid words like "learn," "understand," and "know." The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox, available at <http://sandbox.acrl.org/>, includes numerous resources tagged as Learning Outcomes List.

As a rule of thumb, you want to have no more than three to four learning outcomes for a one-shot session. Even if you are fortunate enough to have two or three hours with the class, as may happen with a course that meets only once a week, you should remember the research on cognitive load and sacrifice extra breadth for depth. If a professor is adamant that students need more information literacy concepts, then advocate for adding another session or for offloading some of the content and concepts into tutorials or online guides.

Throughout the process, keep students at the forefront of your mind. Sometimes, as I excitedly talk with the professor about the possibilities, do a deep dive into the Framework, and consider whether I can finally make use of that cool activity I heard about at some conference, I can forget that the true audience for my efforts are the students. The professor and I may think a lesson is super cool and informative, but if it fails to resonate with the participants, it has failed. I make it a practice to consider the "what's in it for me?" principle of instruction. As Char Booth says, "Typically, what matters most to people is themselves. When creating

an instructional message, it is useful to understand that learners pay more attention, try harder, and understand more clearly when they see the personal benefit of an instructional scenario or object.”⁸ So as I brainstorm and select my learning outcomes, I need to consider what the students are likely to know, what they often find challenging, and what they would hope to achieve in the session.

As you gain experience, you’ll be able to do such needs assessments based on your own observations. When you are new, you can ask colleagues such as fellow librarians and teaching faculty about their thoughts. If you help staff a reference desk, you can note what struggles bring students to the desk. You can ask student workers at the library for their opinions. And you can also look at the literature in the library field and rhetoric/composition field to see what has been assessed more formally.

Once you have chosen your learning outcomes, you can continue with the next two ADDIE steps: developing content and activities, which you will then implement. As you create your lesson plan, beware of falling into the “coverage” mindset; everything you do in the classroom should be in support of the student learning outcomes. Many librarians new to instruction turn to lecturing as a way to transmit the most information possible to the class, but of course, that will simply overload them (and probably bore them). While the lecture model remains popular in higher education, it is not learner-centered. As Alison King explains in her 1993 article, “From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side,” the lecture model “assumes that the student’s brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge. In this view of teaching and learning, students are passive learners rather than active ones.”⁹ Since our library instruction learning outcomes are designed to be student-centered, so should our lesson plans and resulting classes.

The learning outcomes should guide the layout of your class. For each outcome, you should prepare what you will teach and then what supporting activities you have planned for the students. In the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, you first show students how to do something, then have them practice that skill as a group, and finish with them trying it independently. “Students will be able to brainstorm keywords and synonyms related to a research question” is a common learning outcome for my classes. I begin by writing the research question, “Do violent video games cause teenagers to become aggressive?” on the board. I ask students to help me isolate the keywords and tell me possible synonyms (such as adolescents for teenagers). I will record what they say on the board and add my suggestions. I show them how to use online reference materials to help create this bank of search terms. This is the “I do” portion. Next, I share the question, “What are the effects of global warming on island nations?” and challenge them to identify keywords and synonyms, using the same strategies I just shared. I give them a few minutes to do this and then have them turn to a neighbor and share what they did. (This technique is known as a pair-and-share and can be a game

changer with quiet classes. Students are more likely to speak up after talking with a peer.) We discuss the challenges and successes of this activity, concluding the “we do” portion. Finally, I ask them to repeat the process for their individual research questions. The professor and I walk around the room and check on students’ progress during this, the “you do” component.

This need not be a linear process; if the students are struggling with something during the “we do” or “you do” sections, I bring them back to the “I do” part and review material that is causing confusion. I emphasize to students that failure is an essential part of learning; Schmidt and Bjork (1992) were among the first to argue that confronting difficulties is necessary for learners to truly engage with and retain new material. For more ways to incorporate “productive failure” into your instruction, I recommend Liz McGlynn Bellamy’s 2017 article, “The Struggle is Real: Facilitating Information Literacy Learning by Being Leaders of Failure.”¹⁰

The Gradual Release method is just one way to incorporate active learning in your classroom. As you review your student learning outcomes, think about how you can get the participants engaged. Avoid *telling* students the content, and look for ways for them to *discover* it themselves. For example, if students need to be able to recognize scholarly articles, I break students into groups and give each group a stack of articles—some scholarly, some not. I ask them to identify the scholarly ones and then have them list the criteria they used to make the identifications. As a class, we discuss the results, and then I record on the board the agreed upon characteristics of scholarly articles. Sure, it would’ve taken less time for me to simply provide the criteria or distribute a handout, but involving the students makes it more meaningful to them.

If the “I do, we do, you do” steps and other active learning exercises sound like they can be time-consuming, you are right. If students are having difficulty with a concept, you may spend a lot more time discussing or practicing that skill; those minutes come at the expense of the remainder of your lesson plan. With the clock ticking, you might be tempted to skip some of the hands-on activities and move on. I suggest you consider the importance of the concept you are trying to relay; if it’s essential, students learn it and you may need to ditch another part of the lesson plan. On the other hand, if they are struggling with something that is really tangential to their needs, you may elect to transition to another part of the lesson. Hopefully, you and the instructor will be communicating throughout the session so you can jointly make these types of decisions.

↳ Try This:

- Become comfortable with the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. ACRL has created a toolkit, available at <http://acrl.libguides.com/framework/toolkit>, designed as a free professional development resource to help librarians understand, engage, and use the Framework.

- Select one of the frames and write a learning outcome and teaching strategy you could use in a fifty-minute one-shot.
- Watch someone else teach a workshop, either online or in person, and try to backward-engineer the session's design. Can you identify the learning outcomes, teaching strategies, introduction, and conclusion?
- Explore lesson plans in the ACRL Sandbox, mentioned before, and Project CORA at <https://www.projectcora.org/>.

Assessment

The final phase in ADDIE is evaluation: did the learning experience succeed?

Assessment has gotten a lot of attention in recent years, as pressure has mounted to show how higher education provides “value-added” experiences. Library services, including library instruction, are not immune from this charge. Your supervisor or administrators may ask you to prove that your classes have had a measurable impact on participants. Assessment is also essential for your own improvement as a teacher. You cannot know whether your class was successful or identify areas for growth without some kind of measurement. As Megan Oakleaf wrote, “When educators assess learning repeatedly and make instructional changes over time, their pedagogical skills increase.”¹¹

Let's take a moment to discuss some assessment vocabulary. Assessment comes in two flavors: formative and summative. In formative assessment, you are aiming for continuous improvement; the results are intended to help you make changes. Summative assessment is meant to be a final evaluation and used to judge worth or merit. As we'll see, there's not a hard-and-fast line between the two; you might use an assessment project for both formative and summative reasons.

I have found the Kirkpatrick Model to be a useful approach to assessment. Designed in 1954 by Donald L. Kirkpatrick, the model identifies four levels for assessing training and has been used by a wide variety of industries. Turnbow and Zeidman-Karpinski reframe the levels for library instruction, defining Level 1 as measuring student satisfaction, Level 2 corresponding with what the students learned, Level 3 with whether the students applied what they learned, and Level 4 asking whether the students became information literate as a result.¹² In my experience, Level 4 is highly aspirational, not very well-defined (what does “information literate” look like?) and not really viable for library instruction. It's exceedingly rare for one workshop to change people's lives. Instead, I will concentrate on the first three more realistic levels:

- Level 1/Reaction. How did the participants feel about your workshop?
- Level 2/Learning. Did the participants learn the concepts you taught?
- Level 3/Transfer. After they left the workshop, did they use the concepts?

With my colleague Eric Ackermann, I have taught a number of professional development courses related to our version of the Kirkpatrick approach to assess-

ing library instruction, and a common struggle for the librarians is the desire to skip over Level 1, Reaction. Who has time for feelings? We need to prove we added value to students' academic achievements! But in reality, the three levels are interconnected; do not think of them as hierarchical ranking, with Transfer as "best," but instead as a chain. Believe me, if the students have a strongly negative reaction to your workshop, levels 2 and 3 are unlikely to occur!

In the learning outcomes section, we focused on the cognitive domain of learning; Bloom's action verbs reflect that domain. Less talked about but equally important is the affective domain: students' attitudes, values, beliefs, and dispositions. As Ramona Hall states, "What is often forgotten is the fact that the cognitive and affective domains go hand-in-hand; they do not and should not function independently but should complement and complete one another."¹³

In library instruction, you can assess Level 1/Reaction by asking participants about their satisfaction with the librarians' presentation skills, the content of the workshop, and the lesson plan. You can also dig a little deeper and ask students about their comfort or confidence with the material presented. Do they feel better prepared to conduct research having been in your workshop? Surveys and questionnaires are easy ways to gather this type of participant feedback. Emily Rimland's 2013 article, "Assessing Affective Learning Using a Student Response System,"¹⁴ is a good resource for those interested in exploring this type of assessment.

For Level 2/Learning, your goal is to see if the students are comprehending what you are teaching. This can be done formatively by doing quick checks during the workshop. For example, immediately after you teach the class how to limit to streaming video in the library catalog, you ask them to replicate the steps on their own computers for a sample topic and then vote for the right answer in an online poll. If a sizable number don't get the answer correct, you can safely assume they have not learned how to limit, and then spend some time reviewing that topic before moving on to the next part of the lesson plan.

For summative assessment, students can complete worksheets during the library session, tied to the workshop goals. For example, a learning outcome for our freshman composition classes is: "Students will be able to identify keywords and synonyms to use in database searching." During the workshop, I ask students to create a word cloud of search terms for their research questions; I collect the worksheets and then score them to see how many students met the learning outcome. If I want to make this assessment formative, I also contact the professor and alert her to problems I saw in the students' keywords so she can address it or remind the students to contact the reference desk for research help. If the class has numerous sections that will come in for instruction (like freshman composition), I can also use what I learned from the assessment to change up the teaching for the next workshop. Worksheet collection is a fast and flexible way to approach assessment; you can do all kinds of activities related to your learning outcomes. For a great

range of examples, I recommend Melissa Bowles-Terry and Cassandra Kvenild's 2015 book, *Classroom Assessment Techniques for Librarians*.¹⁵

Level 3/Transfer is the “holy grail” of assessment. We want our participants to apply what they learn in our sessions to their assignments, but we cannot assume that they will do so. As Turnbow and Zeidman-Karpinski put it, “It is one thing to learn a new skill, but what most instructors are concerned with is whether learners are changing their behavior as a result of instruction.”¹⁶ Just because they learned something does not mean students will actually use it.

To assess whether students have changed their research behaviors, you will need to either do some kind of follow up interview or focus group or collect the finished assignments tied to the library session. The latter is easy if you are teaching a credit course; if not, you will need to partner with the instructor of record in order to access these artifacts. Research papers and annotated bibliographies are the most common assignments used in Level 3/Transfer assessment. You would then use a rubric to evaluate the student work, figuring out if they have met the desired learning outcomes. Rubric creation and usage could be a whole other chapter; for now, I'll direct interested parties to read Megan Oakleaf's 2007 article, “Using Rubrics to Collect Evidence for Decision-Making: What Do Librarians Need to Learn?”¹⁷

When developing your assessment plan, consider first, what do you want to achieve? You have all the learning outcomes attached to your lesson plan, plus all of the affective domain to explore. You won't be able to assess everything, every time; instead, prioritize what it is you want to know. Maybe you are trying a new activity for evaluating websites and want to see if students are learning a particular concept. Perhaps your library just bought Chromebooks to use in library sessions and you want to find out if the students thought the equipment was user-friendly. You could be curious as to whether senior students use discipline-specific journals in their capstone papers. All of these could make interesting assessment projects.

When selecting a project, consider practical issues. What kind of resources do you have at your disposal? Conducting a Level 1/Reaction assessment is often the easiest to conduct; you can ask participants to complete a quick survey at the end of a session with minimal hassle. Level 3/Transfer projects are the most time-consuming and require the cooperation of the professor but might give you the most in-depth information.

Next, consider whether your assessment will produce actionable results. The point of assessment is not to gather data to fill up your files; it should be used to improve your teaching and student learning experiences. If you rarely teach web evaluation and don't foresee using the new activity in the near future, perhaps assessing it should not be your priority. If your library has had Chromebooks for a while and replacing them will not be viable for a few years, then consider whether asking for feedback in that area is the best use of your and your students' time. It can be demoralizing to learners to be asked to fill out surveys but then never see

any changes. It can also be difficult for you to retain your enthusiasm for assessment if it is just “make work” that you cannot use.

At my library, we recently completed a Level 2/Learning assessment related to our equivalent of freshman composition classes. We wanted to see if students were able to generate keywords and related terms connected to their research questions. We designed a lesson plan that allotted at least ten minutes for students to complete worksheets in which they shared their research questions and then brainstormed search terms. While we have seventy sections of this class visit the library, we sampled just three workshops per instruction librarian, collecting the finished worksheets from fifteen classes in total. Each librarian used a scoring sheet to assess the students’ work right after the class; she then used what she learned about students’ successes and challenges to tweak her teaching for the next class, usually later that week. As head of the instruction program, I also reviewed all of the worksheets and scored them, giving us a sense of whether this learning outcome was being achieved at a program level. Because we used this data to make formative changes as well as summative conclusions, we found this project to be well worth the time.

After you have decided what you want to assess, taught the class, and gathered and interpreted the data, don’t forget the most important step: closing the loop. It’s not enough to confirm that the assessment could have actionable results; it is only valuable if you then use the data to improve the instruction program. As Grassian and Kaplowitz (2001) say, “We plan. We develop. We deliver. We assess and evaluate the results of the assessment. We revise, deliver the revised material, and assess and evaluate again. Perfection is always out of reach, but continually striving for perfection contributes to keeping both our instruction fresh and our interest in teaching piqued.”¹⁸

↳ Try This:

- Think about an instruction session you might teach. What would you be curious to know? Write down all the questions you can brainstorm; some of these can become research questions for assessment.
- Select one of the frames in the ACRL Framework and create a learning outcome related to it. How could you assess this learning outcome?
- Read Turnbow and Zeidman-Karpinski’s article about library instruction assessment. What “levels” of assessment are realistic for your environment?

Appraising Accomplishments

Peer Observation

In-class visitations by someone who is neither teaching nor a student in the class can serve multiple purposes. When you are new to instruction, you can learn an

immense amount by observing other librarians teach. Observing can give you new ideas, introduce you to new pedagogical methods, and provide you with an opportunity to get a more macro view of your library's instruction program. Outside of your personal experiences, what are the students like? How do your colleagues interact with the class and the professor? Can you identify common challenges?

Instruction librarians can also learn a lot by being observed; this can also be called peer review of teaching. Your supervisor may watch you teach as part of performance evaluation, but you may want to supplement such observations with more informal visits from colleagues as a way to gather constructive feedback. In their thorough *Communications in Information Literacy* article, "Peer Review of Teaching," Alabi and Weare (2014) encourage informal peer reviews and tout the benefits: "The literature shows that most peer review of teaching programs and similar initiatives ... can improve teaching for new librarians, rejuvenate instruction for experienced librarians, and provide all participants with a venue for engaging in broader discussions of teaching and learning."¹⁹

When preparing to be observed, it is essential that you discuss expectations with your co-worker. Best practices recommend that the observer be as unobtrusive as possible. Suggestions include:

- Confirm with your professor partner that she is comfortable having the observer present.
- Ask the observer to arrive at least five minutes before the start of class.
- Seat the observer near the back of the room so she can get the best sightline on you and the students.
- Request the observer stay as quiet as possible, including limiting typing.
- Ask the observer not to participate in the class.

If the observation is summative, your supervisor may already have a rubric by which you are being assessed. If the observation is more formative, you may benefit by asking for direct feedback. It's definitely easier for the observer if you give him something to focus upon; doing so does not eliminate getting comments about other parts of the class. But if you can provide the observer with a specific concern or activity, it will lead to a more structured and possibly useful debriefing afterward. In her classic text, *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*, Chism²⁰ recommends possible categories, such as:

- Organization. Did you explain the plan for the day? Was the plan followed? Did you have all the materials needed for the class? Did you transition smoothly between parts of the lesson?
- Variety and pacing of the instruction. Did you use different modes of teaching? Did you engage the students? Did you practice adequate classroom management?
- Presentation skills. How were your speed and volume when speaking? Did you sound enthusiastic? Did you portray appropriate body language? Were visual aids appropriately employed?

- Rapport with students. Did you encourage students to speak? What methods seemed to most engage the students? At what points did their attention drift?
- Clarity. Did students seem confused at any point? Did you adequately gauge comprehension throughout the session?

Ideally, both formative and summative observations will be followed as soon as possible by a conversation between you and the observer. You want to meet while the class is still fresh in both of your memories. While it may be tempting to step back into “student mode” and passively accept the observer’s comments, it is often more useful to frame the debriefing as a conversation between colleagues. You can explain why you made the choices you did in the classroom, and the observer can share how these choices looked to an outsider.

If this is a formal performance evaluation, the observation notes will probably automatically be added to your professional file. But even informal observations can be used to build your portfolio. As Alabi and Weare said, “The observation is only a small part of the process. The act of reflecting on teaching—devoting time and careful thought to what approaches were effective and which ones were not—ultimately leads to change and improvement.”²¹ Written reflections can be added to your file, and you can add a narrative that shares how your teaching has progressed over time.

↳ Try This:

- After you teach a session, write down something that went well and something you would change in the future. This will help you practice self-reflection.
- Ask colleagues, either inside or outside the library, if you can observe them teach.
- Use the methods above to recruit colleagues to observe you and give you feedback on your teaching. In future sessions, intentionally address areas of improvement identified by the observer and record your progress.

Teaching Portfolios

In virtually every academic library, your performance will be evaluated regularly, usually annually. It’s a good idea to think about how you can accurately and adequately capture the work you do in the classroom and communicate it to others. This is especially important if you work in an organization that has promotion and/or tenure as, in those cases, colleagues from outside of instruction (and sometimes even outside of the library) will be making summative judgments about your work.

Because every college and university is different, I urge you to talk with your supervisor and co-workers about the expectations for evidence. However, I can

share what I've seen in academia in my twenty-plus years in academic libraries: there are many common expectations. And aside from formal evaluations, a thoughtful teaching portfolio can be used to prompt self-reflection, measure your own growth, and provide you with strong materials in case you decide to go on the job market.

The format of the teaching portfolio can vary; what you want is to have a structured collection of documents testifying to your effectiveness as a teacher. According to van Duinkerken, Coker, and Anderson, an academic librarian portfolio "should be a collection of current (three to five years), selective examples that document their accomplishments and activities in librarianship, research and scholarship, service and integration of professional activities. Above all, the material should represent the quality and significance of the work performed so that it gives the reader a vivid picture of the librarian's current effectiveness."²²

An instruction librarian could include peer observation reports, surveys and feedback forms from classes, assessment reports, accolades from teaching faculty, and narratives related to self-reflection and long-term goals. I recommend building your portfolio as evidence presents itself; it is no fun to be scrambling at the end of the year, trying to locate that lovely thank you note you received back in September.

↳ Try This:

- Talk to your colleagues and manager about documentation norms in your library. Are portfolios an accepted practice? Is documentation regularly included in annual reports and applications for promotion and tenure (if applicable)? If so, are records shared in print or in digital formats? What kinds of documents are expected?
- Identify a central location in which to save your documentation. Pulling together files into one place at the last minute can be a nightmare, so create your folder system early. The portfolio may be managed by you over the course of years, so locate it somewhere safe and memorable.

Lifelong Learning

The best teachers are often the ones who never lose their love of learning. If you are interested in instruction, there is no shortage of topics to explore. I've been teaching in libraries for over twenty years and yet I am continually energized by new ideas and concepts. As Rebecca K. Miller and I state in our book, "We are learning more about the human brain every day, and with each new discovery, our understanding of how people learn shifts. Similarly, new ideas about how to reach learners and enhance teaching spring up all the time, and the best teachers remain aware of these conversations and adapt their practice in response to these new ideas."²³

While it is very possible to learn on the fly, as you run across articles or have impromptu conversations with colleagues, you may also benefit from creating a learning plan for yourself. In consultation with your manager, consider what your goals could be. Your institution's strategic plan may help you identify priorities for the university or library, and you may be able to align your goals. As you teach, you may also note certain skills or knowledge you'd like to acquire in order to be more effective in the classroom.

Once you have identified the learning goals, you can explore different options for your professional learning. Attending workshops and conferences is a great way to learn about trends in the field and to network with other instruction librarians. There are many national conferences devoted to library instruction, including LOEX and Library Instruction West. The biennial Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) always has a strong information literacy slate of programming. As travel gets more costly and budgets tighten, regional conferences seem to be growing in popularity. Rebecca and I launched The Innovative Library Classroom conference in 2014; it draws heavily from the Virginia-North Carolina-Maryland region. Your state association may also provide more local options.

If you would like a more intensive experience, consider the ACRL Information Literacy Immersion Program. In this four-day event, participants travel to a college campus and learn about teaching and pedagogy from established, nationally recognized instruction librarians. According to its website, "Immersion allows you to embrace your educational role by embarking on a path of teacher development and pedagogical inquiry in a community of practice for academic librarians devoted to collaborative learning, individual renewal, and instructional effectiveness." As an alumna of Immersion, I can verify that it can be a pivotal career experience.

You can also keep engaged by participating in online environments. ACRL offers many webinars at a reasonable cost to members. In the no-cost realm, ALA provides a number of listservs devoted to instruction, including ILI-L, LIRT-L, and ACRL FRAME. Through email, librarians discuss classroom challenges, brainstorm lesson plans, and solicit ideas for teaching new classes. You may also find a librarian or teaching community in social media; Facebook has numerous groups dedicated to higher ed instruction. If you use Twitter, you can find hashtags that will lead to conversations about information literacy, such as #critlib.

No matter which venue you select, you should periodically reflect on your progress, and evaluate whether your learning is proceeding as you planned. Yes, as you might have guessed, I'm suggesting you use a variation of ADDIE when designing your own learning experiences. It's a good system!

↳ Try This:

- Join a professional library organization, such as ALA or your state or regional library association.

- Subscribe to listservs or social media groups that sound interesting and join the discussions among colleagues.
- If you attend a library conference, seek out networking opportunities to meet people from other libraries. Many conferences have social events like dine-arounds and vendor parties. It can be tempting to hide out in your hotel room but resist such feelings and go mingle.
- Carve out time during your workday to read some articles or surf some information literacy websites. Keep your curiosity alive!

Conclusion

According to work done by Sheesley,²⁴ instruction librarians are at increased risk of burnout; it can be stressful to teach classes in which students are not fully engaged, and a high teaching load can lead to feeling overloaded and rushed. Librarians who were not academically trained to teach may suffer more as feelings of inadequacy enter the mix.

But there are steps you can take to combat such negativity. Employing the best practices suggested in this chapter should lead you to have productive, more meaningful classroom sessions. Larrivee's 2014 study, "Exploring the Stressors of New Librarians,"²⁵ emphasizes the importance of professional relationships. Building a community of practice with colleagues in your library, across campus, and at other institutions should provide you with people who can lend sympathetic ears, serve as sounding boards, and provide inspiration. Finally, embrace "teacher" as part of your professional identity. What does it mean to you to be a teacher? Through reflective practice, you can begin to internalize the role of educator, increasing your job satisfaction and, ultimately, making you a better teacher!

Additional Resources

- Bean, J. C. 2011. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. If you are teaching a credit-bearing course, you will need strategies for creating assignments, leading semester-long discussions, and managing grading. Described by the publisher as "a practical nuts-and-bolts guide for teachers from any discipline," this book provides many concrete suggestions to help you become an effective instructor of record.
- Benjes-Small, C., and R. K. Miller. 2016. *The New Instruction Librarian: A Workbook for Trainers and Learners*. This chapter is in many ways a snapshot of Rebecca's and my book, a practical handbook designed to train and orient new teaching librarians. If you are brand new to instruction or would like a systematic way to approach teaching, this very practical-minded title could fit the bill.

- Booth, C. 2011. *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning*. Char's book introduces the idea of instructional literacy, which examines the intersection of educational theory, instructional design, and reflective practice. As head of information literacy, I ask all of my new instruction librarians to read this title.
- LIRT Top Twenty (<http://www.ala.org/rt/lirt/top-twenty>). ALA's Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) recognizes the best twenty articles published about information literacy each year. Perusing the archives is a great way to explore instruction topics and become familiar with trends in the field.
- PRIMO: Peer Reviewed Instruction Materials Online (<http://primodb.org/>). ACRL's Instruction Section curates this database of exemplary online instructional materials. If you are tasked with supporting online learners or want to grow your online content, check out the tutorials in this collection.

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