

## BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Blakiston, R. **Writing effectively in print and on the web: a practical guide for librarians**. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield; 2017. Paperback: 978-1-4422-7885-1. Price USD\$65.00. Available from: <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442278851/Writing-Effectively-in-Print-and-on-the-Web-A-Practical-Guide-for-Librarians>

Are you looking for a practical guide to enhance your writing skills as a librarian? As a library graduate student, I felt my degree was very practical but we never had a textbook on all the forms of writing we do as librarians. In my work as a public services librarian, I edit policies, signage, oversee our website and ensure effective communication through our written points of service including email, instant message and SMS. My other responsibilities often call for creating information literacy presentations which can range from 10 minutes to more than 3 hours, developing LibGuides, writing emails to colleagues, developing staff training materials and more. When I volunteered to write this book review, I was in the midst of writing both a book chapter as an author and book proposal as an editor. At the time I was questioning just how up to par my writing skills were and figured that this would be a great opportunity to get my hands on a guide written by someone in the same field—something not easy to come by!

*Writing Effectively in Print and on the Web: A Practical Guide for Librarians* did not disappoint. Author, Rebecca Blakiston, is a user-experience librarian at the University of Arizona Libraries. She is the lead of a web team designated to improving user experience through better content, design and architecture. Previously she was responsible for management and strategic planning as website product manager. She is a knowledge expert in usability having created a certificate program for Library Juice and previously authoring *Usability Testing: A Practical Guide for Librarians* (2014). In 2016 she was recognized as a mover and shaker by *Library Journal*. Blakiston's expertise and experience are evident throughout the book.

The book is broken down into fourteen chapters. Each begins with a bulleted list of what will be covered in the chapter and ends with a brief summary of key points. Those skimming the text for reference purposes will find these features and overall chapter layouts very useful for getting at what you want to know. As a practicing librarian, I rarely read a guide from cover to cover; however, for the purposes of this review I did. The content flows very well from one chapter to the next and would make a great textbook for library students with weekly readings.

Early in the text, Blakiston discusses the importance of good writing and how it has the power to shape our personal and library brands. This leads nicely into Chapter 2: Knowing Your Readers, which looks at being mindful of who you're writing for including their goals, challenges and motivations. If you're new to the topic of writing for the library user, Blakiston provides a great practical exercise for creating reader personas. Having been through this process before I quite liked the inclusion of current versus prospective audiences libraries want to reach. The author includes somewhat secondary users such as potential donors and campus administrators as potential audiences. However, I think this could also include those you're having trouble reaching, such as students not using Facebook or off campus faculty.

Chapters 3: Defining Your Message and Purpose through Chapter 7: Using Lists and Titles, address practical written skills that would be applicable under any circumstance you may find yourself writing. The author provides clear examples on how to simplify phrases and words, take passive writing and give it an active voice and how to best use bullets. Blakiston argues that when it comes to organizing writing that authors should consider how their audience would prefer they organize content, a great way of further exploring the personas activity from Chapter 2.

In Chapters 8 to 11 Blakiston provides advice on writing for specific tasks. This includes writing information and instructions, forms, for the web and for email and other messaging systems. It is within these chapters that it is evident that this text is meant for those working within libraries. Not only librarians

but also library technicians, coordinators, assistants etc. with responsibilities related to user education, staff training, policy writing and website editing would benefit from reading what Blakiston has to offer. She addresses how to utilize and enhance skills already being applied within everyday library work to better write for our users and colleagues.

In Chapter 10: Writing for the Web, Blakiston builds on fundamental guides such as Janice Redish's (2012) *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content That Works*. While Redish's text is well rounded and robust, as a librarian the content is not always applicable to how and why we write for the web. Blakiston has tailored the content to the library so those in the field looking for a focused reference guide will find it here. One form of writing applicable to librarians that Blakiston did not fully address however is writing presentation slides. While Chapter 8: Writing Information and Instructions does include some transferable information, a chapter devoted to

presentation writing would have made this text complete.

Overall, Blakiston takes her own advice and has written a great guide. Her tone is friendly and accessible while providing clear insights into what makes for effective writing. For the advanced writer, you'll likely find some of the content old hat. However, there is something here for every librarian. A decade into my career, I still found many great ideas not only applicable to my work but also projects staff are completing in my lead area. We are currently undertaking a signage audit and Blakiston's recommendations surrounding purposeful positive signage fits right into what we're hoping to achieve. I had offered to review this book to help me write a chapter and beef up my editorial skills but found so much more. *Writing Effectively in Print and on the Web: A Practical Guide for Librarians* is a staple for any librarian's personal collection.

### Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

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### References

Redish, J. *Letting go of the words: Writing Web content that works*. Amsterdam: Elsevier/Morgan Kaufmann Publishers; c.2012. 368 p.