

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Benjes-Small C, Miller RK. **The new instruction librarian: a workbook for trainers and learners.** Chicago: ALA Editions; 2017. Softcover: 237 p. ISBN: 978-0-8389-1456-4. Price: USD\$68.00. Available from: <https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/new-instruction-librarian-workbook-trainers-and-learners>

As Candice Benjes-Small and Rebecca K. Miller note in *The New Instruction Librarian*, there is a rich body of literature about information literacy instruction but there has been no single go-to source for orienting librarians to the instruction role. This book aims to fill that gap—it examines the many facets of being an instruction librarian and provides information and tools to help librarians get started in this important role.

As long-time instruction librarians and co-founders of the information literacy conference The Innovative Library Classroom, Benjes-Small and Miller bring much experience and perspective to their topic. Benjes-Small is the head of information literacy and outreach and university coordinator of information literacy for the general education curriculum at Radford University, and Miller is the head of library learning services at Penn State University Libraries. They recognize that “for too many librarians, the entry into instruction is trial by fire, painful for both the instructing librarian and the students” (p.4), but they go on to reassure readers that with training and experience, teaching can be comfortable and rewarding.

This book is aimed at a broad target audience: Benjes-Small and Miller state that *The New Instruction Librarian* was written for any library professional with instruction duties. This includes recent graduates, experienced librarians new to instruction, and experienced librarians teaching in a new setting. As a practical handbook and workbook for trainers and learners, this book can be used by librarians to train themselves, or by managers or supervisors to provide instruction training to others. Although it focuses on academic librarians, it is applicable to librarians in other settings. For example, the parts of the book that

discuss instructional design, and those that discuss mentorship and planning for lifelong learning, will be useful to librarians who teach in any library setting.

The book is divided into 4 parts. The first demonstrates the importance of formal training in instruction and the value of developing a teaching identity, and presents concrete ideas and practices for creating a strong foundation for instruction at your library. The second provides an overview of 8 different “hats we wear” in the instruction librarian role, from colleague to instructional designer to teaching partner. The third discusses the use of observation, feedback, and performance management to grow and develop as an instructor. The fourth provides tools and templates that can be used to implement the strategies described in the book.

Each chapter contains activities that prompt the reader to explore and reflect on the issues raised in the chapter, an annotated bibliography for those interested in “exploring the conversation” in more depth, and a list of references. The chapters discussing instruction librarian “hats” also contain an “Ask the Experts” section presenting a problem or scenario that librarians in this role may face, followed by two or three possible solutions proposed by library instruction experts. Of the book’s 13 chapters, 2 are written specifically for managers; these focus on hiring and training new instruction librarians and on performance evaluation and management.

The New Instruction Librarian covers a lot of content in its 237 pages. This is both a strength and a weakness—there is enough depth given to each topic that readers can understand the landscape and determine which topics they would like to explore in more detail; however, each chapter functions more as an introduction to one aspect of instruction librarianship rather than a comprehensive look. The authors acknowledge this and recommend foundational texts that look in depth at these topics. Overall, the book succeeds at what it sets out to do. It is full of useful content and would be a good starting point for librarians new to instruction.

This book is written in an easy-to-read, conversational style. Terminology is clearly defined

and the logical organization makes it easy to locate tools and information relevant to each part of the instruction role. It also presents an honest look at the challenges of working with colleagues, timelines, limited resources, and library and institutional priorities, along with some strategies for dealing with them.

The greatest strength of this book is its practical applicability; as they present each idea, the authors demonstrate how it can be applied in the workplace. Tools such as a sample orientation checklist, training curriculum, lesson plan, and workshop script would help new librarians design their first classes. An interview schedule would give interviewees an idea of what to expect. Activities are useful and encourage reflection and discovery of yourself and your organization. For example, an activity at the end of the chapter about the “teacher hat” asks readers to identify

learning outcomes for a workshop tied to the provided sample assignment.

I appreciated the authors’ acknowledgement that public speaking and teaching can be difficult for many. Benjes-Small and Miller describe themselves as librarians who love instruction, and their enthusiasm shines through in the book. They maintain a positive and encouraging tone throughout. Their work may inspire even a hesitant instructor to tackle the challenges and reap the rewards of library instruction.

This book will be most useful to academic librarians or those or interested in academic librarianship. I would recommend it to new graduates, to those new to teaching librarian roles, and to those who have been doing instruction but who would like some guidance from which to grow and develop as a teacher.

Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

Maren Goodman

Research and Instructional Librarian

London ON

Email: maren.e.goodman@gmail.com