THE ONE-SHOT LIBRARY INSTRUCTION SURVIVAL GUIDE

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ALA Editions
CHICAGO | 2021

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Title: The one-shot library instruction survival guide / Heidi E. Buchanan and Beth A. McDonough.
Description: Third edition. | Chicago : ALA Editions, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: “The third edition of The One-Shot Library Instruction Survival Guide aims to build upon the active learning techniques from the first and the Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education implementation strategies from the second edition. The chapters will encourage you to use the ideas behind the framework to plan successful one-shot sessions and incorporate activities that will encourage students to explore, discover, and question information on the path to becoming information-literate”—Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020047251 | ISBN 9780838949979 (paperback)
Subjects: LCSH: Library orientation for college students. | Information literacy—Study and teaching (Higher) | Research—Methodology—Study and teaching (Higher) | Academic libraries—Relations with faculty and curriculum.
Classification: LCC Z711.25.C65 B83 2021 | DDC 025.5/677—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020047251

Book design by Alejandra Diaz in the Brandon Grotesque Bold, Midiet Serif, and Arno Pro typefaces

© This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Printed in the United States of America

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"They Never Told Me This in Library School"

This book is inspired by the thousands of librarians across the country who regularly teach information literacy in one-shot instruction sessions. We were surprised several years ago when our Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) preconference workshop quickly filled to capacity and spilled over onto a lengthy waiting list. This was testament to the prevalence of one-shot sessions as a vehicle for library instruction. That experience led to the first iteration of this book and an online class taught for the American Library Association—all about how to teach information literacy effectively and engagingly in one-shot sessions.

It turns out that one-shot library instructors want to be excellent teachers, but they encounter significant barriers to success. The most obvious is the pressure to cover a large amount of information literacy content in a limited amount of time. One-shot instructors often have difficulty engaging students. Their success is heavily dependent on collaboration with course instructors, and they often have little control over the environments in which they teach. Further, despite the brevity of the sessions, they still need to assess their success (or failure). It doesn’t help that many teaching librarians were not offered formal preparation to teach in their library science coursework, though more library science graduate programs are adding courses in instruction. The stories we heard that day, and in subsequent workshops, became the outline for the chapters of this book. Despite the barriers, teaching librarians earnestly...
want to help their students become information literate, and most understand that they must change their teaching practices if that is to happen.

Reaching a common understanding of information literacy is problematic, not just with course instructors, but even within our own profession. The literature is flooded with articles that endlessly debate the concept of information literacy and the best way to deliver it, yet one-shot instruction has become unpopular in the discourse of information literacy in higher education. While there exists some serious consideration of how to deliver one-shot instruction, the trend is to describe programs that transform, extend, or otherwise eclipse the one-shot approach with the assumption that something else—anything else—is preferable. (Buchanan and McDonough 2015, 85; see also Markgraf et al. 2015)

**Embedded librarianship**, interactive online tutorials, and credit-bearing information literacy courses are all well and good, but of little use to the librarian who has **one-shot library instruction** as a major job responsibility and is faced—sometimes on a daily basis—with teaching a diverse range of students in multiple disciplines how to transform a vast amount of information into academic scholarship. One-shot library instruction remains the reality for most libraries, for a variety of reasons ranging from “staffing, allocation of academic credits, instructional needs, and even space” (Markgraf et al. 2015, ix).

**What Is the One-Shot?**

Instead of serving as the instructor of record for an entire course, librarians typically work with different classes for a single session, generally only fifty to seventy-five minutes in length. These single sessions are commonly referred to among teaching librarians as **one-shots**. Critics of one-shot library instruction are leery of the generic library orientation or tour, which better fits into the traditional category of bibliographic instruction rather than information literacy instruction. The **Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education** defines information literacy as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information to create new knowledge and participate ethically in communities of learning” (ACRL 2015, 8). Information literacy instruction should be so much more than a library tour, orientation, or scavenger hunt.
Though the phrase *bibliographic instruction* is not commonly used now, one-shot library sessions may still look more like the bibliographic instruction of the past. Seamans (2012) describes this phenomenon as “a tendency to take bibliographic instruction, wave a wand over it, and designate it as information literacy instruction” (230–31). She borrows Ward’s (1997) chart to answer the question “How Is Information Literacy Different from Bibliographic Instruction?” (Seamans 2012, 231). The goal is that even one-shot instruction can meet the criteria of information literacy in table 1.1. Each one-shot session that you provide is a building block for your overall information literacy program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW IS INFORMATION LITERACY DIFFERENT FROM BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bibliographic Instruction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-shot instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on learning to use library resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often not linked to classroom assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often focuses on passive learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May lack clearly defined goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian lectures, demonstrates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian provides requested instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Why Bother?

Librarians have many other responsibilities in addition to teaching, so the idea of investing additional time in planning and implementing one-shot sessions may seem counterintuitive. Why invest quality time in your one-shots? The most obvious reason is that if you get only one session with a group of students, you want to teach it well and make it relevant and meaningful. Another
reason is that your investment in collaboration with the course instructor will develop into a positive working relationship and lead to future endeavors, such as a more integrated model of information literacy instruction. The time you spend reflecting on your teaching after a class session is a valuable investment as well. The more time you spend preparing for and reflecting upon a class, the less stress you will experience in the classroom. And while you will always want to adjust your sessions each time you teach, a sound initial instructional design could potentially pay off for semesters to come.

**The One-Shot and the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education**

In 2015 ACRL released the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. We were thrilled to find that the *Framework* embraces Hofer, Townsend, and Brunetti’s (2012) recommended threshold concepts for information literacy (see also Hofer, Hanick, and Townsend 2019), which we had described in our first edition as an excellent approach to setting relevant, meaningful, and transferable goals for one-shot library instruction. Meyer and Land (2006) define a threshold concept as “opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something” (3). Townsend, Brunetti, and Hofer (2011) assert that “this [threshold concept] approach offers a way to focus and prioritize instructional content and leads to engaged teaching” (854). They suggest that the threshold concept model is ideal for the design of library instruction because it “grounds the instructor in the big ideas and underlying concepts that make information literacy exciting and worth learning about” (853).

The *Framework* provoked tumultuous debate within the profession. Many librarians wondered, “But what about the one-shot?” The gut reaction by many was that these big ideas could not be conveyed in a one-shot library session. We disagree—the one-shot is the perfect time to focus on big ideas and students’ potential stumbling blocks. Lauren Wallis says it best in her charming break-up letter to the standards. Here is her argument for embracing the *Framework*:

> It’s flexible. It doesn’t insist on teaching information literacy as a linear series of steps. It realizes that learners enter the process of research at different points, depending on their past experiences and the type of questions they’re asking. And it leaves room for change and growth, both in terms of emerging technologies and student needs. (Wallis 2015)
It’s worth noting here that threshold concepts are useful to teaching and learning beyond the one-shot and across disciplines. Two resources that teaching librarians will want to refer to are *Transforming Information Literacy Instruction: Threshold Concepts in Theory and Practice* (Hofer, Hanick, and Townsend 2019) and *Teaching Information Literacy Threshold Concepts* (Bravender, McClure, and Schaub 2015).

And now on the eve of the publication of the third edition, we are happy to say that along with other librarians featured in this book, we *have* found the one-shot to be a great venue for big ideas. Our examples and those of our contributors demonstrate how to incorporate a variety of instructional strategies and good pedagogy to embrace those big ideas and turn your one-shot instruction into something special.

**What to Expect from This Book**

If you are looking for a cookbook of ready-made lesson plans or a linear template for your instruction, this is not the book for you. A premise of this book is that meaningful, relevant information literacy instruction begins with the student experience. Because every student or group of students is different, every instructional situation is different as well. Librarians’ situations also vary widely. Have you ever read an article or heard a conference presentation and thought, “That’s nice, but it would never work in my library”? There are no cookie-cutter solutions. You will want to adapt the recommendations in this book to your *real life* and choose the strategies that work best for your own teaching. It is also understood that there are many things that you cannot control, such as institutional frameworks, resources, or technology; but there are many more that you can control, and those are the focus of this book. If you concentrate on those areas that you can control, your instruction will improve, and chances are you will feel better about yourself as a teacher. In fact, instruction may just become your favorite part of your job.

The third edition of *The One-Shot Library Instruction Survival Guide* aims to build upon the active learning techniques from the first and the Framework implementation strategies from the second. It invites you to take advantage of the flexibility and freedom of the Framework. The chapters encourage you to use the ideas behind the frames, discuss expectations with course instructors, plan successful one-shot sessions, and incorporate activities that will encourage students to explore, discover, question—and even struggle with—information on the path to becoming information literate. Featured throughout are

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vignettes from reflective practitioners who have developed creative solutions to real-life problems such as difficult assignments from professors or students’ fear of reading academic articles. The vignettes are not recipes but, rather, creative efforts to transform the traditional click here, go there instruction model into better, more effective teaching practice.

This book offers invaluable guidance based on decades of classroom experience, wisdom from the literature, and voices from the field. We wrote the book that we wish we had read our first year of teaching. Each chapter contains practical strategies to common challenges. In addition to thirteen new vignettes, each chapter includes these instructional scenarios:

- It’s Your Turn features practical, hands-on mini-activities for the reader, such as identifying the best time in the students’ research cycle to schedule the session or making over a traditional lecture-based lesson plan to better reflect the Framework (ACRL 2015).
- Sticky Situations presents cases to challenge teaching librarians faced with difficult situations, such as when they lose the attention of the class or the instructor-of-record makes an unreasonable request.

The third edition also offers a glossary for reference on terms related to information literacy instruction, such as the individual frames, various classroom assessment and active learning techniques, and concepts like curriculum mapping.

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