

THE
ONE-SHOT
LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

SURVIVAL GUIDE

3rd
EDITION

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments vii

CHAPTER 1

“They Never Told Me This in Library School”

1

CHAPTER 2

“The Teaching Faculty Won’t/Don’t _____”:
Communicating and Collaborating with Instructors

9

CHAPTER 3

“How Will I Cover Everything?”

35

CHAPTER 4

“How Do I Get Them to Pay Attention?”: Classroom
Strategies for One-Shot Instruction

57

**CHAPTER 5**

**“My Class Is [Online, in an Auditorium,
with No Computers, during a Global Pandemic]”**

91

CHAPTER 6

“How Will I Know What Worked?”

113

CHAPTER 7

**“There’s Not Enough of Me to Go Around!”: What to
Do When You Become a Victim of Your Own Success**

131

Glossary 145

Bibliography 151

Index 159

CHAPTER 1

“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 1.1

HOW IS INFORMATION LITERACY DIFFERENT FROM BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION?

Bibliographic Instruction	Information Literacy
One-shot instruction	Integrated into curriculum
Focuses on learning to use library resources	Focuses on information management
Often not linked to classroom assignments	Integral to course assignments
Often focuses on passive learning	Active learning
May lack clearly defined goals and objectives	Goals and objectives are carefully linked to course
Librarian lectures, demonstrates	Librarian and faculty facilitate learning
Librarian provides requested instruction	Librarian and faculty design and implement together

Source: Ward 1997, as cited in Seamans 2012.

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



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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INDEX

A

action research, 128
active learning, 5, 18–19, 62–63, 71, 75, 103
ad-hoc peer workshops, 137
Anderson, Lorin W., 53
Angelo, Thomas A., 117
application cards, 117
assessments
 about, 113–114
 in classroom, 114–115
 evaluating data from, 127–128
 “I like” and “I wish,” 125–126
 improvements using, 126–127
 with limited resources, 115–116
 ongoing, 132
 performance, 121–123
 post-instruction interviews, 126
 reasons for, 114–115
 summary of, 128–129
 tests, quizzes, and surveys, 123–124
Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), 1, 4. *See also Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*
asynchronous learning, 92–93, 98–99, 102
auditoriums, teaching in, 103–104
Authority Is Constructed and Contextual frame, 36, 37*t*, 38–40, 117

B

backup plans, 95
backward design, 53, 116

Barry, Maureen, 82–83
Baugnon, Rebecca, 107–108
Beichner, Robert, 62
Bergmann, Jonathan, 138
bibliographic instruction, 3, 3*t*
Bloom, Benjamin S., 53, 77, 116
Bodemer, Brett B., 137
Boller, Sharon, 77
Booth, Char, 115, 127
Bowles-Terry, Melissa, 117
Bowman, Sharon L., 66
Brady, Frances, 46–47
brainstorming, 46–47, 66–67, 106
breakout groups, 98–99
Broussard, Mary J., 76
Brunetti, Korey, 4, 36, 38, 42, 46, 50
Bush, Lindsay, 68–69
Butler-Tongate, Sara, 82–83

C

Carr, Allison, 27
Carter, Susan, 24
case studies, 75, 98–99, 106
casual conversations, importance of, 13
chains, books in, 44–45
challenges
 classroom settings and, 91–110
 incremental, 77
Challu, Amilcar, 82–83
changes, midsemester, 120–121
“Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy That Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline” (ACRL), 140
chat features, 95–96

- Choinski, Elizabeth, 128
- classroom assessment
 reasons for, 114–115
 techniques for, 98, 104, 116–121
- classroom discussion, 84–86
- classroom settings, 91–110
- classroom strategies
 about, 57
 complex activities, 71–83
 instruction types, 61–64
 lectures, 83–86
 letting go, 57–61
 questions from students, 86–87
 student engagement, 64–70
 summary of, 87–88
- Clement, Kristina, 18–19
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi, 45
- Cole, Charles, 24
- collaboration
 importance of, 9–10
 online instruction and, 93, 96
 setting stage for, 11–13
- comic strips, 101*fig*
- communication
 challenges to, 10
 importance of, 9–10
 information search process and,
 20–27
 pushing back, 30
 relationships and, 13
 saying no, 27–29
 sticky situations and, 31
 tailoring, 11–12
- complex activities, 71–83
- computers, lack of, 104–106
- concept mapping, 67–69, 70*fig*, 106
- concepts, focus on, 58
- conversations
 casual, 13
 starters for, 14*t*
- cooperative learning, 61–62, 71, 96,
 103
- copyright, 44
- course instructors
 active participation from, 28
 communication and collaboration
 with, 9–31
 as equals, 12–13
 help from, 136
 instruction interviews and, 13–16
 online instruction and, 93
 as partner, 103, 138
 relationships with new, 13
- Cowart, Georgia, 125
- Cross, K. Patricia, 117
- Crowe, Stephanie, 107–108
- curriculum mapping, 80, 132–133,
 133*t*, 134*t*
- curriculum-integrated model, 140–141
- D**
- databases, searches using, 50
- defining features matrix, 117
- Delevan, Kelly, 42–43
- designated skeptic, 102
- dialogues, invented, 117
- direct instruction, 64
- directed paraphrasing, 117
- discussion boards, 96
- E**
- Emanuel, Michelle, 128
- embedded librarianship, 2, 141
- equipment preparation, 94
- Escape Room game, 99
- experiential learning, 62–63
- exploding article, 78, 79*fig*, 81, 98
- F**
- faculty. *See* course instructors
- Finkelstein, Jonathan, 102
- flipping your class, 138
- fly-by sessions, 139

focus stage, 24, 25*fig*, 26
follow-up interviews, 16–17
format limitations, 40, 42
Fox, Nicole, 120–121
frame, finding, 54
Framework for Information Literacy
for Higher Education
 big questions and, 37–38*t*
 course instructors and, 13
 on information literacy, 2–3
 information literacy frames from,
 35–52
 introduction to, 36–37
 learning objectives and, 53
 metaliteracy and, 84
 one-shot library instruction and, 4–5
Francis, Mary, 76–77
Frazier, Nancy, 118–119
free-writing, 64–65

G

Gaiman, Neil, 45
gallery walk, 66–67, 96, 97*fig*
games, 76–77, 99
Gilchrist, Debra, 116
gleaning, 127
goals, common, 12–13
Google searches, 50
grouping students, 61–62, 96, 103

H

half-sheet response, 64–65
help, sources of, 135–137
Hofer, Amy R., 4, 36, 38, 42, 46, 50
Hursh, Chrissy, 74

I

“I like” and “I wish” assessments,
125–126
incremental challenges, 77

Information Creation as Process frame,
36, 37*t*, 40, 42–43, 76–77, 78
Information Has Value frame, 37, 37*t*,
43–45
information literacy
 bibliographic instruction versus, 3, 3*t*
 definition of, 2
 integration levels for, 141–142
 teaching of, 1–2
Information Literacy Competency Stan-
dards for Higher Education (ACRL),
35
information search process, 20–23*t*,
20–27, 24*t*
instruction interview, 13–16, 19–20,
24
instruction types, 61–64
instructors. *See* course instructors
interventions, zones of, 26
interviews
 follow-up, 16–17
 instruction, 13–16, 19–20, 24
 post-instruction, 126
 reference, 24
 as student engagement activity, 105
 student-to-student, 85–86
invented dialogues, 117
It’s Your Turn features, 5, 54, 87, 110, 129,
142

J

Jackson, Christopher N., 39–40
Jacobs, Heidi Hayes, 132–133
Jastram, Iris, 78
Jeffries, Shellie, 15
jigsaw, 71–75, 73*fig*, 106
JSTOR, 50

K

Kapel, Scottie, 96
Kapp, Karl M., 77

Kennedy, Lynn, 24
 keywords, 46–47, 66–67
 Khoury, Jake, 39–40
 Korber, Irene, 74
 Krathwohl, David R., 53
 Kuhlthau, Carol C., 26
 Kuhlthau’s model of information
 search process, 20–23*t*, 24, 24*t*
 Kvenild, Cassandra, 117
 KWL (know/want to know/learned)
 chart, 67–68, 68*fig*

L

Land, Ray, 4, 36
 Langan, Kate, 28–29
 Lawson, Katherine, 51
 leading questions, 85
 learning
 active, 5, 18–19, 62–63, 71, 75, 103
 asynchronous, 92–93, 98–99, 102
 cooperative, 61–62, 71, 96, 103
 experiential, 62–63
 objectives for, 52–53
 synchronous, 92–93, 98–99, 102
 learning management systems, 82, 92,
 95–96, 138–139
 lectures, 83–86
 “lecturettes,” 84
 letting go, 57–61
 Lewis, Abbey, 48–49
 library, teaching in, 106–108

M

McTighe, Jay, 116
 mental models, 100
 Meola, Marc, 44–45
 metaliteracy, 84
 Meulemans, Yvonne N., 27
 Meyer, Jan, 4, 36
 mind maps, 67–69, 70*fig*
 mini-conference model, 82–83

mishaps, common, 79–81
 Morgan, Norah, 84–85, 87
 Morrow, Debbie, 76
 muddiest point, 98, 117

N

Nilson, Linda B., 75

O

Oakleaf, Megan, 58, 116
 one-minute paper, 64–65, 85, 98, 117
 one-sentence summary, 98, 117
 one-shot library instruction
 assessment of, 113–129
 classroom strategies for, 57–88
 communication and collaboration
 for, 9–31
 covering material during, 35–54
 description of, 2–3
 facilities and location for, 91–110
 ongoing practices regarding,
 131–142
 overview of, 1–6
 supplements and alternatives to,
 137–139
 online classrooms/instruction,
 92–103, 109–110
 online research guides and tutorials,
 138
 open-ended questions, 84–85

P

paraphrasing, directed, 117
 peer review, 109–110
 peer tutoring programs, 136–137
 peer workshops, ad-hoc, 137
 performance assessments, 121–123
 personalized approach to searches,
 51
 Peter, Samantha, 18–19

plus/delta evaluation, 128
polls, 99, 104
Popham, W. James, 122
post-focus stage, 24, 25*fig*, 26–27
post-instruction interviews, 126
Practical Guide to Information Literacy Assessment for Academic Librarians, A (Radcliff et al.), 122
practicing, 94
pre-focus stage, 24–25, 25*fig*
prep work, 94–95
prioritization, 132–133
professional identity, 12–13
Project Outcome, 124
prompts, 85
pushing back, 30

Q

questions
 leading, 85
 open-ended, 84–85
 for quizzes, 123–124
 from students, 86–87
quizzes, 99, 123–124

R

Radcliff, Carolyn J., 67, 122
Reale, Michelle, 141
reference interview strategies, 14, 24
repeat customer, 80–81
research, action, 128
Research as Inquiry frame, 37, 37*t*, 45–47, 107–108
research assignments, 17–18, 24–27
Research Scenarios activity, 39–40
Research Sources Chart: Choosing the Right Source for the Right Task, 39–40, 41*t*
resources
 for information literacy assessment, 114

 for instructional strategies, 63
 for learning games, 77
role-play, 76, 106
rubrics, 122–123, 122*t*

S

Sams, Aaron, 138
Saxton, Juliana, 84–85, 87
saying no, 27–29, 134–135
Schmidt, Krista, 85–86
Scholarship as Conversation frame, 37, 38*t*, 48–49, 76
scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), 128
Schroeder, Sarah Bartlett, 101*fig*
screen sharing, 102–103
scripts, ditching, 58–59
Seamans, Nancy H., 3
Searching as Strategic Exploration frame, 37, 38*t*, 50–52, 69, 74, 82–83, 120–121
self-reflection, 128, 132
Seymour, Celene, 141
shared experiences, 12–13
sharing venues, 96, 104
sidekick roles, 102
skeptic, designated, 102
Smith, Erin Sweeney, 125–126
Snyder, Jason, 118–119
social media, 106
Sokoloff, Jason, 60–61
Sticky Situations, 5, 31, 54, 87, 110, 129, 142
storytelling approach, 84
Stout, Jenny, 39–40
strategizing, 132–133
structured workshops, 78–83, 98
student engagement, 64–70, 79–80, 98–106
student participation, 95–96
student-led instruction, 136–137
student-to-student interviews, 85–86

Stump, Madi, 82–83
 surveys, 123–124, 126
 Sweetser, Michelle, 82–83
 synchronous learning, 92–93, 98–99,
 102

T

talking points for instruction
 interviews, 15–16
*Teaching Information Literacy Threshold
 Concepts* (Bravender, McClure, and
 Schaub), 5
 team approach, 136
 technology
 lack of, 104–106
 problems with, 95
 tests, 123–124
 think-pair-share, 65–66, 85, 105
 threshold concepts, 4–5, 13, 36, 52
 time, running out of, 81
 timing, importance of, 19–20
 topic selection and formation, 25–26,
 46–47
 Townsend, Lori, 4, 36, 38, 42, 46, 50
 training, 94
 Tran, Ngoc-Yen, 77
*Transforming Information Literacy
 Instruction: Threshold Concepts in
 Theory and Practice* (Hofer, Hanick,
 and Townsend), 5

U

universal design for learning (UDL),
 18–19

V

Veldof, Jerilyn R., 59, 84
 visibility, 11–12
 voice of the web, 102

W

Wallis, Lauren, 4
 Walsh, Andrew, 76
 Ward, Dane, 3
 warm-up activities, 64–67, 85, 99
 Wasson, Winn W., 109–110
*Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
 (WCAG)*, 91
 Whelan, Jennifer, 78
 Wiggins, Grant, 116
 workshops
 peer, 137
 structured, 78–83, 98

Z

Zald, Anne, 116
 zones of interventions, 26