# A Practical Writing Guide for Academic Librarians

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# A Practical Writing Guide for Academic Librarians

*Keeping it short and sweet*

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# About the authors

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# Introduction

> If writing seems hard, it's because it is hard. It's one of the hardest things people do. – William Zinsser

Writing is hard. Writing is painful. Writing hurts.

There. We said it.

Pulling weeds out of dry soil, cleaning under the bathroom sink, looking for our work keys after a two-week holiday – we'd rather do any of these things than sit down in front of a computer and write.

And yet here we are, writing a book about writing for academic librarians.

Why? Because we saw a need for it.

Library managers and administrators assume that when you show up for work, you know how to write. And you do, of course. Even if you're starting your first job in an academic library, you've spent at least four years of your life as an undergraduate and at least two years as a postgraduate. You've done plenty of writing.

The problem is, you haven't done all the kinds of writing, or even most of the kinds of writing, that you'll need to do in your job.

Even if you're an experienced writer, when you're confronted with a new kind of writing, you can feel like you're back in that first-year composition course, or writing your first research paper. You may have no idea where to

begin, or what you need to include, or what the unspoken rules are. You're a beginner. You're lost. It's not a good feeling. And the fact that you know that you're a competent professional only makes it worse.

We're here to help, by taking the kinds of writing that academic librarians do, analyzing them one by one, and thereby taking the mystery and – we hope – at least some of the stress out of them.

## What to expect from this book

In our *Practical Writing Guide for Academic Librarians*, you'll find two kinds of help with writing.

The first two chapters, on *style* and *audience*, focus on broad concepts that apply to any writing you do at work. In fact, these chapters apply to any writing you do anywhere. In that sense, they should also be useful to writers who are not academic librarians. All the writing examples we use to illustrate our ideas, however, are taken from the world of academic libraries.

Just because the first two chapters are broad does not mean that they are theoretical rather than practical. In Chapter 2, we give you scores of words and phrases to avoid if you want your writing to be clearer and more concise, and we suggest alternatives. In Chapter 3, we help you get started with audience by sketching out the basic approach to each of the four main audiences for whom academic librarians write. At the end of both chapters, we show you how we put our recommendations to work in our own writing.

Chapters 4–9 are about the different kinds of writing you encounter at work. Each chapter focuses on writing projects that are similar to one another in some way. For example, Chapter 4 looks at the writing we do when we're seeking a

job, recommending someone else for a job, or seeking a promotion or a pay rise. Chapter 6 is about the writing we do when we become managers and have to supervise others.

After a brief introduction, each of these chapters looks at a series of typical writing projects. For each project, we give you a rundown of the dos and don'ts, and we include ideas about audience, objectives, idiosyncrasies, writing resources, and more.

For most writing projects, we also provide a sample document. These are not meant to be perfect examples of lilting and lyrical prose. Rather, we hope that these samples will get you started, giving you ideas about the format, voice, language and other conventions that define the documents you will be asked to write.

## Our goals as writers

We wrote this book with our own writing principles in mind. We think that writers should strive to:

- Be concise, direct and avoid jargon
- Write appropriately for the intended audience
- Use formatting to help the reader find information more easily.

If you apply these principles, your writing will be easier to understand, easier to follow and more fun to read. It's the Golden Rule, modified for writing: *Write unto readers as you would have them write unto you.*

We hope that we succeeded in following our own principles throughout the book. But if we didn't, it just goes to show you – writing is hard, and no one's writing is perfect.

# Style: short and sweet

If you came to this book looking for rules about writing, this chapter is the closest you're going to get.

This is not, however, a chapter about grammar. We're not going to make a fuss about whether you split infinitives, or start sentences with 'and'. We're not going to tell you whether it's better to ask 'Who do you love?' or 'Whom do you love?' And we're not going to try to persuade you that you should choose carefully whether to say 'think', 'believe' or 'feel'. In disputes like these, we don't have a dog in the race.

Our rules – suggestions, really – will help you make what you write more concise, more direct and clearer. That is, they're about making your writing *short* and *sweet* – sweet in this case meaning not sugary or mellifluous but *direct* and *to the point*.

You don't have to read this chapter to get something out of this book. If you are looking help with a specific library-related writing project, you can go directly to the chapter that covers that genre of writing for some quick, basic help. If, on the other hand, you want to improve your communication skills for all the writing assignments you encounter in your work, you are in the right place.

## Why short and sweet?

As an academic librarian, we're sure you'll agree, you are nothing if not busy.

On a given day, you might attend a committee meeting, teach a library instruction session, spend time on the reference desk, gather data for a report, dash off a series of e-mails and help a professor with a database – all before lunch.

Your colleagues are just as busy. And so, of course, are the professors, administrators, undergraduates and graduate students you work with every day. When you write at work, these are the people you are writing for – your audience.

We talk more about audience, and how to adapt your writing to specific audiences, in the next chapter. For now, we will focus on one fundamental idea:

> *Busy people appreciate writing that is clear, concise and direct.*

We don't want to spend time puzzling over what our colleagues are trying to tell us. We don't want to read 10 paragraphs of introductory material before we get to the one that explains why the document is important in the first place. We don't want to slog through 10 pages to learn something that we could have been told in a single sentence. In short, we want to read it, understand it and get on with it – quickly.

Let's look at an example.

Here's how the East Forthright University Libraries begins its mission statement:

> **Example 1:** The Libraries strives to give all its users the tools and materials they need.

Those 14 words seem perfectly clear, don't they? No matter who we are, or why we've come to the library, the staff is going to help us get what we ask for. If we work or study at East Forthright, this mission statement gives us a warm feeling: the library is here to help.

We're willing to wager, however, that at some point in your career you have seen East Forthright's fine sentiment expressed much more in the way Humbug State University Library says it in its own mission statement:

> **Example 2:** In this era of rapid technological change, it is the goal of the Libraries to address the information needs of each group among its diverse set of users – faculty, undergraduates, graduate students, staff and the general public. With this goal in mind, the Libraries endeavors to continually review and update its collections and resources to ensure that it is providing access to those tools and materials – both in print and electronically – that best meet the University's evolving mission of scholarship.

Humbug State uses 69 more words, 83 in total. Yet not a single one of those words tells us anything that isn't expressed in East Forthright's 14. Quite the opposite: many of the extra words and phrases detract from meaning and make the sentence more difficult to understand.

- The opening clause, for example – 'in this era of rapid technological change' – misdirects the reader by suggesting that what follows will be about technology or how to respond to it. But it isn't; the sentence is about the Libraries' commitment to public service.

- The Library's attempt to be inclusive by listing the members of its 'diverse set of users' inevitably ends up excluding some of them – What about alumni? Doctors at the medical center? Visiting scholars? Public officials? – in a way that East Forthright's simple phrase 'all its users' does not.

- Similarly, by promising to update both print and electronic resources, the sentence passes over things that are neither, such as sound recordings and microfilms.

And the Humbug State Library is not speaking to us directly. Instead of saying clearly that it wants to help *us*, personally, Humbug State says that it is reviewing its collections in order to meet an undefined and therefore vague 'mission of scholarship'.

Readers of Humbug State's mission statement don't get a warm feeling. It is likely that they get no feeling at all; they are numb from plodding through the text and trying to decipher long, indirect, convoluted sentences.

The bottom line: East Forthright and Humbug State are trying to express the same idea, but only East Forthright makes the idea clear and forceful. Why? Because East Forthright expresses the idea concisely and in plain language. Which brings us to something important:

> *Short sentences and plain language are usually the best way to say something.*

Not all your sentences will be short and not all your language will be plain, nor should they be. But when you get into the habit of using short, declarative sentences and plain language whenever possible, your writing will become clearer, more direct and easier to understand. That's what this chapter will help you do.

You have no control over how others communicate with you. But you can take charge of your own writing and strive, through precise communication, to make patrons and colleagues happier and make work more productive for everyone.

This can only reflect well on you. How many times have you seen a job ad for a library position that asked for 'excellent oral and written communication skills'? Libraries, after all, are in the information business, and they need people who can make information clear. Your ability to do so will make you a valuable asset – and a valued colleague.

And, of course, others may respond to your example and write more clearly and directly themselves.

Where to begin? The way to make your writing short and sweet – or at least shorter and sweeter – is to focus on your writing *style*.

## What is style?

When we talk about a writer's style, we can mean three different things.

One is whether the writer adheres to a set of formal guidelines, such as those in the Chicago Manual of Style, the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association or the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (aka Vancouver style). These style guides ensure that academic writers follow uniform practices when it comes to citations, quotations, bibliographies, numbers, and much more. Journals in library science and information science generally require either Chicago or APA style; if you do scholarly work in other disciplines, you may use other guides. We won't concern ourselves with such style guides here, although you can find a list of them at the end of the book.

Another meaning of style is the writer's individuality, or voice, as it comes through in the choices he or she makes – what tone to set, whether to be colloquial or formal, what turns of phrase to emphasize, whether to sound friendly or distant. These questions hinge on who exactly we're writing for, and we deal with them in the chapter on audience.

The kind of style we want to talk about in this chapter involves *readability*. Writing is highly readable when sentences and paragraphs are short, clear, direct and easy to

understand. Conversely, writing is less readable when sentences and paragraphs are long, unclear, indirect and abstruse. In this chapter, we will look at common problems that can make writing wordy and hard to follow, and we will show you what to do about them. But before we get to the nuts and bolts, we want to put this on the table:

> *The best way to improve your writing style is to make a habit of revising.*

## Revising: the key to improving your style

With our guidelines in mind, you should start to produce writing that is shorter and sweeter. You'll think twice before using jargon, or turning verbs into adjectives, for example.

But we're going to say something that might sound odd from people who are about to give you a set of writing guidelines to follow:

> *Don't spend time worrying about our guidelines, or anyone else's, when you first sit down to write.*

When we're struggling to get our ideas down on paper, or onto the computer screen, then that's what we need to concentrate on – getting our ideas onto the paper. If you can think about style as you write, all the better. But don't stress about style while you're working on your first draft.

Nobody, including us, has ever written anything that couldn't be improved, and the way to improve what you've already written is through revision.

When you read something that is wordy, unclear or convoluted, you are often reading a first draft that has never

been revised. That's why we urge you: when you have a writing assignment, always make time not just to proofread, but to go back over what you've written and think carefully about whether you can make it clearer and more direct.

Let your document sit for an hour, a day, a week. Read it out loud to yourself, or to a colleague. Print it and read it somewhere other than your desk or office, like a campus coffee shop, or outside under a tree. All these tricks will help you approach it with fresh eyes.

We will take a quick look at how we revise at the end of the chapter. For now, let's move on to our guidelines for making your writing clearer and more direct. But remember – these are guidelines primarily for revising, not for getting your words down on the paper for the first time.

Specifically, we will be looking at wordy phrases, verbs and action, jargon, clichés and platitudes, the active versus the passive voice, redundancy, and qualifiers.

## Wordy phrases

Our language is filled with stock phrases that are part of everyone's vocabulary. Many of them are long and roundabout ways of introducing a sentence or expressing transitions, juxtapositions, and other relationships among words and ideas.

We use these phrases every day without thinking much about them. In conversation, in fact, they sometimes help us think – they fill up time, allowing us to essentially put our mouths on autopilot while we compose our thoughts.

Similarly, we use these wordy phrases to fill up space as we think and write. But when they stay in your writing – that is, when you don't get rid of them while you're revising – they

make what you have to say less forceful and harder to understand, and they create the impression that you are beating around the bush. Consider this paragraph:

> **Example 3:** We are in a situation in which scholarly communication is in crisis, as evidenced by the fact that university library budgets are falling as journal prices are rising. In light of these circumstances, it is incumbent upon faculty, campus administrators and librarians to work to ensure the free flow of scholarly information.

This is a call to action, isn't it? There's a crisis out there, and we'd better do something about it! But wordy phrases give the paragraph a flat, bureaucratic tone that makes it hard to see the crisis, and the call to action is so muted that we're unlikely to get out of our chairs.

In Example 3, we found four lengthy phrases – 'in a situation in which', 'as evidenced by the fact that', 'in light of these circumstances' and 'it is incumbent upon' – each of which can be replaced with a single word or eliminated entirely. Here's the same idea, minus the extra verbiage.

> **Better:** Scholarly communication is in crisis, because university library budgets are falling as journal prices are rising. Faculty, campus administrators, and librarians must work to ensure the free flow of scholarly information.

Here are some of the most common wordy phrases, and the words you can replace them with – but don't forget that you might be able to simply do without them.

**Wordy phrases**

| Instead of this | … use this |
| --- | --- |
| Afford an opportunity to | Allow, let, enable |
| At this point, at this juncture, at the present time | Now |
| Be aware of the fact that | Know |
| By means of | By |
| During the course of | During, in, when |
| Excessive number of | Too many |
| Has the opportunity to | Can |
| Have an effect on, have an impact on | Affect |
| In a situation in which, at the same time as | When |
| In a timely manner | Quickly |
| In conjunction with | With |
| In light of these circumstances | Therefore |
| In reference to, in regard to | About |
| In the absence of | Without |
| In the event that | If |
| In the final analysis | Finally |
| In the not too distant future | Soon |
| In the vicinity of, in close proximity to | Near, about |
| It is important that, it is incumbent upon | Must, should |
| It is probable that | Probably |
| Is located at | Is at |
| Owing to the fact that, due to the fact that, as evidenced by the fact that, based on the fact that | Because |
| Prior to | Before |
| Regardless of the fact that | Despite |
| Sufficient number of | Enough |
| The possibility exists that | Might |

# Verbs and action

In English, the most basic sentence structure is subject/verb/object – *the dog/ate/my homework*. In most

situations, this simple, declarative formula – with the sentence's action expressed by a verb – is the fastest and most direct way to explain *who did what to whom*.

We expect verbs to convey action; that's what they do. When the action is expressed by a word that is not a verb, we easily get confused and have trouble following along. But we often see writing in which action is expressed by nouns, adjectives or prepositional phrases. These indirect ways to express action obscure who or what is doing something, and they almost always lead to unnecessary and convoluted verbiage.

Let's look at some examples, and how to improve them.

■ *Verbs into nouns*

> **Example 4:** The addition of this point came in response to a question from management.

In this sentence, neither the subject nor the verb tells us what's really going on. Somebody has *added* something, that's for sure. But the verb in this sentence is *to come*. The action requires the verb *to add*, but that strong verb has transmogrified into the noun *addition* and turned into the sentence's subject. The real subject – whoever did the adding – has disappeared.

> **Better:** We added this point in response to a question from management.

> **Example 5:** Cheryl Davis was the designer of the new interface for the Special Collections catalog.

Cheryl Davis, quite properly, is the subject here; she created something useful for Special Collections patrons. But this sentence lacks a verb other than *to be*; this weak linking verb

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doesn't express the real action, *to design*, which is transformed into a noun, taking the zing out of her accomplishment.

> **Better:** Cheryl Davis designed the new interface for the Special Collections catalog.

> **Example 6:** The Libraries carried out an evaluation of the procedures for collecting data.

In this sentence, the subject is clear – the Libraries – and there's a strong verb, *to carry out*. Yet the real action is still disguised as a noun. The verb that expresses what the Libraries did to the procedures is *to evaluate*.

> **Better:** The Libraries evaluated the procedures for collecting data.

■ *Verbs into adjectives*

> **Example 7:** The Libraries' collection is reflective of the teaching objectives of the University and is responsive to changes in the curriculum.

When you see the verb *to be* followed by an adjective ending in *-ive* or *-ful*, followed by a preposition, you can be sure that an action verb has become lost in the land of adjectives. In this sentence, the Libraries' collection should be performing two actions, *to reflect* and *to respond*. But those strong verbs have turned into adjectives, and the writer's point about the collection becomes less forceful as a result.

> **Better:** The Libraries' collection reflects the University's teaching objectives and responds to changes in the curriculum.

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Here are some of the most common examples of the verbs-into-adjectives construction, and the verbs you can replace them with.

| Instead of this | … use this |
| --- | --- |
| Be conducive to | Encourage, promote |
| Be desirous of | Want |
| Be helpful to | Help |
| Be hopeful that | Hope |
| Be indicative of | Show |
| Be mindful of, be watchful of | Watch, watch for, take care |
| Be needful of | Need |
| Be reflective of | Reflect |
| Be responsive to | Respond, answer, reply, acknowledge, understand, sympathize, fulfill |
| Be suggestive of | Suggest, show |
| Be supportive of | Support |

- *Verbs into prepositional phrases*

Sometimes action verbs not only get turned into nouns, but those nouns get stuffed into prepositional phrases. (Quick grammar refresher: *Prepositions* are mostly small words that express relationships in time, space and logic, such as *to*, *from*, *for*, *around*, *despite* and *about*. A *prepositional phrase* consists of a preposition, a noun called the preposition's *object*, and any other words that modify the object. Prepositional phrases usually act like adjectives or adverbs.)

Putting actions already disguised as nouns inside a prepositional phrase separates the action further from the subject and takes away even more of its impact. In the example below, we have highlighted four prepositional phrases. Can you spot the actions hidden within them?

> **Example 8:** The Libraries should address the concerns of faculty regarding the ease of accessing materials through Interlibrary Loan.

Again, we have a call for the Libraries to do something – the faculty need our help. But the long string of prepositional phrases mutes the urgency and obscures what we're being asked to do.

Here's a tip: whenever you hear that someone is *addressing concerns* – or *needs*, *issues* or *challenges* – you can be sure that you're being told something in a roundabout way that could be said more clearly and forcefully. Here, the Libraries want to *address concerns regarding the ease*. There's a more direct way to say that: *make it easier*.

Another action is hidden in the prepositional phrase *of accessing*. Stated more directly, faculty want *to access* materials – although we prefer the punchier, less jargony verb *get*.

> **Better:** The Libraries should make it easier for faculty to get materials through Interlibrary Loan.

You'll notice that when we revised, we didn't eliminate prepositional phrases from the sentence. There are two left: *for faculty* and *through Interlibrary Loan*. Prepositional phrases are indispensable. But like salt, they should be used sparingly, and never to mask the real action in a sentence.

## Jargon

One of us was in a graduate seminar, talking about why it's a good idea to use plain language instead of jargon, when a woman raised her hand and asked, 'If I can't use big words, then why am I in graduate school?'

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It was a fair question. After all, scholars in many disciplines use dense words and phrases that seem impenetrable to laypeople but are indispensable if they want to get their meaning across to their colleagues. Particle physicists talk about *electroweak unification* and *parton distribution functions*. Geneticists discuss *parthenogenesis* and *degenerate codons*. And if you're involved in *nanofabrication*, you might use *molecular beam epitaxy*.

These dense words and phrases are the discipline's *terminology*. They have precise meanings, understood by everyone who uses them. Because their meanings cannot easily be expressed in plain language, scholars cannot do without them.

*Jargon*, on the other hand, is not specific to a particular discipline; it can pop up anywhere, but it is particularly common in business, academic and bureaucratic writing. It consists of long, pretentious words with vague, imprecise meanings, or with meanings that can easily be expressed in plain language. As Jamie Whyte says in *Crimes Against Logic*, jargon 'involves the substitution of bizarre, large, and opaque words for ordinary, small, and well-understood words. The substitution is no more than that.'[1]

*Human capital*, for instance, is a nebulous concept with no universally agreed-upon definition; you'll find people using it when they mean *staff* or *know-how*. To *incentivize* people is, in ordinary language, to *encourage* them. *Utilize* is just a longer way to say *use*. Combining two jargon words, people say *leverage our assets* when they mean *use our resources*.

In essence, our graduate student was asking, 'Don't big words make my writing sound smarter?' And that's exactly why people use jargon – because it creates the illusion of sophistication. Like the terminology that many disciplines use, it produces language that is dense and impenetrable. But because jargon can be replaced with words that are simple and easy to understand, jargon-filled writing is no more

meaningful or more precise than jargon-free writing – it is merely dense and impenetrable.

Here are some jargon words that you run across often, and the everyday words you can use to replace them.

**Jargon**

| Instead of this | … use this |
| --- | --- |
| Acquire, obtain, access | Get |
| Articulate | Say |
| Assets | Resources (better yet, be specific: skills, knowledge, staff, librarians, etc.) |
| Availability | Time |
| Be cognizant of | Know |
| Benchmark (noun) | Standard, criterion, measure |
| Benchmark (verb) | Compare, gauge, measure |
| Best-in-class peers | Leading libraries |
| Best practices | Good ideas, good examples |
| Core competencies | What we do best, skills |
| Currently | Now |
| Enumerate | Count |
| Expedite | Hurry, hasten, speed up |
| Facilitate | Help, aid, ease, lead, teach, do |
| Going forward, moving forward | In the future, next, then |
| Human capital | Staff, people, librarians, know-how, skills |
| Implement | Do, carry out, achieve |
| Incentivize | Encourage, spur, prompt, motivate |
| Indicate | Show |
| Individuals | People |
| Initiate | Start, begin |
| Leverage | Use |
| Locate | Find |
| Operationalize | Do, carry out |
| Relocate | Move |
| Subsequently, subsequent to | After, next, then |
| Task with | Assign |
| Terminate | End |
| Utilize | Use |

# Clichés and platitudes

There's a fine line between clichés and platitudes; they are both trite, overused expressions. For us, the important difference is this: clichés can be replaced, but platitudes should be excised.

**Clichés** are common phrases, once clever and original, that have been used so often that they have lost their impact – things like *leave no stone unturned, jump on the bandwagon*, or *the straw that broke the camel's back*. That loss of impact is reason enough to avoid them, most writing authorities will tell you – they make your writing less forceful and less original.

But for us, the biggest problem with clichés is that they tend to be wordy and roundabout ways of saying something that can be expressed more clearly and directly. Why avoid something *like the plague* when you can simply *avoid* it? Why *burn the midnight oil* when you can *work late*? So the question we're concerned about is not whether you are using a cliché, but whether you can express your thinking more succinctly without it.

The kind of clichés we try to avoid are wordy, convoluted ways to express plain ideas. As with jargon, many of the clichés we see every day have sneaked into the academic library from the world of business management. Here are some of the most common:

**Clichés**

| Instead of this | ... use this |
| --- | --- |
| Agree to disagree | Disagree |
| Ahead of the curve | Innovative, ahead |
| Be on the same page, be on board | Agree |
| Coming down the pike | Coming, ahead |
| Give 110 per cent | Work hard |
| Have a lot on one's plate | Be busy |
| Mission critical | Important, necessary |
| Movers and shakers | Leaders |
| On the leading edge, on the cutting edge | Innovative, ahead |
| Take it to the next level | Improve |
| Think outside the box | Be creative, think creatively |

**Platitudes** are banal, trite or meaningless phrases that are presented as if they were profound and meaningful. Humbug State University Library's mission statement begins with a platitude, and it ends with one, too: *In this era of rapid technological change … the University's evolving mission of scholarship*.

Whereas a cliché says something meaningful that could be expressed more succinctly, a platitude says something meaningless that needn't be said at all. When you're editing, platitudes can simply be removed.

Here are three platitudes we found on library websites or in library and information science journals, with notes on why to avoid them. This is far from a comprehensive list; there are thousands of common platitudes. But these examples should help you spot other platitudes when you see them.

*The nature of scholarship is changing*. Yes it is. That has always been true, and it always will be – *everything* is changing, after all – so this common platitude contains no useful information. What a reader needs to know is *what* about scholarship is changing, *how* it is changing, *why* it is changing and *what* you intend to do about it. (Watch out! This platitude comes in many variations; for example, *The mission of the University is constantly evolving*. Its most basic form is *change is constant*.)

*The library is at the center of the University's intellectual life*. Some version of this platitude is common in library vision statements and mission statements. And, again, it is quite true. So true and so obvious, in fact, that it doesn't need to be said at all. After all, the fact that it is true doesn't really make the library special; any number of things could platitudinously be said to be at the center of a university's intellectual life, including logic, rhetoric, the scientific method, information in general, the faculty, the students, academic freedom, digital technology, the free exchange of ideas … the list goes on.

*A happy worker is a productive worker.* Sometimes platitudes contain opinions, presented as if they were unassailable facts. We found this platitude used to justify one library's changes to its sick leave and personal leave policies, and to support another library's diversity policy. It would be nice if it were true. But common sense tells you that it isn't necessarily so. Plenty of workers are happy precisely because they get away with being lazy. And highly stressed workers are often extremely productive; you probably know a few yourself.

## Active voice versus passive voice

*The dog ate my homework. My homework was eaten by the dog.* The first sentence is in the active voice, the second is in the passive.

The passive voice is not wrong, and you shouldn't always avoid it. But if you want to make your writing clearer and more direct, you should use it sparingly and carefully.

For one thing, expressing the same idea in the passive voice requires at least two additional words. So that's one good reason to avoid the passive voice – doing so will make your writing shorter.

But that's not all. Avoiding the passive voice will also make your writing more direct and to the point.

That's because the passive voice plays a trick on the reader. It takes the sentence's object and turns it into the subject. In *my homework was eaten by the dog*, the grammatical subject is *my homework*. But my homework didn't *do* anything; it just sat there and let the dog – the real actor – eat it. That's why we call it the passive voice – the subject of the sentence is acted upon instead of acting.

Because the object becomes the subject in the passive voice, it's possible to leave the real actor out of the sentence altogether. And that's when the passive voice can become confusing and even misleading.

*My homework was eaten.* But who ate it? The dog? The cat? Me? By using the passive voice in this way, we have chosen not to tell you an important piece of information. *Mistakes were made.* Who made the mistakes? It was probably me or you, but we're ducking responsibility by hiding behind the passive voice.

In the following examples from academic libraries, we've underlined the passive constructions.

> **Example 9:** User testing <u>was conducted</u>, and based on the feedback that <u>was received</u>, it <u>was decided</u> that a revision of the Library's homepage <u>would be required</u>.

Without an active subject – *we*, the members of the committee that studied the homepage's usability – this sentence can only be wordy and indirect. Switching to the active voice creates a sentence that's shorter and clearer, and it reveals to the reader exactly who did the heavy lifting – we did.

> **Better:** We conducted user testing; based on the feedback we received, we decided to revise the Library's homepage.

> **Example 10:** It <u>was deemed</u> advisable to list items by title without alteration, at the risk of listing a single work several times under variant titles.

The passive phrase *it was deemed advisable* gives the impression that a group of librarians carefully weighed the

**23**

pros and cons of how to catalog these items before deciding on a strategy. But in this case, the author did the deeming herself, and she is using the passive voice to make her decision sound more authoritative than it really was.

> **Better:** I decided to list items by title without alteration, at the risk of listing a single work several times under variant titles.

## Redundancy

Being redundant means one of two things – saying the same thing twice (or more), or saying something that is already obvious from the context. The reason to avoid redundancy is clear: if you say things only once, your writing will be shorter and more direct, and you'll save your reader time.

Sometimes an entire sentence is redundant, because it provides information that literally goes without saying.

> **Example 11:** This possibility warrants further study using additional sources of data covering longer periods of time.

*Further study* means digging deeper. If the people who conduct the next study don't use more sources, or look further back in time, or expand the inquiry's scope in some way, then they won't be studying the subject further – they'll just be repeating the study you've already done.

> **Better:** This possibility warrants further study.

But a lot of redundancy occurs at the phrase level, and that's where you'll root most of it out.

> **Example 12:** When we consider the new developments facing the Library in the coming year, it is absolutely essential that each and every one of us take personal responsibility for advance planning.

We spotted five redundant phrases here. All *developments* are *new*; if something is *essential*, the need for it is *absolute*; *each* and *every* mean the same thing; the *responsibility* you take can only be *personal*; and all *planning* is done in *advance*.

> **Better:** When we consider the developments facing the Library in the coming year, it is essential that each of us take responsibility for planning.

There are two basic types of redundant phrases. The first consists of a pair of words, joined by *and*, each of which means exactly the same thing. In these cases, you can simply eliminate one of the words. For example:

- Above and beyond
- Concerns and challenges
- Each and every
- First and foremost
- Hopes and dreams

A little harder to spot are phrases in which one or more of the words goes without saying. Here are some of the most common ones.

## Redundant phrases

| Instead of this | ... use this |
|---|---|
| Absolutely essential | Essential |
| Advance planning | Planning |
| Advance warning | Warning |
| Already exists | Exists |
| Basic necessities | Necessities |
| Clearly evident | Evident |
| Consensus of opinion | Consensus |
| Contributing factor | Factor |
| Controversial issue | Issue |
| Could possibly | Could |
| Current status | Status |
| Current trend | Trend |
| Eliminate altogether | Eliminate |
| Final result, end result | Result |
| First began | Began |
| Future plans | Plans |
| Gather together | Gather |
| General public | Public |
| Hands-on experience | Experience |
| In and of itself | Itself, in itself, by itself |
| Join together | Join |
| New development | Development |
| On a daily basis | Daily, often, frequently |
| Originally created | Created |
| Past experience | Experience |
| Personally responsible | Responsible |
| Postpone until later | Postpone |
| Sum total | Total |
| Ultimate goal | Goal |
| Whether or not | Whether |

# Qualifiers

*Qualifiers* are modifiers – adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases – that make other words stronger or weaker. When we say we *completely* agree, for example, we mean that there is no dissent at all between us. When we say we are *somewhat* angry, we are telling you that you have yet to see just how angry we can get.

Don't worry; we are not going to suggest that you do without qualifiers. They are useful, and they are often necessary.

But qualifiers can also make your writing wordier and less direct. So you should use them sparingly; when you come across them as you revise, you should carefully consider whether you need them. Consider this sentence, with the qualifiers underlined:

> **Example 13:** <u>Seemingly</u>, the virtual library's users were more satisfied than the traditional library's. But there are <u>very</u> important differences between traditional and virtual libraries, and comparing the user data was <u>somewhat</u> difficult. So the findings, <u>whenever possible</u>, should be taken with a grain of salt.

*Seemingly* is intended to cast doubt on the quality of the results. The reasons for doubt are made clear later in the paragraph, however, and *seemingly* doesn't help us understand this clear explanation. *Very* suggests that these particular differences are more important than some other differences, but because it doesn't tell us where, why or how, it doesn't add information to the sentence. Similarly, *somewhat* doesn't give us a precise idea of just how difficult the comparison was. *Whenever possible* tells us something we already know – we could hardly take the findings with a

grain of salt if it were impossible to do so. In fact, none of these qualifiers is necessary; without them, the paragraph means the same thing.

> **Better:** The virtual library's users were more satisfied than the traditional library's. But there are important differences between traditional and virtual libraries, and comparing the user data was difficult. So the findings should be taken with a grain of salt.

Qualifiers come in at least four flavors. (Did you spot the qualifier in that sentence?)

- **Intensifiers** suggest that the word they modify is bigger, better and stronger – that is, more intense – than it would be without the modifier. The problem with intensifiers is that they are vague, because the degree of intensity they add cannot be precisely measured. What's the difference, for example, between 'He is tall' and 'He is *very* tall'? Because intensifiers are vague, you can often do without them. Alternatively, you can give your reader more information by replacing them with something more precise ('He is *ten feet* tall'). Intensifiers include:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| absolutely | exceptionally | thoroughly |
| certainly | extremely | totally |
| completely | quite | truly |
| definitely | really | utterly |
| entirely | so | very |

- **Disintensifiers** have the opposite effect – they take the word they're modifying down a notch, making it smaller, more limited and weaker. Like intensifiers, they tend to be vague, and you can often eliminate them or replace them with something more precise. Disintensifiers include:

| a bit        | mostly | rather   |
|--------------|--------|----------|
| fairly       | nearly | slightly |
| frequently   | often  | sometimes|
| kind of      | partly | somewhat |
| more or less | pretty | sort of  |

- **Expressions of caution** are ways to hedge your bets. They suggest that the claim you are making might not stand up to scrutiny. When used judiciously, they show that the author is being cautious, admitting that his or her evidence is incomplete or that he or she might not have taken everything into account. When overused, they making the author sound hesitant and unconfident. These expressions include:

| arguably  | in all likelihood | probably         |
|-----------|-------------------|------------------|
| at least  | in part           | seemingly        |
| at most   | possibly          | to my knowledge  |
| generally | presumably        | usually          |

- **Expressions of conditional action** modify an action that the writer is urging you to take. They suggest that you should perform the action only when the action needs to be performed or can be performed. This is self-evident, however. When else would you or could you perform the action, other than when you need to or when you can? Thus expressions of conditional action are redundant, and unlike other qualifiers, they can always be excised from your writing. Common ones include:

| if any          | if needed           | if you see a need |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| if at all possible | if possible      | whenever possible |
| if desirable    | if you can          | when you can      |
| if necessary    | if you have a chance| where needed      |

## How thinking about style helps us revise

Until now, we have given you examples of other people's writing and talked about how they could be improved. It only seems fair to do the same with our own work.

Let's take a single short example – the sentence in this chapter that describes what style guides do. When we first wrote it, it looked like this:

> **Example 14:** The purpose of these style guides is to ensure that writers within the disciplines or journals that adopt them follow a uniform set of practices when it comes to citations, quotations, bibliographies, the use of numbers, and much more.

Wordy? Yes, more than a little bit.

The subject of the sentence, *purpose*, is an abstraction, requiring a long prepositional phrase to explain what purpose we have in mind. Moreover, the verb connected to the subject is a form of *to be*, and the action is expressed by another verb, *ensure*. The secondary subject, *writers*, is followed by an even longer prepositional phrase, putting eight words between these writers and their verb, *follow*. Finally, we spotted a couple of nouns within prepositional phrases – *a uniform set of practices*, *the use of numbers* – that can probably be shortened.

We asked ourselves three questions:

- Can we find a concrete subject and connect it to the action verb? We decided that the subject is the *style guides* themselves.

- Can we find a shorter way to describe the writers? We decided that *writers within the disciplines or journals that adopt them* is just a fancy way to say *academic writers*.

- Can we pull some of the nouns out of their prepositional phrases? We decided that what we're really talking about is *uniform practices* and just plain *numbers*.

Having made these decisions, we found 19 words that we could cut from the sentence:

> ~~The purpose of~~ these style guides ~~is to~~ ensure that writers ~~within the disciplines or journals that adopt them~~ follow ~~a~~ uniform ~~set of~~ practices when it comes to citations, quotations, bibliographies, ~~the use of~~ numbers, and much more.

Then we added just one word, *academic*, to describe the writers, and ended up with this:

> These style guides ensure that academic writers follow uniform practices when it comes to citations, quotations, bibliographies, numbers, and much more.

It's more direct, easier to follow and 18 words shorter. That's pretty good. Yet the sentence could arguably shed another four words:

> These style guides ensure that academic writers follow uniform practices ~~when it comes to~~ *for* citations, quotations, bibliographies, numbers, and ~~much~~ more.

Sounds like a lot of work just to revise one sentence, doesn't it? Don't worry; it took far longer to describe the revising process than to actually carry it out. And the more you practice, the faster it will go.

## Note

1. Whyte, Jamie (2004). *Crimes Against Logic: Exposing the Bogus Arguments of Politicians, Priests, Journalists, and Other Serial Offenders*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 66.

# Audience

This chapter is about figuring out who the audience is for your writing, what that audience needs from you in order to understand what you're trying to say and how to give it to them. It will help you to become an *audience-focused writer*.

That may sound like an odd phrase. After all, we write to communicate, and the people we are communicating with are our audience. Surely all writing is audience-focused.

Yes and no. When we write the first draft of a complex project, we have a lot to think about – doing research, getting our ideas together, organizing those ideas and just plain getting them down on paper. We are also worrying about whether we know enough about what we're writing about, whether our boss will appreciate our efforts and whether our paper will be good enough for a prestigious journal to accept. In other words, when we begin to write, we turn the spotlight on ourselves and our own needs. So first drafts tend to be *writer-focused*.

When it's time to revise, it's time to think about our audience and how to adapt our writing for their benefit. In the previous chapter, we gave you guidelines for revising at the sentence level. Here, we focus on a broader picture.

# Identifying your audience

Simply put, your audience is the people you're writing for.

But each time you sit down to write, your audience is different. You might be e-mailing a proposal to the other members of an internal committee, preparing a library guide for students in an introductory class, submitting an article to a peer-reviewed academic journal or developing a presentation for a Friends of the Library meeting. Each of these writing tasks has a different audience, and each audience has its own needs and expectations.

To communicate with your audiences more successfully, you need to figure who they are and what they need from you. This important step in the writing process is called *audience analysis*.

Here's how it works: think about the people who will read what you write and answer these questions,[1] saying as much as you can about each one:

1.   Who are they? (Be as specific as possible, especially about their professional or student roles and their demographic characteristics.)
2.   What is their level of expertise in your subject?
3.   What can you expect them to know already?
4.   What can you expect them not to know?
5.   What do they care most about?
6.   What do they care least about?
7.   Why are they reading what you write?
8.   What do they expect from you?
9.   What order would they like the information to be in?
10. How (that is, in what format) will they read what you write?

# Revising for an audience

When you're finished, you should have a pretty good picture of who you're writing for. Then it's time to read over the draft of your writing with three big questions in mind.

**Have I adopted the right tone?** Formal or informal? Breezy or serious? Distant or approachable? It's not just a matter of who you're talking to – an undergraduate, or the provost? – but of where and how you're writing. If you're doing Instant Messaging (IM) reference, you'll write very informally; if you're asked to write the text for the library's homepage, you need a very different approach – friendly yet authoritative. You also need to think about the impression you make on your readers. If you are a reference librarian creating a subject guide, for example, you'll want to come across as informal and approachable, so that people will feel comfortable getting in touch with you to ask questions. If you're writing a cover letter as part of a job application, you'll want to sound formal and professional.

**Have I included too much or too little information?** The answer depends on whether you've decided that, when it comes to your subject, your audience is made up of experts, novices or something in between. If you need to describe a new initiative in the acquisitions department to an audience of undergraduates, you'll need a lot of background information; in fact, you'll need to tell them what an acquisitions department is and what it does. But if you're writing about the initiative for an audience of acquisitions librarians at other universities, you'll need very little background, and you might be able to tighten up your writing by removing some of it.

**Have I organized the information in the best way for this audience?** This is more than a question about what order the information comes in. It's also about whether the information is easy to find and digest. Most audiences will

be glad if you break up long blocks of text with headings and subheadings that guide them to the information they need; extremely busy people will appreciate it if you use bullets to separate a series of similar or related ideas.

Here are some audiences that you write for frequently, and broad guidelines for adapting your writing for each of them.

**Administrators:** Unless they've told you otherwise, administrators need you to present information quickly, in a way that's easy to digest. This means beginning with a summary of your most important points; in a long document, you might also begin each section or chapter in this way. Use bulleted lists to highlight a series of related ideas or items. Your tone should be formal. Because administrators deal with a broad range of responsibilities, they may not be experts.

**Faculty and graduate students:** These people are experts in their own fields, and if you are writing within their discipline, you should treat them as such. But if you are giving them information from outside their own field, they are unlikely to be experts and they will need more from you. Again, your tone should be formal.

**Colleagues:** There's a lot of latitude here, and the medium you're writing in will affect your tone. In an internal newsletter, addressing the people you work with every day, you might take a breezy and informal tone, even cracking wise a few times. In an academic journal, you'll want to sound serious and dispassionate. Most of the time, you'll consider your colleagues to be experts or nearly so.

**Undergraduates:** It's fine to use a more informal tone with undergraduates; in fact, it can help you connect with them. But avoid using slang, which will seem condescending, or pop culture references, which quickly become stale. In most cases, you should assume that they are novices who need you to give them quite a bit of background and context.

## How thinking about audience helped us revise this book

When we put this book together, our ideas about our audience affected the way we wrote and revised.

We decided that our audience is a broad one, ranging from first-year students in library school to librarians who are well along in their careers. You are diverse in other ways as well; in particular, some of you are librarians from countries where English is a second language. Thus we expect you to be experts in librarianship but to have a range of expertise when it comes to the fundamentals of grammar – although none of you will be novices.

In the chapter on style, we decided that you were likely to have enough background in English-language grammar that we didn't need to define terms such as *subject* or *declarative sentence*. But we thought it useful to include a refresher on *prepositional phrases*, which can be a little tricky.

And we didn't expect you to be experts on the writing process – if you were, you wouldn't be reading this book – so we needed to define concepts such as *audience analysis*.

Because we are speaking colleague-to-colleague, we decided on an informal tone. But not a breezy or slangy one, because we want to sound authoritative ourselves. And because we are writing a self-help book, we decided that it's important to speak directly to the reader – *you* – by frequently using the second person.

Occasionally, our notion of our audience led us to discard something rather than revise it. In this chapter, for example, we cut out a six-paragraph section about the reasons people produce writer-centered writing. We decided that the section contained more information than you need – you care much more about how to adapt your writing to your audience than you do about why it's hard to produce audience-focused

writing in a first draft. Moreover, the section had a tone that was preachy and nagging, producing an impression that we didn't want to make.

## Help with audience

For each writing project in this book, we offer suggestions about audience. These aren't meant to substitute for your own audience analysis; after all, you know the audiences you write for far better than we do. But our suggestions should help you get started.

## Note

1. Adapted from *http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/faculty_resources/ audience_analysis.html*

# Getting and keeping a job

Many of us find it hard to write about ourselves – that is, to portray ourselves through words. When the stakes are high (a job search, a performance evaluation), we feel unable to convey who we are because we're afraid of boasting, or we're unsure how we'll come across.

It helps to think that the documents in this chapter give you a chance to show how awesome you are. Often the only evidence you have of the work you do is the record found in your résumé and cover letter or your self-assessment for a performance review. Unless you work hand in hand with your supervisors every day, they don't know all you do or how successful you are at your job. Your cover letter, résumé and self-evaluation are *you* on paper.

A similar task is writing a letter of recommendation for someone else. We want to make certain that we don't damn them with faint praise or, on the other hand, praise them too fulsomely, and that we give an honest picture of their strong points and, if necessary, their deficiencies.

## Letters of recommendation

**Audience:** Employers, managers, librarians, faculty, admissions officers.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: The readers will probably be from a variety of backgrounds.

**Objective**: To describe, with specific examples, the abilities and personal qualities of the applicant.

**Idiosyncrasies**: People reading the recommendation have no idea of your context; it's better to be direct than subtle.

**Editors**: Colleagues who do similar activities.

**Writing resources**: Any work the person has done for you (as a student or as a professional), reviews or self-assessments, the requirements for the recommendation, the job description.

Letters of recommendation are commonly sought for hiring decisions, promotions, applications to graduate school, scholarships and grants. If you teach or manage people, you will be asked to write letters of recommendation. And even if you don't, you could be asked to write a letter for a colleague.

The best letters of recommendation respond directly to all the given criteria with specific examples. If no criteria are provided, there are some basic types of information to include. Grand statements without evidence do not help the reviewers or the applicant.

If you are asked for a recommendation and you don't think you can offer a positive one, tell the person who's asking that you don't feel comfortable recommending him or her. However, if you are asked to give a recommendation by an outside party, then you must do so, and do so honestly.

Large organizations sometimes have policies that specify what kinds of information may be included when giving recommendations for present and former employees. Check to see whether your library or university has such policies before you start. Usually the human resources office will be able to tell you.

Typical parts of recommendation letters:

- Describe your relationship to the person, and its length
- Describe your credentials for giving the recommendation
- Discuss the person's attributes in relation to the desired position, vocation, etc.
- Discuss specific examples of related work or activity by the person
- Say why you think the person would be right for the position/vocation, and describe how

Remember that the letter says as much about you as it does about the person you are writing it for.

*Sample recommendation letter for a student for graduate or professional school*

Thursday, May 7, 2009

To whom it may concern:

I enthusiastically recommend John Doe for admittance to medical school.

In autumn 2008, John was a student in my course, Engineering 333, Science Information Retrieval. He showed himself to be responsible, insightful, curious, creative, bright and thorough, as well as an outstanding student. He received the highest grade in the class on the final project, and for the course.

John's interpersonal skills are excellent. His focused listening and positive, non-confrontational manner of speaking will serve him well as he interacts with fellow students, patients and medical colleagues in the future. John never missed a class or a meeting and was always

prepared and ready to work. He was very prompt and professional when communicating via e-mail.

John is one of those people who immediately grasps a concept and all of its ramifications. He also realizes when he needs to know more and is able to find answers on his own. He was very thorough in his search for articles to review and, unlike many students, reviewed chemical patents for the final paper. John has a refreshing outlook on life that will serve him well in the rough regime of medical school.

I can easily and wholeheartedly recommend John. He will be an excellent student, a valued colleague and terrific at whatever he chooses to do.

If there is anything else you need from me, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Jane Smith
Engineering and Science Librarian

*Sample recommendation letter for a staff member applying for a scholarship*

Dear committee members:

This letter is in support of John Doe's application for the Staff Scholarship award. Since I first met John, we have often spoken about his interest in attending Library School. After watching him work, I think he will be a terrific success in the profession, and a perfect match for the scholarship.

I have known John since he began working at the Art Library in October 2007. I was his direct supervisor from June 2008 to November 2008. And as

coordinator of the Branch Libraries, I still see the results of John's work every day.

Evidence of his perseverance and dedication to the Art Library came out during his first year, when there was a rapid turnover of staff. He had three different supervisors, and, when I was in charge of the Art Library, John was, for the most part, the only staff member there. He took it upon himself, after consulting with another librarian and me, to renew relationships with many people and groups at ABC University and beyond. These important relationships had been broken during the previous two years, and the effect on the library and its users was not good. John successfully gained the trust, respect and support of the art departments, the museum library staff and the art library at our neighboring university, XYZ. On his own initiative, he met or talked with all these groups to find out what partnerships had existed, and he worked hard to reinstate successful policies and communication strategies.

John is an exemplary employee, graciously taking on extra duties and responsibilities when we are short-staffed, and he has been very generous in training new staff. He has learned how to do everything that a staff person needs to do in an art library, and then some. And most of these duties are not part of his job description. He always tracks things down, no matter how difficult to find or obscure they are. If he can't find something, he makes sure to alert the faculty member or graduate student.

His public service skills are excellent, learned under fire in a very short-staffed, busy library. He took it upon himself to learn how to use many of the art and

humanities databases so that he could help users when a librarian was not in the building.

Not only has he taken on extra work and duties, he has done so willingly, cheerfully and most often on his own initiative. His interest in and attitude about library work is phenomenal, and I can't think of better preparation for the study of library science. I wholeheartedly recommend him for the Staff Scholarship.

Sincerely,
Jane Smith
Coordinator, Art and Humanities Libraries and Head, ABC Music Library

*Sample letter of recommendation for a colleague*

Dear Search Committee:

This is a letter of recommendation for candidate Jane Doe for the position of Subject Liaison Librarian at LMNOP Libraries.

Jane and I worked together at XYZ Libraries for three years before I left XYZ to come to ABC University. At XYZ Libraries, I was the collection management librarian, and Jane was the reference librarian for physical and mathematical sciences. As you can imagine, we worked in tandem quite often, meeting with faculty, collaborating on instruction or collection issues and serving on search committees.

Jane develops relationships based on dependability and honesty. She promotes participation, building on mutual dependence and understanding. With colleagues, she is considerate, creative and non-confrontational. With faculty, she excels in listening and helps them understand what the library can do for them, and she has been asked

to serve on faculty committees within her liaison departments. With students, she conveys a positive and open attitude to build trust and confidence in her ability to help them. Recognizing her abilities, the university advising center asked her to serve as a first-year advisor.

Jane has quickly moved up the ladder at XYZ Libraries. Not long after she began working at XYZ, she was promoted to Assistant Head of the Reference Department, and soon after she was asked to be the Acting Head of Reference. She is now the Head of the Earth Science Resources Library. Obviously, the library administration has recognized her leadership. Because of her people skills, her problem-solving abilities and her excellent judgment in difficult situations, her colleagues also see her as a leader.

Jane is committed to quality user service. She knows that science and engineering library users tend to be self-sufficient in information searching, so she creates many web and paper resources for point-of-need use as well as instructional use. She helped to pioneer virtual reference at XYZ and shared what she learned with colleagues in our local consortia.

Her interests are far-reaching and encompass much beyond the science and engineering fields. These wide interests have served her well, especially at the general reference desk at the main library. Jane excels at follow-through and reference interviews. She chairs a committee at XYZ that focuses on helping users create individualized library web space. She also serves on the XYZ web strategy team, whose primary role is to increase the library website's usability. Her commitment to users pervades almost everything she does. Her web design was so user friendly that others in the department decided to adopt it as the standard.

Jane is one of those rare employees who is not only devoted to her own job, direct reports and the profession as a whole, but is also involved in the organization's growth and development. She is a team player and a team builder. Her intelligence, capacity for humor and ability to remain calm are traits that would improve any organization. You would be fortunate to have her as part of your team.

Sincerely,
John Smith
Coordinator, Reference and Instruction, ABC Library

# Cover letters

**Audience**: Employers, managers, administrators, human resources specialists, librarians, faculty, staff.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Search committees often comprise a variety of people, not all of them knowledgeable in the field.

**Objective**: To get an interview, to describe in narrative form how you are a good fit for the job and, especially, to showcase what you can do for the employer.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Audience will have many similar letters to read.

**Editors**: Colleagues, friends, professional editors.

**Writing resources**: The job ad, your résumé and any background information you can find about the job or the institution, such as a strategic plan, mission, goals, value statements, recent reports or upcoming projects.

Cover letters bring your résumé to life. They also give you the opportunity to expand on your résumé and respond

directly to the requirements in the job description with concrete examples from your work.

One common mistake in cover letters is to talk about what the job will do for you. Prospective employers only care about what you can do for them. If you talk about how the job will help you, you will sound arrogant or, at best, inexperienced and naive.

This is also the place to confront the fact that you may not have all the experience they are looking for. You can adopt one or both of two strategies:

- Connect an experience you do have to the skill set they require, or

- Say you are eager to take up a new challenge.

A cover letter should show that you are good at communicating in writing. Make sure to revise, edit carefully and revise again. Get others to read through your letter; when you get feedback, don't be defensive. If your editor is confused, you can be sure the search committee members will be confused as well. Get advice – the more, the better – and listen to it.

For most academic library positions, the search committee gets a stack of candidate packets to go through and has to whittle it down. Faced with a pile of packets, search committees have to be efficient, so they look for the candidates who fit the job description best. Knowing that, you must *use language from the job description itself* as cues to the people on the search committee to let them know what an asset you would be. Find out the organization's goals and vision, and its strategic plan. Find out what the people you want to work for think is important, and bring those things forward in your letter and résumé.

It's worth repeating: *Use the same words that they use.* Search the job description, the strategic plan, the vision

statement, and the organization's goals for key words and phrases that you can fit into your own writing.

We like to take a job ad, paste it into a document and turn it into bulleted statements. Then we go through our letter and résumé to make sure we have responded to every one, using the language they do. Use a highlighter to match up the words and phrases.

Doing background research beyond the job ad is also a good way to find out whether you would like the institution and the job, because it is easy to see what's important to them. At your interview, you'll be able to say without hesitation, when asked why you applied, 'When reading over your strategic plan, I got inspired and excited, because ⎯⎯ is high on your list, and on mine, too.'

Basic sections of a cover letter:

Dear (try to get a name to put here; failing that, say 'members of the search committee'):

1. State the name of the position; give a general statement about your enthusiasm, and ask them to accept the letter and your résumé.

*Sample*

> Enclosed please find my résumé in response to your vacancy announcement for the position of Assistant Curator, Special Collections. I am excited to apply, because my experience and interests are a terrific match with the job description. I hope you will consider me a candidate for the position.

2. If asked to do so, describe your vision, matching it to theirs as far as you honestly can. If not asked, skip to Step 3.

*Sample*

> My vision for the future of science librarianship is of collaborative partnerships. Science and engineering libraries must work hard to embed themselves into the departments they serve. Faculty and librarians will collaborate to design and teach assignments that engage students through information-gathering activities. The library and departments will partner to ensure that faculty have the resources they need for teaching, scholarship and research. Librarians and information technology experts will work together to create interfaces to digital resources on campus and beyond. Public services in science and engineering libraries will use evidence-based data to align their own future with that of the library as a whole, and of the university it serves.

3. Go through each of the job requirements, and, *using their language*, give examples of where and how you have done those things or got experience in them. You can expand these areas in separate paragraphs later if you want to. Think about it this way – you are painting pictures to go along with your résumé that show off your experience and abilities.

*Sample (words and phrases from the job ad are underlined)*

> My teaching experience at both the high school and undergraduate college levels is another strength I would bring to this position. I have a <u>thorough knowledge of instructional techniques</u> and extensive <u>experience with the development of curricula and instructional materials</u>. My <u>familiarity with research,</u> and my experience with students at all levels, helps me

offer guidance at all stages of the research process. I enjoy giving <u>bibliographic instruction</u>, and I interact well with patrons.

4. If there are requirements or desired attributes in the job ad that you do not have, respond to these now. Say something like, 'Although I have never done _____, I have prepared myself by _____, and I am looking forward to the opportunity to have this as one of my responsibilities.' Then, if they ask about this requirement during your interview, it shouldn't be a surprise to them that you are missing something they're looking for.

*Sample*

The position of Head of the Chemistry Library is an opportunity for me to gain further proficiency at online searching. I look forward to enhancing my skills in this area. I will also enjoy being able to focus on a single subject.

5. Sum up your enthusiasm and excitement by talking about something you have learned about them from your research into their organization. Then invite them to contact you at a telephone number or e-mail address. Make it easy for them – give them all the information they need.

*Sample*

ABC University Libraries offers exciting opportunities for the future Director of Science and Engineering Libraries. It would be an honor and a pleasure to build on your strong foundation and help lead the Science and Engineering Libraries in new initiatives as they become more deeply enmeshed in the lives of their

users. If you have further questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached during the day at (123) 000–0000.

*Lists of references*
Always include a list of references – always. But you may ask that they contact you before they call your references. That way, your application will stay a secret unless you become a candidate.

Include this information in reference lists:

- Name of reference
- Title
- Institutional address
- Phone
- E-mail address
- How best to contact each person: 'E-mail is best when contacting Jane Doe.'
- A short description of your relationship to each person and what he or she can tell them about you: 'Jane Doe was my direct supervisor for five years before leaving for ABC University Libraries. Jane can talk about my management and collection activities.'

# Résumés

**Audience**: Employers, managers, administrators, human resources specialists, librarians, faculty, staff.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Search committees often comprise a variety of people, not all of them knowledgeable in the field.

**Objective:** To get an interview, to show in a prescribed format your experience and credentials.

**Idiosyncrasies:** Audience will have many similar résumés to read.

**Editors:** Colleagues, friends, professional editors.

**Writing resources:** Past résumés or CVs, present and previous job descriptions, self-evaluations of past work.

A résumé describes your career to help search committee members decide whether you have the qualifications and experience needed to perform a specific job. To some extent, its length depends on where you are in your career, and what you have done (or not done).

Still, remember this: a six-page résumé does not necessarily look more impressive than a three-page résumé; to a search committee member faced with a stack of 50 application packets, it may just look like more of a chore to get through. Keep your résumé as brief as you can, and use formatting to make it easy to navigate.

Keeping your résumé up to date makes creating one much easier. At the least, give it a read-through and add to it when you do your annual review or self-evaluation. If you find a good format and update regularly, the process will be much less onerous than if you try to make a résumé from scratch every time you apply for a job.

Formatting is important, and it can say a lot about you and what you think about yourself. For example, putting your name in large type at the top of every page is a strong signal that you are full of yourself.

Keep it simple. Use formatting to help people find what they need to find, but don't overdo it. Don't use lots of bold type and underlining, and don't change fonts.

When writing bulleted statements, make them parallel; that is, start all of them with the same verb tense.

Below you will find a list of strong verbs to use to describe your work, ideas for section headings, keys to a strong résumé and samples of things that can be hard to incorporate into your résumé. At the end, we present a sample résumé.

## Strong verbs

Try to use verbs like these to describe your work, rather than nouns or adjectives. Remember, use the same tense throughout, or use present tense for your present job and the past tense for all previous jobs.

| Assist | Direct | Purchase |
|---|---|---|
| Assess | Guide | Review |
| Archive | Integrate | Select |
| Begin | Maintain | Start |
| Create | Manage | Supervise |
| Collaborate | Market | Support |
| Coordinate | Plan | Teach |
| Design | Promote | Update |
| Develop | Provide | Write |

## Section headings

You won't use all of these, nor should you try. Choose the headings that best illustrate your strengths.

| | |
|---|---|
| Employment | Language |
| Experience | Language Skills |
| Library Experience | Languages |
| Professional Experience | Service |
| Related Experience | Library Committees |
| Work Experience | University Committees |
| Relevant Experience | Committees and Appointments |
| Additional Experience | Professional Service |

| Additional Experience and Activities | Activities |
|---|---|
| Education | Professional Activities |
| Other Education | Professional Affiliations and Activities |
| Continuing Education | Publications (or Selected Publications) |
| Related Education | Books |
| Skills | Articles |
| Workshops | Electronic |
| Professional Development | Other |
| Honors | Presentations |
| Awards | Memberships |
| Awards and Honors | Courses Taught |
| Fellowships and Awards | Instruction |
| Achievements | Conferences |
| Awards and Achievements | Projects |
| | Grants |

## *Keys to a strong résumé*

- Use a single font.

- Use font size, italics, bold, underlining, indentation, horizontal lines, columns and spacing to differentiate sections and types of information – be consistent throughout.

- Don't use a small type size, except in headers or footers; ask someone who needs reading glasses to check the type size.

- Make your dates stand out: put all your dates on the right or left side of the page

- Be consistent with your date and years; for example, always use two digits to express the year (10), or always use four digits (2010).

- Unless this will be your first professional position, don't put your education first; start with your work experience.

- Don't include your grades or marks, but do include honors.

- If this will be your first professional position, include coursework related to the job you are applying for.

- Most employers want to see a reverse chronological format (that is, starting with the most recent job first and working backward in time); this makes it easy for them to map out your work timeline; use your cover letter to explain discrepancies or gaps in dates.

- Include a skills section to highlight your computer skills and other general skills that don't show up in your employment history or cover letter.

- If your activities section is long, alphabetize rather than use reverse chronological order.

- Include a header or footer in small type with the page numbers and your name – this helps search committees remember whose résumé they are reviewing.

The examples below represent types of information that you might have trouble figuring out how to incorporate in your résumé.

*Sample additional coursework*

**BA, English Literature, May 1999**

ABC University, Smalltown, LS

*extensive coursework in secondary education, biology and physics*

*Sample semester or year abroad*

*1977 Winter Term, Université d'Haute Cuisine, Paris, France*

*Sample education section, including non-degreed but job-related subject coursework*

*University of Big State, Smallville, School of Library and Information Science*

**MSLS, 1993**

*ABC State University*

1988–1989 Graduate study in Creative Writing

**BA, 1988** English/Creative Writing (major) and German (minor)

*LMNOP Institute of Technology*

1985–1986 Undergraduate study in Chemical Engineering

*Doe and Smith College, CA*

1984–1985 Undergraduate study in Chemistry and General Engineering

*Sample of job experience beyond regular responsibilities to match a job requirement for budget experience; this would appear in an **Additional Experience and Activities** section*

As Chair of the ABC Libraries travel committee, managed the use of over $20,000 in travel funding.

*Sample of non-library experience, using the language of libraries (underlined)*

**1996–1999** Large State Tax Service, Information Systems Department, Big City, LS.

**Computer Operator –** Ran regular backups for eight Cybex servers. Loaded updates for computer software programs. Served as Unix System Administrator. Assisted employees with computer software and hardware problems. Maintained library of system reports and documentation. Negotiated service contracts.

*Sample skills section, including computer and other job-related skills*

General: assessment; budget allocation, creation, management and tracking; collaborative group work; collection assessments; committee chair; consultant; course design and instruction for single classes and entire courses; management; mentoring; project management and design; promotional and outreach material design; search committee chair; strategic planning; survey design and administration; training; Web design and content creation.

PC: Access, DreamWeaver, FoxPro, FrontPage, Microsoft Office (including Excel), PC TEX, WLN Conspectus Software, Camtasia, Webedit.

Mac: Adobe Photoshop, FileMakerPro, Microsoft Office (including Excel).

Unix: Familiarity with Unix operating systems, GNServer Software, WN Server Software.

Other: Blackboard, Podcasting, Social Networking, Streaming Video instruction, Virtual Reference via IM, EndNote, Refworks, R/3 accounting software; various integrated library systems and database interfaces including GEAC, DRA, INNOVAC, ALEPH, OCLC, RLIN, Amigos CACD, Beilstein/Gmelin CrossFire, Sci-Finder Scholar, Web of Knowledge, Lexis-Nexis Academic and Statistical, Medline/Pubmed, KnowItAllU, Expanded Academic, Proquest.

*Sample résumé*

**Jane Doe**
123 Smith Library
ABC University
Smalltown, BS 12345
(123) 111-2222
jane.doe@abc.edu
www.abc.edu/art

## LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

**2001–present** Head of Art Library, *Smith Library*, ABC University

- Manage library and staff
- Monitor $100,000 budget for library facilities and collection
- Develop and maintain library collection
- Act as liaison with technical and systems services
- Collaborate with public service department heads to create consistent policies
- Provide reference and instruction services
- Create and maintain Art Library website

**1998–2001** Art Librarian and Coordinator for Electronic Resources, *Reference Department, LMNOP Library*, XYC University, Smalltown, BS

- Provide reference and instruction services
- Monitor art collection budget of $50,000
- Develop and maintain art collection resources
- Act as liaison with technical and systems services
- Manage and maintain electronic reference resources

**1996–1998** Reference Staff Assistant, *Reference Department, LMNOP Library*, XYC University, Smalltown, BS

- Supervise three student assistants
- Manage reference department office
- Manage department and librarian travel in university accounting system

- Develop and maintain library collection, including binding and preservation
- Act as liaison with technical and systems services

OTHER EXPERIENCE

1988–1992    Bank Services Teller and Desk Manager, *Big City Bank*, Big East Coast City, SS

- Supervise 12 tellers
- Maintain documentation and bank policies
- Manage bank loan department office
- Develop teller training for regional bank system

EDUCATION

**May 1998**    **MSLS**, XYC University, Smalltown, BS

1992–1996    Apprentice Painting Practicum, Berlin Art Institute, Germany

**June 1988**    **BA,** Double major in Business and Art, Smith University, Big East Coast City, SS

SKILLS

Platforms: PC, Mac, Unix
Office Tools: MS Office, Access, FileMakerPro
Design Tools: Photoshop, Illustrator, PageMaker, QuarkExpress, Apple QuickTime, Flash, JavaScript, RealAudio, ShockWave
Peripherals: Digital Cameras, Flatbed Scanners, Slide Scanners
Languages: Fluent in French and German

ACTIVITIES (recent)

2009–, *Chair*, Art Library Staff Supervisor Search Committee
2006–2008, *Member*, Tenure Committee
2006–, *Member*, Bibliographic Representation Committee
2005–, *Member*, Art Department Instruction Design Committee

PUBLICATIONS (selected)

Doe, Jane and John Smith. 'Creating a User-Friendly Library Space.' *Art Library Today*, 6(2), 2008, pp. 56–60.
Doe, Jane. 'Managing Student Assistants: Lessons Learned.' *Modern Library Times*, 12(1), 2006, pp. 12–18.

As with your cover letter, get lots of feedback and editing help from friends and colleagues – and listen to it. Proofread your résumé as many times as you can stand to do so. *It should have no typos*. Repeat: *It should have no typos*.

You will want to review and revise your résumé for each job you apply for. Remember, your goal in writing a résumé is to get an interview. Crisp formatting, clear chronology, and using the language that appears in the job ad will make it easy for the search committee to choose you.

# Self-assessments

**Audience**: Employers, managers, administrators, human resources specialists.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: May not be experts in your specialty.

**Objective**: To showcase your activities at work for a specified period of time in an easy-to-read format; to get a good rating; to get a pay rise and/or a promotion.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Some workplaces have a form for your assessments; don't let that hinder you from filling it with everything you do; think expansively, loosely interpreting sections of the form if necessary.

**Editors**: Colleagues, friends.

**Writing resources**: Previous annual reviews; your folder of 'evidence' – anything that's a record of something that you did in the previous year. Don't leave anything out.

We can't emphasize this enough – the self-evaluation/annual review is your opportunity to tell your boss and those higher up about all the work you do: the committee projects and your role in them, the documents you created, the people you helped – everything. *This is the most complete record of your work*. Make the most of it.

We keep a folder in our e-mail and a paper folder on our desk, both called Accomplishments. Into these folders we throw any bit of evidence of anything we do – even pages from our calendar. When it's comes time to do the self-assessment, this is the raw material – we can pull it out and start typing up a list of what, where, when, why and how, then organize the items by job description categories, previous year's goals, or the goals of the library.

If you have time – and we suggest you make the time – type it up, let it sit for a day or two, then come back to it. You will remember even more things you did, and you can add them.

*Sample annual review/self-evaluation*

> Jane Doe
> Head, Art Library
> Accomplishments, 2008–2009
>
> **Membership**
>
> Leader, Budget Analysis survey design and implementation group
>
> Member, Branch Library Group
>
> Member, Collections Council (humanities representative)
>
> Vice President, ABC Library Staff Association

Member, Administrative Management Group

Leader, Humanities Collections Group

Member, Staff Education Team

Member, Strategic Plan 2009

Member, Task Force for Journals Pricing

Member, Task Group for Digital Libraries

Member, Consortia Collections Group

Member, AINF (Art Information Division), AAS (American Art Society)

Member, LAMA, ALA

**Accomplishments**

Accomplishments that satisfy last year's goals are in bold.

- Created and co-taught, with John Smith, How to use Web of Knowledge
- Created and taught Finding Artist Data
- Coordinated use of the Art Library with professors from ZYC University
- Served as a consultant for the Smalltown Public Library in planning for their monographic budget cuts, 5 May 2008
- Created and presented 'Electronic Books' to the Library Advisory Board, 7 April 2009
- Responded to RFI throughout the year from the art department, faculty at ABC, artists in the metropolitan area and beyond
- Coordinated and evaluated the staff education course 'Yoga in the Libraries', 25 January to 29 February 2009

- **Directed the redesign of the current periodical stack area in the art library**
- **Interviewed candidates and hired Library Assistant Senior John Doe, April 2009**
- Served as Disaster Contingency contact for the Art Library
- **Created a new way to gather citation count reports for all humanities faculty and compiled citation statistics for the chairs of the humanities departments**
- Wrote a section on the Art Library for the Art Department External Review
- **Co-wrote 'Learning our limits: the Humanities libraries at ABC University respond to our changing Environment.' *Issues in Art Librarianship*, Autumn 2008**
- **Wrote 'Perspectives on the digital library: a colloquium at ABC', forthcoming in *Art Serials Review***
- Served as liaison between users and technical services in troubleshooting problems with databases and electronic journals
- Volunteered as instructor for undergraduate Library Instruction, autumn and spring terms
- Monitored art-l listserv to keep abreast of issues relating to art, the libraries and software
- Conducted tours of the library for interns, new and visiting faculty, and graduate students
- Created web pages/sites for Administrative Management Council and the strategic planning committee
- Worked with the cataloging department to get some of our stranger (and newer) electronic resources into the online catalog

- Created a map of the physical space of the art library to use as a handout and on the art library website

- Created, in consultation with art faculty, the Web tutorial 'Art Information Retrieval: an overview'. Used the site to instruct undergraduate art students and as a precursor to new curriculum needs

- **Created a handout for use in undergraduate and graduate instruction: 'Introduction to the art library'**

- Planned for and manned the library booth at ABC's Autumn Student Fest

- **Completed the Budget Analysis Report for Art**

- Served as a Mentor at the Smalltown Lab Elementary School, autumn 2008

- Hosted a visit from XYC humanities librarians, 23 August 2008

- Reviewed databases for cancellation, purchase or retaining decisions, alone and in concert with other humanities librarians at ABC and in our consortia partner libraries

- Created, with library assistant, methods to gather use statistics and cost analysis data for serials review

- Conducted serials review, autumn 2008

- Continued to find new ways to market and communicate with art user group: used table tents in the library, flyers in mailboxes, special e-mail announcements to users@art, 'This week in the art library' paper and digital formats

**Activities**

- Artview Workshop in Smalltown Library, 22 September 2008

- ARL Library Management Skills Institute II: the Organization, 26–29 October 2008, Big City, Small State

- Continuing education course 'Collaboration Across and within Boundaries', ILS, ABC Library School, 3 March 2009

- Workshop: 'Designing Instructions for High Usability', Consortia Training session, 17 March 2009

- Groundbreaking ceremony at the Storage Hut, 3 April 2009

- JJ Doe Seminar at XYZ State University, 7 April 2009

- 'Perspectives on the Digital Library', XYZ Libraries, 25 April 2000

In this self-evaluation, you can see that similar activities are grouped together. As with your résumé, make your statements parallel by beginning them with verbs in the same tense, if appropriate.

## Thank-you notes

**Audience**: Anyone – librarians, administrators, students, faculty, human resources personnel, staff, donors, visitors.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Each one is unique; try to find something personal to relate to.

**Objective**: To succinctly and professionally show someone your gratitude for something.

**Idiosyncrasies**: It's hard to find the line between warmth and being too familiar.

**Editors**: Colleagues, friends.

**Writing resources**: Simple thank-you cards, a good pen.

One of the best habits you can have, at work and at home, is keeping a box or two of thank-you cards handy – and using them often.

Regularly write thank-you cards to anyone who does something well, or who goes beyond the normal duties. A simple and direct thank you not only makes the recipient's day, it furthers your career by one small step.

If you have a job interview, send thank-you notes within a few days to, at the least, all the members of the search committee, the person who would be your supervisor, and anyone above that supervisor with whom you met. This is non-negotiable. If you want the job, then you must write thank-you cards.

Why do so many of us balk at writing thank-you notes? Probably because we don't usually write in an effusive and sentimental style. We don't want to come off as trite or silly. So we don't write anything.

The best advice we have ever come across for writing thank-you notes is from Emily Post's 1960s book on etiquette.[1] Post advises us to be sincere and, yes, effusive. Don't worry about not sounding like yourself. We all have different voices, and an effusive thank-you sounds more personal. It will be appreciated. Remember: a stiff thank-you comes off as snooty and insincere. So lay on the schmaltz.

Also, don't be vague – say exactly what it is you're thanking them for.

If you want to thank someone for a job well done, you can expand your thank-you to a full formal letter and send it to those higher up. This is an excellent way to reward people,

because it is rare, concrete evidence of the work they have done. In the bargain, you will also show them that you are a gracious person who appreciates their efforts.

*Sample thank-you for serving on a search committee*

> John Doe
> Assistant Professor
> Department of Biology
> ABC University
>
> Dear John:
>
> It is high time I got around to writing you this thank-you! Now that Jane Smith is here (as of November 1), I finally have the time to write.
> I really enjoyed working with you on the search committee for Head, Sciences Library. Your background knowledge of the departments and the university and your level-headed approach to the process were invaluable. I look forward to working with you on other committees and projects in the future.
> Thanks for your excellent dinner conversations, insightful comments and willingness to work hard to find the best person for the job. They made the committee's work go more smoothly.
> In sincere appreciation,
>
> Jane Doe
> Coordinator, Reference and Instruction, ABC Library
>
> cc: Jack Smith
> [Note the cc to the recipient's department chair]

*Sample thank-you note after an interview, handwritten on a note card*

Dear John:

It was great to meet you during my interview at the XYZ Library last week. I really appreciated the thoughtful questions the search committee asked me. I felt I had the opportunity to share my experiences with everyone, and I have a good idea of what an awesome place the XYZ Library is. Thanks for making my experience go so smoothly.

All the best,
Jane Doe

## Final thoughts

Writing about yourself becomes easier over time, especially when you have your own samples to choose from. When you get stuck, don't hesitate to ask colleagues to let you see their own examples. You can also read through candidate packets for people who interview at your institution – these are often made available to all the staff on an intranet. Use them as a resource to get ideas for your own documents.

## Note

1. Post, Emily and Post, Elizabeth L. (1968). *Etiquette: In Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls.

# Meetings and reports

These documents do one of two things – they talk about something that has already happened, or they describe something that you want to happen.

What you write may persuade your department or organization to change the way you and your colleagues work. The information you present, and how you present it, will help to determine the outcome.

## Minutes

**Audience**: Colleagues, co-workers, managers, administrators.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Will understand most specialized language and acronyms.

**Objective**: To record and share a meeting's discussion or the proposed actions of a committee or work group.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Better to attach names to actions but not discussions, can be politically charged, can be formal or informal.

**Editors**: Committee or group members.

**Writing resources**: Agenda, handwritten or typed notes, recording of the meeting.

Reading the minutes is often the only way people who missed a meeting can learn information that they need to do their job. So minutes must record the discussion fairly and accurately, and they must be written up and edited soon after the meeting (less than a week is best).

However, the minutes are not a transcript of the meeting, and they needn't go over everything that transpired. Writing minutes, in fact, can be a political minefield, because people say things in meetings that they don't intend to share beyond the meeting room. This encourages the group to have frank discussions, but it makes the minute-taker's task more difficult. If you are uncertain, ask the group whether particular information belongs in the minutes or is just part of the discussion.

Some groups decide that everyone who comes to a meeting should have the opportunity to review the minutes before they are posted. Gathering everyone's edits can hamper timely posting; make sure you state a firm deadline to respond to your draft.

When taking minutes, keep the meeting agenda in front of you. Use the headings in the agenda to give structure to your minutes. If a meeting doesn't have an agenda, or strays from its agenda, interrupt and ask the group what heading to assign to the topic under discussion, especially if you aren't sure what the main point is. This will have the additional bonus of helping to keep the meeting on track.

Many people find it hard to take part in a meeting while taking careful notes at the same time. Using a recorder can help; you can listen and take more notes later.

It's best to keep speakers' names out of the main body of the minutes, except to say who's in charge of anything that needs to be done. Discussions often get heated or stray off topic; what's relevant is the topic discussed, not who said what or what side issues popped up. Stick to the work discussions and the actions the group decided to take.

Most libraries don't have set formats for meeting minutes. But you should include the name of the group, the date of the meeting and the names of those attending the meeting, followed by the minutes themselves.

Your writing can be informal, and it's common to clip small words like 'the' from your sentences. It's also fine to use abbreviations and acronyms if you're certain everyone in the group will understand them.

*Sample minutes*

> Collecting Committee Minutes
> 27 March 09
> Present: John Doe, Jane Smith, Bill Williams, Ellen Garcia, Mark Stevens, Steve Marks (recorder), Janet Michaels, Frank French, Arnold Jackson (some members of the Storage Move Task Force joined the meeting for #1)
>
> 1. Discussion of the report of the Storage Move Task Force
>
> ■ Janet acknowledged the excellent work of Bill (chair) and the rest of the group
>
> ■ Bill gave an overview of the events leading up to the task force's work
>
> ■ A report of non-barcoded monographs yielded a list of over 700,000 for possible transfer
>
> ■ The work of the committee focused on how to go about moving materials to storage, beginning with these monographs
>
> ■ The other large group of materials for review will be serials (full or partial runs of journals)
>
> The council discussed the following: journals (what and why), how the group came up with the options, dots vs. flags, how much time is needed, reports, the need for executive group (administrative) support.

A few questions and actions came out of the discussions:

- How will running the necessary reports and other work conflict with the startup of the new library system? Perhaps we can run the reports before then

- We need two project managers. Ellen Garcia was chosen to be the tech services PM; the CC will need to choose the PM who coordinates the review

- For withdrawals, change the procedure: pull the flag, and mark a list to give to Holdings Mgmt

- Need to keep orders flowing simultaneously

- Need to hold informational sessions to keep people updated about the process

2. Minutes from the last meeting are on their way. (Frank French)

3. CRL purchase list. The council went through the list one by one, reviewing the votes and ratings for each purchase given by resource specialists. This was followed by a general discussion about CRL:

- value of being a CRL member

- need to add CRL holdings to the catalog

- need to get the guides to CRL holdings, perhaps link to them via the web, or explore other possibilities

Next meeting will be journal and database review. Also, we need to replace members from the Social Sciences and the Humanities groups who are leaving the committee.

# Formal reports

**Audience**: Managers, administrators, colleagues, co-workers.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Mostly internal, but not always.

**Objective**: To report in a formal way the methods and findings of a work project or activity.

**Idiosyncrasies**: May not always lead to action, but may be the only formal record of the work done.

**Editors**: Committee or group members.

**Writing resources**: Documentation of the work, meeting minutes, instructions given to the group before it began work, similar or related reports.

Formal reports are often much longer than they need to be. The administrators who read and act on such reports have little time to read them. Focus on the executive summary; make sure it succinctly presents the most important data, and use bullets to pull out key ideas. Many administrators will read no further.

Use the body of the report to expand on the ideas in the summary. Do not, however, present raw data in the body; use appendices or addenda to present such data and other kinds of evidence.

Our example includes an executive summary – the key to writing a formal report – and an outline of the sections that follow.

*Sample formal report title page, executive summary and outline*

**User Survey 2009 results report for**
**Strategic Planning**
**30 August 2010**

**Committee Members:**
Jane Doe, chair; John Smith, Mark Stevens, Bill Williams, Helen Jones, Ellen Garcia

**Executive Summary**

This report presents themes from the spring 2009 User Survey that are relevant to the Library's strategic planning process. Each survey theme is analyzed in the body of the report. We include an addendum of survey comments to illustrate the results.

**Themes from 2009 User Survey**

- Use of the physical library spaces and electronic resources has not changed significantly since the 2007 User Survey.

- All user groups use the Internet often; 76% use it daily

- Users want to have control over information. This is an area where all user groups say we are not meeting their needs. Users emphasized:

  – Electronic resources that are accessible from home and office (faculty especially)
  – A Library website that lets me find information independently (faculty and graduate students especially)
  – Easy-to-use tools that allow independent research (faculty and graduate students especially)

- Many users want round-the-clock access to the Main Library

- Many users praised ILL and Document Delivery service, which was a problem in the 2007 survey

- Users generally praised staff and service, though there were complaints about student assistants' customer service skills

- Electronic Resources/Website/Catalog garnered many negative comments

**Report Sections**

Executive Summary, p. #

# Annual reports

**Audience**: Managers, administrators, colleagues, co-workers.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Mostly internal, but not always.

**Objective**: To report in a formal way the methods and progress of a work project or activity, department, or division.

**Idiosyncrasies**: No need for conclusions or recommendations unless the early findings point to the need to re-direct or disband.

**Editors**: Committee or group members, staff within a department or division, colleagues.

**Writing resources**: Previous annual reports, library strategic plan, self-evaluations or other sources of input from group members, group meeting minutes.

Annual reports showcase the work that you and your committee, department or library do, offering a snapshot of the past year.

   Your first task, and often the hardest, is to gather and organize the evidence you need. If you supervise others, or if

you're reporting on the work of a group, ask everyone for input. You'll give them a chance to have a say in the report; in return, you'll have some of your writing work done for you. You can also ask the group to hold a brainstorming session to create a list of the work you've done together. Getting input from others takes time, so don't wait until the last minute to ask!

Plan ahead. The best way to prepare for an annual report is to create a folder (print, electronic, or both) where you keep evidence of what the group does throughout the year. Don't leave anything out – you want to get credit for the hard work you and your colleagues do. Save anything related to the group's work: fliers from events, e-mail, documents from group projects, meeting minutes, articles written by group members. You can also review the group's calendar and look over archived e-mails and document folders.

Once you have all your evidence, your job as the writer is simply to make a list of what the group has done. The report is a snapshot; keep it brief. Use bullets to separate the group's accomplishments, and describe the accomplishments succinctly. You don't need to tell a story or go into a lot of detail.

*Sample annual report*

**Art Library**
**Annual Report: Accomplishments (2008–2009)/Goals (2009–2010)**
**Jane Doe**
**15 July 2009**

**Applicable Library Strategic Plan themes**
Goal 1.1: All library materials are readily available
Goal 1.4: Explore options for document delivery service for the ABC Library system
Goal 2.1: Support University Millennium Curriculum

Goal 2.3: Expand instruction, especially in information literacy

Goal 2.5: Increase outreach through library marketing

**Accomplishments (2008–2009)**

- Sent ~1000 monographs to storage facility and redistributed space in the book section

- Successfully lobbied for move of 2000 boxed art journals to storage; this work begins in August 2009

- Shifted the entire journal collection to allow for growth

- Held 4th annual summer shelf-reading project; entire collection shelf-read and straightened

- Created a new position for John Smith, who transferred to the Art Library from ABC Reserves

- Hired Mary Jones, Reference Librarian for the Art and Film Libraries

- Created an office for John

- Continued 'This week in the art library' newsletter

- Taught ~50 sessions on art information retrieval in the art library for undergraduate and graduate art courses

- Taught an integrated library assignment for University Millennium Curriculum art course

**Goals 2009/2010**

- Reinstate reviews for regular transfer of materials to storage

- Formalize standard library procedures to respond to increase in staff and varied schedules

- Work to increase instruction opportunities – formal and informal

- Respond to Library Survey results

- Assess office space and configuration in light of new staff
- Update signs and handouts
- Continue to work with the ABC Library system to create and hire the Art and Film technical services position – or look for other options to solve our needs
- Continue to improve library space and organization
- Work to establish and support document delivery efforts
- Continue to collaborate with faculty and librarians in course design and instruction
- Create new ways to deliver instruction to graduate students
- Continue to find new ways to market and promote the library
- Upgrade technical service staff position from level 4 to level 6

Remember: the annual report is the fullest record of a group's work. Don't leave out any important project or activity.

# Project proposals

**Audience:** Managers, administrators, colleagues, co-workers.

**Demographic or professional attributes:** Mostly internal, but not always.

**Objective:** To propose a work project or activity and get the go-ahead and resources to do it.

**Idiosyncrasies:** Need to provide a realistic description of the resources and staff time the project will require.

**Editors**: Committee or group members, staff within a department or division, colleagues.

**Writing resources**: Meeting notes discussing the project, articles or other information about similar projects, related reports or relevant statistics.

Project proposals are marketing tools. You want to persuade someone who controls the resources to give you what you need to get your project off the ground. Like a cover letter for a job application, the proposal needs to say how the project will help the library or the university achieve its goals.

Remember: *Always tie a project proposal to the library's or the university's strategic plan*. The strategic plan outlines where the organization intends to spend its money, time and effort; if you can show a connection between the plan and your proposal, you are far more likely to get the go-ahead.

Say exactly what you are proposing early on. But don't write at length about how the project will benefit you or your department. Keep the focus external, and tie your project to the vision, mission and goals of the larger organization.

*Sample project proposal*

> **Reference assessment proposal**
> In support of the Libraries' strategic goal to incorporate evidence-based management, the Reference Department will assess the scope and usefulness of the user evaluation data that are available to us. Then the department will conduct an off-site retreat to explore what other data sources we need and how to best apply the data we have.

> **Context and background**
> Evidence-based management is coming into its own in academic libraries. The Association of Research Libraries

(ARL) published its first SPEC kit on library assessment programs in 2007. ARL now has a large assessment component to support academic libraries as they build their own assessment and evaluation teams. With the spread of LIBQUAL, and a growing need to test the usability of library interfaces, assessment and evaluation are becoming an integral part of running a library.

ABC University Library devotes a section of the 2009 strategic plan to incorporating assessment into our work. Library departments, especially those whose main function is public service, would do well to create and carry out assessment plans. The results of these assessments can be used to make better use of scarce resources, especially staff; to justify budget requests; and to present a picture of the department's work to the rest of the library, the users, and the university at large.

Assessment comes in many forms, including anecdotal evidence and hard data: statistical data analysis [i.e. Reference Question Software (RQS) statistics, Virtual Reference (VR) statistics], formal surveys such as LIBQUAL, suggestion boxes, usability studies, feedback forms or mail-in flyers. The reference department already gathers much assessment information, but we are not analyzing anecdotal evidence and hard data together and applying the findings.

**Proposed Assessment Plan**
**Goal**: The reference department will gather, analyze, and use in planning all available and appropriate evaluation data.

In keeping with the library goal of evidence-based planning, the reference department will audit its own assessment activities and will provide regular reports of its analysis.

Action: Continue to work with the Technology Department's assessment group to explore the data from VR transactions. The results will inform scheduling of VR shifts, training, budget for supplies, signage, instruction, website usability, other.

Action: Analyze the Library Survey results from 2002, 2005 and 2007 to identify areas for improvement or continued involvement.

Action: Analyze RQS data for statistically valid results and apply those results to departmental planning etc.

## Project plans

Audience: Managers, administrators, colleagues, co-workers.

Demographic or professional attributes: Mostly internal, but not always.

Objective: To report in a formal way the methods of undertaking a work project or activity.

Idiosyncrasies: Although a detailed plan can help structure the work, make sure you are not too rigid in your planning process or too tight in assigning times to specific activities.

Editors: Committee or group members, staff within a department or division, colleagues.

Writing resources: Project proposal, participants' schedules, project planning meeting minutes, other documentation related to the project.

Once your project gets the go-ahead, you can use the proposal as a template for the planning document. Before you start, jot down all the activities necessary to complete the plan, and list all the people, resources, tasks, etc., needed for each activity. Then much of your work will already be done.

Make sure that you have the participants' calendars and that you know the timing of events that could get in the way. For example, remember that the people you expect to do the work may be busy during the first weeks of the term teaching library instruction sessions for new students; don't propose a due date for a key report that coincides with the end of the fiscal year, when your colleagues will be finalizing their budgets.

*Sample project plan*

**Reference Assessment Project Plan**

**Context and background**
Evaluation and assessment can help the Reference Department create and improve services to better meet the users' needs; make better use of scarce resources, especially staff; justify budget requests; and present a picture of the department's work to the rest of the library, the users and the university at large.

**Plan overview**
To undertake evidence-based planning and create user-oriented services, the reference department will:
(a) conduct an audit of assessment data already gathered by the department to gain a fuller picture of reference activities, and
(b) after the audit is complete, devote the annual spring retreat to learning new assessment techniques and planning for new assessment tools.

**Project timeline and activities**
*October 2009*
   Audit begins.

■ Virtual Reference statistics audit group is assigned to compile and report on findings from 2007–2008 VR statistics.

   Report deadline – 15 December 2009

- Reference Question statistics audit group is assigned to compile and report on findings from 2007–2008 RQ statistics

  Report deadline – 15 December 2009

- Library Survey 2002, 2005 and 2007 statistics audit group is assigned to compile and report on findings from LS statistics.

  Report deadline – 15 December 2009

*15 December*

Reference staff will begin reviewing findings and preparing to draft audit report at in-house retreat on 15 January 2010.

*31 January*

Audit Report will be completed and turned in to Library Administrative Council.

*1 February*

Retreat and workshop planning group will be formed and will plan the workshop for May reference retreat.

*15 May*

Reference department staff will retreat to learn new assessment techniques and create a plan to use other assessment tools.

*1 June*

Begin using new assessment tools.

## Final thoughts

The documents discussed in this chapter portray you and your colleagues at work for others to see. Keep a neutral tone, and stay professional.

# Managing

Of all the people in a library, managers probably have the most writing to do. On top of the other kinds of writing librarians do, you are asked to review your subordinates' work, document employee behavior, create reports, budgets and proposals, and more.

   Your employees and your own boss are counting on you to write fair and appropriate performance appraisals, persuasive and sound budget proposals, and annual reports that accurately and positively highlight your unit's work. To succeed as a manager, you need to master these types of writing.

## Performance reviews

**Audience**: Staff, managers, administrators, human resources staff.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Not all readers are experts in the field.

**Objective**: To formally describe and comment on the quality, quantity and appropriateness of employee work and behavior, often related to compensation and/or promotion.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Staff will be especially sensitive to how and what you write; need to balance feedback and review of work with coaching; also, may have legal consequences.

**Editors**: Human resources staff only, as these are confidential.

**Writing resources**: Files for the people you are reviewing; their self-evaluations; previous reviews and goals; rating system or other guidelines from human resources.

Performance reviews are difficult to write. They have multiple purposes and meanings, not only to the person you're writing about, but also to the human resources staff and administrators who are reading them.

Although you are reviewing someone else's work, recognize that what you write can say a lot about you. Managers who consistently write only negative or positive reviews are sending a message to their employees and their employers about the kind of manager they are. Performance reviews are an extension of your own management style, and you will be judged by them, too.

Take special care to be impartial. Stick to facts and explicit details, and how an employee's behavior has affected his or her work. It helps to have documentation in front of you before you begin writing: an employee's job description, his or her own self-evaluation, the employee's goals, those of the department and the organization, and anything else you've kept on file that shows how he or she performs in the job.

You can make the job much easier by planning ahead. Save evidence of your employees' work, good and bad, throughout the year, and you won't be at a loss for something to say when it comes time to write an annual review.

You should comment on people's work as it relates to the requirements of their jobs, the goals they and you have set, and the goals of the library and the institution; where necessary, you should offer ideas for improvement.

Your comments can be positive or negative, but they must be based on facts. Therefore, include examples to illustrate

everything you say. This will help employees understand what they are doing wrong and make it difficult to argue with your assessment.

One caveat: A performance review is not the place to bring up a problem for the first time. It's your job to alert employees to problems as they happen, then work together to improve their performance (see the next section on employee documentation). You can, however, use the review to talk about sub-par work or behavior that employees have been given the opportunity to improve, discussing whether they have done so.

Sample *review for a librarian position*
[This review is in narrative form, with frequent examples of the librarian's exemplary work.]

> John Doe
> Associate Librarian
> ABC Mountain Outpost Branch Library
> Mountain Outpost Laboratory
> ABC University
>
> Performance Appraisal, 2008–2009
> For the second year in a row, John has continued to make wonderful improvements to the ABC Mountain Outpost Branch Library. With his skills in public service and in coordinating projects over long physical distances, he makes the library more user-friendly. He has worked to build strong relationships with the Mountain Outpost Laboratory administration, faculty and students by creating services that are timely and appropriate. From the mundane (better photocopiers) to the high-tech (document delivery work station), John continues to find ways to better serve this remote ABC population.

Translating his experience from his many years at the On-Campus branch library to a smaller, more focused one has been a good change for John and very useful for the library. Because of his analysis of the collections, users and service options, he was able to quickly begin working on a plan for an ideal library for the Mountain Outpost Laboratory at the suggestion of the director. His initial suggestions for these improvements are very forward-thinking and show a keen sense of how electronic resources are changing the face of libraries, how document delivery is vital to remote users, how cooperation with partners is vital to providing good collections, and how teaching users to effectively use electronic databases and materials is one of our most important functions as librarians. He also shows a keen understanding of the need to reduce operational inefficiencies.

John continues to share his history and experience with the rest of the ABC Branch libraries. During the interim librarian's stint (2008–2009) and while we wait for the new Campus Branch Librarian to begin (summer/autumn 2011), he gladly helped us sort through problems as they arrived. He has taken a large role reviewing Campus Branch materials that were in the old storage facility and need subject analysis as they are transferred into the new storage facility. He is always there when we have a question or need some clarification. He also continues to take an active part in discussions of other branch library collections (via e-mail) and selects for the Campus Branch Library in a few subject areas. His participation in collections discussions will continue, but with the arrival of the new librarian in the Campus Branch library we will be able to let John focus more on the needs of his own

library. Without John, however, the Campus Branch library would have fallen into much worse disarray during this interim period.

As John continues his analysis of his job and the workings of the library, I have complete faith that the ABC University Mountain Outpost Library (AMOL) can only improve. His goals show that he has nothing but the best in mind for the library.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Signature | Date | Signature | Date |

*Sample review for a staff position*
[This review highlights language taken directly from the job description to make clear what the employee is and isn't doing well.]

Jane Doe
Library Assistant Junior
ABC Mountain Outpost Branch Library
Mountain Outpost Laboratory
ABC University

Performance Appraisal, 2008–2009
With some of her key responsibilities, Jane regularly meets the responsibilities and expectations of her job. With some other key job responsibilities, however, Jane takes little or no initiative in beginning or completing them.

Areas where the responsibilities and expectations are being met:

*1. Provides directional/reference assistance to patrons including faculty, staff, students and visitors*
Jane responds quickly and efficiently to patrons' requests. She is particularly good at helping professors

and their assistants; she often orders document delivery materials personally, and she keeps professional and timely contact with them via phone or e-mail.

*2. Provides routine circulation assistance*

Jane can handle routine circulation functions. She is also good at recognizing what needs to be handled by the Library Assistant Senior, and she passes on the appropriate information to him after making sure that patrons have the materials they need. This accords with the culture of the library – give patrons what they need, and handle the bureaucracy behind the scenes.

*3. Maintains subscription, check-in records and binding for journal titles*

Jane is assiduous in her journal check-in responsibilities. She keeps on top of all the journals as they come in and does her best to check them in within 24 hours of arrival. She undertook all of the new ILS training for journal check-in (see goals section) and kept an interim list up to date while the system was getting normalized. Jane compiles all the necessary statistics for the journals. Once she began the binding work, she met all expectations for binding the journals. She made sure we were able to get as much binding in as possible before we had to stop for the switch to the new ILS.

Excluding the exceptions expanded upon below, her work in this duty meets expectations.

*4. Provides routine office support*

As needed, Jane stays in touch with shipping and receiving to resolve any problems.

**Areas for improvement**

**Job Responsibility**: Prepares periodical and serial issues for binding, determining need for monograph analytics; processes volumes returned from binding.

In March 2008, it took much prompting and coaching from me to get Jane to begin work in this area of her job. She was resistant, and when asked for a plan, she was unable to create one on her own. I worked closely with her to figure out how to begin, and after more than three weeks, and a few e-mail and one-on-one meeting reminders, she began working on the binding in the last week of the fiscal year. She is now on top of her binding responsibilities.

**Job Responsibility**: Responsible for the general appearance, maintenance and proper labeling of the journal stacks.

For a journal shelf labeling project in mid-fiscal year, Jane showed strong resistance to beginning the project. She was argumentative during a training session with me for the project, and she said to me that she didn't see why she needed to make the list/labels. She is now working her way through the project and has had only a few small setbacks. As with binding, once she began the project, she showed great interest in doing the task. The main problem was in getting started and taking initiative to do so.

# Employee documentation

**Audience**: Managers, administrators, human resources, employees, lawyers.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Not all readers are experts in the field.

**Objective**: To create a record of employee behavior for personnel and legal reasons.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Need to describe negative employee work habits or behaviors; library or institution may have guidelines about what can be included.

**Editors**: Human resources staff only, as these are confidential.

**Writing resources**: Human resources work policies, the employee's file, any written evidence relating to the employee's actions or behavior, such as memos, reports or e-mail.

Employee documentation creates a dated paper trail describing the behavior and actions of employees who are not performing their jobs well or who are causing personnel problems with their behavior. Without careful documentation, any discussion about an employee's behavior becomes a he-said, she-said situation.

Employee documentation can be a manager's first step toward showing that an employee is not suitable for a position. To put it bluntly, a paper trail of behavior makes it easier to terminate or sanction a poorly performing employee. Conversely, creating a written record can help you turn a poorly performing employee around.

Write down as much as you can piece together, including date, behavior or action, the work policy that was violated, and a description of your follow-up and the employee's response. Your written record will help justify any actions you take with the employee, and it will paint a picture of the employee for human resources or legal staff.

Key elements:

- Your name
- Employee's name
- Date written and date the offense took place
- Short description of the employee's action or behavior
- Short description of your follow-up actions, including what and how you told the employee to improve

*Samples of employee documentation*

> Manager: Jane Doe
> Employee: John Doe
> Date: 1/1/2009
>
> On 1 January 2009, John was one hour late for work and did not call to say he would be late. He and I spoke shortly after he arrived, and I explained that if he is running late, he needs to call or e-mail the office to let us know, or I will have to give him a written warning for unexplained or unexcused tardiness.
>
> Manager: Jane Doe
> Employee: John Doe
> Date: 2/2/2009
>
> On 1 February 2009, John Doe and I met to discuss a complaint I received from a faculty member in his assigned department earlier in the week. The faculty member e-mailed (attached) to let me know that John had scheduled an instruction session on a day after the end of the term. John argued with me, saying he did not know the academic calendar. I told John that I expected him to consult the academic calendar before scheduling library instruction sessions, and if he does not, I will prepare a written warning for his file.

For more help with writing disciplinary documents, contact your human resources department.

# Job descriptions

**Audience:** Managers, administrators, human resources, staff.

**Demographic or professional attributes:** Not all readers are experts in the field.

**Objective:** To describe job duties and responsibilities, to advertise for a position.

**Idiosyncrasies:** Depending on the organization and its requirements, may be written by human resources staff, the manager, the employee or even a group of people; can reveal information about the organization and its values as well as about the job duties and requirements.

**Editors:** Human resources staff, staff, colleagues, managers, administrators.

**Writing resources:** Similar or previous job descriptions, format guidelines from human resources.

A job description outlines an employee's responsibilities. Job descriptions are written when a new position is created or a job is vacant and needs to be filled, and they should clearly reflect the department or organization's needs. Don't simply recycle an old job description when you have an opening. Because organizational and technological change brings new responsibilities, job descriptions should be revisited and revised whenever a job becomes vacant.

In some organizations, employees must update and modify their own job descriptions annually, often when they write their self-evaluations and goals. If you are revisiting your job description, compare what you did in the past year to what your job description says you are responsible for to see if there are any discrepancies. If there are, think about how to better describe your responsibilities to reflect the work you do. If your job has changed significantly, have a conversation with your manager or human resources staff about whether your job should be reclassified.

*Sample librarian job description*

ABC Library System
Position Description
Instruction and Outreach Librarian

The Instruction and Outreach Librarian develops library instructional materials and offers services for undergraduate research support in all subject areas. The Instruction and Outreach Librarian will also work with the Business and Law librarians to create and lead instructional programs and services for the Business and Law Libraries.

This position reports to the Director of Outreach & Instruction in the ABC Library System.

**Responsibilities**
**Undergraduate Research Support**

- Assists the Director of Outreach & Instruction and subject librarians with the planning, development and maintenance of instructional materials, including tutorials, simulations, research guides and other instructional projects. Develops innovative ways to make these materials available to faculty and students.

- Works with subject librarians to develop research support services for undergraduates in specialized academic areas and research-intensive courses, with initial emphasis on English, History and Public Policy courses.

- Collaborates with subject librarians and Web Services to create and update online class guides and subject guides, using a common, usable, educationally sound design.

- Schedules and teaches library instruction classes related to specific disciplines.

- Provides individual research consultations for undergraduates.

- Assists the Director of Outreach & Instruction in assessing library instruction tools, materials and services.

- Assists the Director of Outreach & Instruction in publicizing the library's instructional services.

- Participates in the broader ABC Libraries' instruction and outreach programs, including first-year library instruction.

- Participates in Instructional Technology meetings and consultations with faculty, where appropriate, to determine the best way to incorporate library resources and instruction into web-based courses.

- Assists subject librarians in the use of web-based courseware for library instruction and research support.

**Business and Law Library Instruction and Outreach**

- In concert with the Business and Law librarians, creates, offers and evaluates library instructional services to support the curriculum in each department served by the Business and Law Libraries.

- Works with Business and Law librarians and faculty to design and develop instructional materials in a variety of formats.

- Collaborates with Business and Law librarians and the Director of Outreach & Instruction to identify and pursue opportunities to integrate library instruction into the business and law departments' curricula.

- Schedules and teaches library instruction classes for business and law courses.

- Works with the Director of Outreach & Instruction and the Business and Law Librarians to evaluate instructional services in the Business and law Libraries.

- Provides reference and research consultation services in the Business and Law libraries.

- Performs other related duties incidental to the work described herein.

**Qualifications**

All ABC Library staff members must demonstrate exceptional workplace behaviors as they execute their responsibilities. These behaviors are customer focus, collaboration, creative problem solving, continuous learning and a commitment to diversity.

EDUCATION

Required: MLS from an ALA-accredited program.

EXPERIENCE

**Required:** Two years' library instruction experience in an academic setting and/or relevant teaching experience; specialized knowledge in instructional design and learning theory, as well as expertise in various instructional technologies and web design; a dynamic and engaging teaching presence; excellent oral and written communication skills; effective public-speaking skills; commitment to excellent customer service; broad knowledge of the library's role in instruction and research; experience with electronic information resources; awareness of national and international issues and trends in academic librarianship; strong computer skills, especially in web editing and creating course materials; ability to work independently and collaboratively.

**Preferred**: Working knowledge of an integrated library system; working knowledge of web-based course software; experience in assessment of library instructional services and resources.

*Sample staff job description*
ABC Library System
Position Description
Library Assistant, Senior
Sciences Library

**Summary**
Under general direction of the Sciences Library Director, performs a wide variety of public and technical services to meet the informational and scholarly needs of the users of an active branch library. Oversees the general operation of the Science Library and assumes total responsibility in the absence of librarians. Within the framework of the procedures and policies established for the ABC Library System and for the Science Library, provides effective and courteous service.

**Duties**
Recruits, interviews, hires, trains and supervises 15–17 student assistants who staff the library during the day and on evenings and weekends. Maintains and revises the student assistants' manual.

Provides directional/reference assistance to patrons, including faculty, staff, students and visitors:

- Teaches patrons how to use general library tools such as the online catalog, general databases and the library website.
- Assists patrons with print and online science reference tools such as *Biological Abstracts*, *Web of*

*Science* and the various collections and online resources, referring more complex questions to the librarians.

■ Refers patrons to other units within the library system as appropriate.

Conducts and/or supervises all circulation functions in the Science Library:

■ Interprets and applies complex circulation policies of both the Science Library and the ABC Library System, according to the categories of patrons and types of materials involved.

■ Trains and supervises student employees and library assistants in circulation procedures.

■ Sends all overdue and recall notices and follows up on such matters until resolved.

■ Sends bills for overdue and lost materials.

■ Identifies volumes that need repair or rebinding.

■ Searches for missing books.

■ Applies barcodes to books with records in the online catalog, using the online catalog as a guide.

Processes incoming new monographs, verifies agreement with online catalog records, and initiates error corrections with Technical Services.

Responsible for reserve functions in the library:

■ Requests reserve lists from Science faculty members.

■ Collects and processes all materials on these lists.

■ At the end of each semester, removes items from reserve.

■ Maintains files on reserve requests and materials and notes missing volumes.

- Identifies and sends to technical departments bindery materials in need of repair or rebinding

Participates in stack maintenance for the collection of 120,000+ volumes:

- Prepares schedules for shelf-reading to ensure patron access to materials.

- Trains and supervises student assistants in shelving and shelf-reading and performs these functions when the library has no student assistants.

- Surveys stacks for materials in need of repair or rebinding.

Updates catalog records as needed.

Assists in writing and revising procedure manual; drafts revisions, adds materials as needed.

Assists in editing and revising Science Library web page; drafts revisions, adds materials as needed.

Participates in the work of cross-functional teams within the library; performs special projects as assigned; works occasional holidays.

**Qualifications**

**Required**: Practical understanding of technical and specialized library tasks and effective oral and written communication skills usually acquired through two years of post-secondary education; one year of library experience; or an equivalent combination of relevant education and/or experience. Accurate typing; attention to detail. Preference will be given to candidates who have demonstrated ability to master and prioritize a diverse set of duties and responsibilities and to work independently with little supervision.

**Desirable**: Familiarity with computers and foreign languages.

Note that in both of these job descriptions, as with many documents in this book, the verbs used to describe each activity are parallel; that is, they are all in the same tense.

## Search committee reports

**Audience**: Hiring manager, administrators, human resources staff.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: May not be experts in the field, probably need to find and read specifics quickly.

**Objective**: To provide strengths and weaknesses of job candidates to help with the decision to hire or not to hire, to describe in writing the committee's work process to demonstrate that the members were fair and followed protocol.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Can say as much about the search committee as about the candidates.

**Editors**: Search committee members.

**Writing resources**: All documentation related to the search, including candidates' packets, search committee notes and meeting minutes, comments solicited from staff.

In most academic libraries, whether to hire someone is not the search committee's decision, but rather that of the director, dean or university librarian. But these administrators rely on the search committee's report of its findings. Although the report will therefore sway the decision, the committee must present its data in an unbiased way.

This document might be used in legal proceedings, so it is important to clearly describe how the committee followed all of the legal requirements surrounding a search. Should a candidate bring a case against the organization, the report will serve as a record to show that the committee was fair and unbiased.

Key elements:

- List of search committee members

- Description of the search process, including the number of applications reviewed, the number of candidates interviewed, who each candidate met during the search and the process for gathering feedback

- Committee's evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate; comments from library staff

Sample *Search Committee report*

> **MEMORANDUM**
>
> **To:** Jasper Doe, Executive Group
>
> **From:** Search Committee for Program Coordinator, Jane Doe (Chair), John Doe, Jane Smith, John Smith, Jackie Doe
>
> **Subject:** Report – Coordinator, Instruction Program
>
> **Date:** 14 January 2010
>
> **CC:** Director of Library Human Resources
>
> This report summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the finalist candidates in the search for the Coordinator, Instruction Program. This summary was compiled from comments received from staff, feedback from references, and the committee's own observations and conversations with the candidates.
>
> The search committee reviewed 27 applications for this position obtained by advertising (refer to written

recruitment strategy provided by HR). The committee designed a screening matrix to identify candidates from the applicant pool that most closely matched the qualifications (see attached). From this group, six candidates were selected for phone interviews. Of those interviewed by phone, Alice Doe and Alex Doe were selected for on-site interviews. On-site interviews consisted of an open presentation; group meetings with technology assistants, search committee members and library instruction group representatives; and individual meetings with Jasper Doe, the Library director, and the direct supervisor.

Alice Doe

Alice Doe has over 10 years of experience in library technology and instruction, including two years as Instruction Director for the BBB University Library Reference Department. Her responsibilities there included managing the library-wide instruction program. She holds a Master's in Library and Information Science from the University of XYZ in Big City, Small State.

- Strengths:
  - Up-to-date knowledge of library instruction models and Internet resources
  - Collaborative attitude
  - Optimistic and enthusiastic
  - Clearly articulated vision for the position, including concrete and feasible ideas for the program
  - Realistic expectations about the amount of time involved in instructional programs
  - Current knowledge of instruction in libraries
  - Presentation displayed the ability to connect with the audience effectively; handled technical difficulties well

- Weaknesses:
  - Not as familiar with the atmosphere at a small private college
  - During her meeting with the librarians, the committee felt she could have asked more questions and listened more; however, she did demonstrate good rapport with this group

Telephone references for Ms Doe were obtained from three individuals; notes from these conversations are attached.

Alex Doe

Alex Doe has a wide range of instruction experience. He has designed and developed library instruction programs and materials for the past 15 years, which includes six years of experience creating a program from the ground up. He hold a Master's in Library Science from ABC University.

- Strengths:
  - Extensive library instructional design experience, including assessment work
  - Speaks clearly and effectively
  - Displayed the ability to listen carefully and ask good questions, particularly to librarians
  - Collaborative attitude
  - Previous experience in instructional training as instructor of a library science course at ABC
  - Previous training in video instruction

- Weaknesses:
  - Several staff commented on his overall lack of energy and enthusiasm. He did not clearly display the ability to motive and energize – he was described as 'not dynamic enough'

- Limited experience working with the typical range of instructional technologies – some commenters were worried about his grasp of the time and effort involved in instructional technology use
- Technology skills did not seem up to date; for example, he professed little experience with digital media
- Presentation skills were adequate but not strong (limited eye contact; pacing was described as too slow)
- Seemed uncomfortable with the undefined aspects of the position – some staff expressed concern about his ability to 'deal with ambiguity'

Based on the comments from staff and the committee's observations of the candidate's performance at the interview, the committee did not feel that Mr Doe should continue to be a candidate for the position, so his references were not contacted.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Jane Doe
Chair, Coordinator, Instruction Program Search

Remember: your case for one or more candidates will be stronger if you present the information succinctly and in a neutral, unbiased voice.

## Budget requests

**Audience:** Managers, administrators, budget officers.

**Demographic or professional attributes:** Not all are experts in the field, probably need to find information quickly, may just want one small piece of information and need to know how to find it quickly.

**Objective:** To present and make a case for budget needs.

**Idiosyncrasies:** Tying requests to strategic goals will improve the likelihood of funding.

**Editors:** Colleagues, managers, staff.

**Writing resources:** Previous budgets; the department's annual report; most recent goals of all staff, the department and the library; equipment and other catalogs.

A well-written and well-justified budget request can have far-reaching effects. Morale and employee satisfaction are affected by whether a department gets funding for its initiatives, or whether they have the supplies and tools they need to get their work done. Knowing what to request and how to request it so you get the funds are key to being a good manager. Without the right resources, work can be disrupted or hampered.

Make sure your budget requests fit your organization's goals. Scour the strategic plan to find where your request fits. Administrators are working toward their strategic objectives. If you can make a case that your needs are connected to the organization's strategies, then you have won half the battle.

Just turning in a list of what you want won't get your requests funded. Describe what you want, and talk about how it ties in with your department's and your library's goals. Show that you have done your homework – that is, show that you looked for the best price – and include costs and purchasing information.

If you supply all the information they need to order what you want, you won't have to engage in any back-and-forth with the purchasing office once the request gets funded; you will thus have your items faster.

*Sample budget requests*

> **Multimedia projector** BestCost, VisualPro 9000, LIBCO catalog 2009, Product Number 9000, page 123.
>
> A portable multimedia projector will support library instruction away from the library. With the increased focus on science and technology at ABC University and the increase in students taking, and required to take, science and technology classes, science and engineering librarians are teaching many more classes. There are no facilities in the branch libraries to conduct classes such as these that are controlled by the library. It is often difficult for us to schedule classes in the main library classrooms, and it is hard for us to get our users to go there for a class. With a portable projector, we will be able to conduct classes anywhere – in our libraries, in a classroom, in a conference room.
>
> Some classes the projector will be used for are: Chemistry Information and Retrieval, General Chemistry lab (600 students per semester), Basic Biology (required for all biology or pre-med students).
>
> We will be able to offer more classes that will be more convenient for our users, and we won't have to compete with the rest of the ABC librarians for instructional space or equipment.
>
> **Four high-end, high-speed multifunctional copiers** (could replace the fax and networked printer that need replacing and the scanners which all branch libraries are requesting). CopyPro EfficientCopy 44455.
>
> These copiers would fill the need for improved document delivery facilities. The current model does not work – our materials are retrieved by the runner from the main library and then shipped to Main. There

they are photocopied and then returned to us via shipping and receiving. Many items are not returned to us quickly, or even at all. Many end up in the wrong place. This means our materials are not available for ABC Library patrons.

This purchase will help improve the ILL/DD system, Goal 1.3 of the strategic plan. The present process is inefficient; it is also expensive, because we have had to replace lost materials. With these copiers in place, materials will not leave the building.

We will free staff for other duties because we will not have to send lists out to all libraries to look for our items; we won't have to look for other libraries' items on our own shelves; we won't have to explain to the patrons why materials are not here; and we won't have to spend time trying to track down our materials.

## Final thoughts

Managers write often and copiously. But the more you do it, the easier it will get – you'll have your own past examples to start from. For many of the writing tasks in this chapter, you'll be able to develop a template that you can use again and again.

# Public services and collections

Most of the documents in this chapter are specific to libraries; you won't encounter them anywhere else. Your library may prescribe a format for each of them, created and decided upon by committee.

That may seem like a straitjacket if you're the creative type, but it's usually a good thing. If you're handed a format to use, a lot of your work is already done for you. And in our experience, most institutions are flexible; if you can justify doing so by showing that it will help the users, you can add categories or deviate from the format in other ways.

Even though you have a local format, the types of information you write about won't vary much from institution to institution. That is, a subject guide in chemistry at ABC University will resemble a subject guide in chemistry at DEF University, with similar elements and content.

Before you begin these writing projects, you will want to have all the data about your library's resources that you can get your hands on. Statistics on the use of facilities, resources and services can be very helpful, and you will need to know well the resources available to users within your subject areas. You should also have in hand any relevant library policies.

Subject guides or pathfinders share information about collections and services with library users, while collection assessments and external reviews share information about

collections and services with audiences both inside and outside the library. Therefore, most of the projects in this chapter will have an audience at least part of which has little expertise in how a library works, or in the academic field you're writing about. In these types of documents, be extra vigilant about using plain language and avoiding technical terms that only a specialist would know. When in doubt about a word or phrase, e-mail friends who work outside academia and ask whether they know what it means.

## Subject guides (pathfinders)

**Audience**: Students, casual library users, graduate students, other librarians who need to help a user find information in your discipline.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Not experts in the field, probably need to find information quickly, may want an overview of the possibilities of information available in the field, probably just want one small piece of information.

**Objective**: To guide users to subject-specific information, to show how information is organized within a discipline.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Used by people whose information-gathering skills range from novice to expert.

**Editors**: Subject librarians in the field, subject librarians in other fields, students, faculty.

**Writing resources**: Other subject guides or pathfinders in your field, earlier versions from your own institution, a list of what you want the user to be able to do or find.

A subject guide or pathfinder leads the user to information, often within one library's collection. Because each subject

creates and organizes information differently, and because an academic library contains a daunting amount of information, users or librarians without subject expertise can save time by using a subject guide to find indexes, databases and other sources of information.

Subject guides can be broad, covering an entire field – for example, anthropology. Or they can be quite narrow, covering only a small swath of a single sub-specialty – for example, African–American literature of the Harlem Renaissance.

Unlike a course handout, which we describe in Chapter 9, a subject guide stands alone, to be used without in-person instruction. That means the guide should be more than just a list of resources; it should also offer instructions and tips on using those resources.

Many libraries are moving their subject-specific documents to web-based versions, using proprietary or in-house software that has a template with formatting built in. Take this formatting with a grain of salt. Because academic fields use information differently, no single format will work for all guides. Make the guide fit the subject, and not the other way around.

If encyclopedias are vital for your field, for example, then you must include a section on encyclopedias. But if your guide is for a subject area where encyclopedias are rarely used, don't include an encyclopedia section just because the software asks for one – you will only confuse the users. Remember: you are the expert.

Before you start writing, use these questions to brainstorm:

■ What types of information are people typically looking for in this subject? Is it company facts and figures? Critical literature reviews? Scientific articles? Data sets? Is it in visual, print, sound, web, scholarly or manuscript form? Is it available only when certain parts of the library are open?

- Who is most likely to use this guide? Undergraduates? Or graduate students and faculty?

- Where are the best places to find specific types of information in this field? Are they in print, on the web, in a database or in another format?

- What is the most efficient way to use the tools that index the needed information? What tips will help a user navigate a particular resource?

- What are other possible places to look for related information?

- How should users formulate the best search statements to limit their searches?

Now you're ready to write. Keep in mind that a subject guide should answer these questions:

- **What** resources do you want to lead the user to?

- **Why** would they want to use these resources? Annotate your entries to make this clear.

- **Where** can they find the resources?

- **How** are the resources best used? Searching in the index? Natural language searching? Author searching? Or something else?

- **When** can you use them? Are there access restrictions, or are there better times to get into a database than others?

- **When** was the subject guide written? When was it last updated?

- **Who** made the guide? How do users contact you?

Because most academic libraries prescribe a format for subject guides, we do not provide a sample. We suggest instead that you use as examples the guides that your own library produces.

# Collection assessments

**Audience:** Collection development staff, library administrators, faculty, subject librarians, external administrators.

**Demographic or professional attributes:** Internal audience is often detail-oriented; administrators need to have a nutshell presentation of the results.

**Objective:** To present information found while conducting a collection assessment project about a set of library materials, whether subject- or format-based; may need to make a case for funding, space, etc.

**Idiosyncrasies:** Has many uses, including budgeting, external needs, shelving and storage, long-term planning.

**Editors:** Subject librarians in the field, collection development staff.

**Writing resources:** Previous assessment documents for the collection; internal statistics about the collection, including budget, amount spent, numbers of volumes acquired in a year; use and cost-per-use statistics for books, journals and databases; checkout statistics etc.; statistics about the academic departments supported, including number of faculty, students and researchers, courses taught, majors, graduates, etc.; external statistics on average costs of materials in the field, average numbers of books published in a year, number of core journal titles and what they are, new databases in the field with costs and reviews. Numbers and facts help you describe the collection and make a case for special needs.

Collection assessments are most often initiated by collection development staff who will often prescribe the format of the report.

Your goal is to be as detailed and thorough as possible. But you also need to decide what picture you will paint with

your results. Consider your collection's relationship to other collections being assessed and to the library's collection as a whole.

What you say about your collection can have far-reaching results. Do you want to show that the collection is lacking compared with its peers? Or do you want to show that it is a gem that should be considered an asset to the library's reputation? Do you see changes ahead that will that affect the library monetarily? Are there space or access problems? If you see something important related to your collection, find a way to fit it into your report even if you weren't asked for it. You are competing against the other subject areas for funds, and the information in your report will help administrators decide who gets what.

Think hard, though, about whether the subject area is strategically important to the library or university – and if it isn't, say so honestly.

Some collection development departments will ask subject specialists to create an assessment or collection report annually, usually at budget time. For this type of report, tracking data over time provides a powerful illustration of the collection, showing trends in the subject area or gaps in collecting or support.

Some collections' needs vary greatly from year to year. For example, you may learn that an important – and expensive – new database is coming out. If your users will need it for their research, you'll need to explain why.

Librarians who create the acquisitions budget are like most of us and don't enjoy surprises, so it is best to alert them as soon as you hear of a resource that will be available in the future. In the meantime, build support for the product. Invite the vendor to demonstrate it for faculty and students; ask for feedback from the department on how the resource will support their research; contact the librarians in

other academic fields who may be interested in the product and give them and their faculty the opportunity to give feedback. Keep in mind that faculty support is one of the strongest ways to get your product funded; get it in writing to include in your assessment.

On the other hand, you may be asked to conduct an assessment because the library is cutting its budget. In this case, you will need to present collection information to your faculty to get feedback about collection decisions. Their input will help you make a case for cancelling or retaining materials. You'll find a sample e-mail to faculty asking for their feedback on a journal cancellation project in the next section.

Parts of a collection assessment:

- Background (of the collection, and who uses it for what)
- Description of the assessment and why it is being done
- Lay of the land (what's going on with the budget, the department, publishing in the field, costs, etc.)
- Relevant collection data
- Analysis of the data
- Conclusions, consequences and suggestions

*Sample collection assessment*

> **Collection Assessment of Science Collection, ABC Libraries**
> **Recent History and Profile of Science Department at ABC University**
>
> The ABC Science Department comprises 32 professors, six associate professors, seven assistant professors (45 total faculty), 138 graduate students, 66 postdoctoral fellows and ~500 undergraduate majors; it teaches roughly 4500 students per year. The 2008 external review

set the target for total faculty at 52. The department plans to add the additional seven faculty over the next two years. It also plans to replace professors who will soon retire with faculty whose intellectual focus is on the science of life processes. These appointments will be related to upcoming research collaboration opportunities with the ABC Medical School and the ABC School of Engineering in biological chemistry and materials science.

In the external review, the chairman sums up how he sees the department in the near future:

'The department is clearly on a positive trajectory. The administration supports our development. There are likely to be many changes in the next few years, as several faculty are nearing retirement and we still are several faculty short of our target number of 52. We are, in effect, reinventing science at ABC.'

**Table 1**   Course Enrollments and Science Majors 2005–2009

| Academic year | Science enrollment | Science majors |
|---|---|---|
| 2005 | 2863 | 810 |
| 2006 | 2856 | 812 |
| 2007 | 2634 | 817 |
| 2008 | 2397 | 810 |
| 2009 | 2428 | 800 |

**Table 2**   Science Degrees Awarded 2005–2009

| Academic year | A.B. graduates | B.S. graduates | Total graduates |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2005 | 125 | 127 | 252 |
| 2006 | 125 | 124 | 249 |
| 2007 | 121 | 124 | 245 |
| 2008 | 130 | 119 | 249 |
| 2009 | 125 | 119 | 244 |

Other changes proposed for the science department include an undergraduate research building, which might include more than just student lab space. The science library will soon need to focus on planning library services and collections to coordinate with this new undergraduate space and to continue supplying the information needs of science faculty and graduate students in their labs in both the John Doe Laboratory Building (JDLB) and the Jane Doe Research Center (JDRC). Many researchers who are in the building and the JDRC already take advantage of the electronic journals and databases, and stay in contact with the library by e-mail and phone. These heavy remote users of library materials and services can serve as a focus group to see how we can best serve their information needs.

Changes in the library collections:
An overview of changes in the past 10 years and how the library and its users are responding to them:

- The past 10 years have seen a major transition from print to electronic resources and services

- The monograph is making the leap to the digital world and continues to be a source for in-depth research into multidisciplinary work

- Stand-alone CD-ROM products have come and gone

- Nearly 90 per cent of all science journals are now available digitally, at a high cost, over the web

- Reference resources continue to migrate to the web; the smaller publishers are now following their larger counterparts, who moved to the web first

- Journal articles remain the most important medium for our users

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- Many faculty and graduate students are accustomed to retrieving articles via document delivery or out of storage using the web interface with ILL/Document Delivery

- Many users access digital resources while working in their offices or labs. These people are very vocal, and they contact us immediately when there is a break in their access

- Visits to the science library website have increased at a phenomenal rate – at peak times they have reached 65,000 hits per month (hpm), up from 12,000 hpm during the same peak period the year before – a five-fold increase in a single year

What does all this mean to the library?

- Creating, customizing, managing, testing and training patrons to use digital materials is a major part of our work

- The library is not just physical space; it is also the virtual space available on the web

- The website allows users to learn about and access much of what they need to know, around the clock from almost anywhere. The web is the first stop for any sort of work in the library

- Users are very self-sufficient, or want to be. Making the website a do-it-yourself place works well in a library where there is no staffed public desk. Part of supporting a DIY library is having training available regularly and on demand to teach people how to navigate the website, the physical library and all of the resources available in either place.

History of funding for the collections:

It is expensive to support scientific research. Science journals continue to lead the pack in cost; science monographs, sets and databases are not far behind. Like every library, the science library has participated in journals and serials reviews over the past two decades. Though we have cut titles, our expenditures have more than doubled.

Trends in expenditures over the past 10 years:

Expenditures have increased as prices have increased. This, however, has not been a one-to-one increase. Journals have been reviewed and cancelled not only to cover budget shortfalls, but also to make funds available for expensive reference databases and new journals. The science library expenditures have changed to incorporate digital resources and soaring journal costs. The monograph budget has stagnated. With the increase in the cost of monographs, fewer books are being purchased.

Specific pressures on the science library collections budget:

An increase in multidisciplinary work. This means faculty from disciplines with whom scientists are collaborating have a greater need for monographs. For the most part, the people using these monographs are faculty from other disciplines, graduate students and science faculty changing research directions. We will have to purchase such monographs in the areas of materials science and biological chemistry.

An increase in smaller sets and single-volume reference materials available digitally via the web. Some of these will be ongoing purchases, whereas in the past they were mostly one-off purchases. In some cases, such as the CRC and the Merck Indexes, digital access means wider campus access. This means we can collaborate with the medical center library and the other science branches.

# Memos or letters to faculty about library collections

**Audience**: Faculty, external administrators.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Faculty; they may not know how libraries work, but they have a vested interest in the collection.

**Objective**: To present or share information about the library, sometimes to obtain feedback for a collection decision.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Need to be certain faculty get enough information to give an informed response.

**Editors**: Subject librarians in the field, collection development staff.

**Writing resources**: Internal statistics about the collection: budget, amount spent, numbers of volumes acquired in a year; use statistics for books, journals, databases; cost-per-use data for databases and journals; checkout statistics etc. Also, statistics about the academic departments supported: number of faculty, students, researchers, courses taught, majors, graduates, etc.; statistics on average costs of materials in the field, average numbers of books published in a year, core journal titles; new databases in the field, with costs and reviews. Numbers and facts help you describe the collection and make a case for special needs.

If you are a responsible for collection development for any subject area, you will need to solicit feedback on collection decisions from faculty.

Faculty often don't understand how the library is funded or grasp the financial constraints facing libraries in general. Your goal in these memos is to be direct, present the facts quickly and clearly define the response you are looking for.

Faculty are very busy, and they may not even read long and detailed e-mails or letters. If you want a response, you need to:

1. succinctly outline the issue,

2. present your case and

3. describe exactly what you need from them and when.

*Sample e-mail to faculty*

> Dear macro science faculty, researchers, students and staff:
>
> As some of you know per the memo from library administration in early April, the library is in the midst of a journal and database cancellation project, trimming nearly $500,000 in order to balance its materials budget.
>
> For details on the project, go to http://library.univ.edu/libreview09.html.
>
> I reviewed the macro science titles for overall use and cost per use, and came up with a list of six titles with low use and high cost per use that I propose we cancel. They are:

| Journal | 2009 subscription cost | Yearly uses | Cost per use | Avail@CISTI or/ABCU |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Comments on Balloon Science* | $1,457.26 | 8 | $182.16 | Yes/Yes |
| *Smithereens and Nanocubes* | $2,663.58 | 15 | $177.57 | Yes/Yes |
| *Journal of Carbohydrate Gems* | $2,232.24 | 16 | $139.52 | No/Yes |
| *Journal of Macro Science* | $4,878.64 | 11 | $443.51 | No/Yes |
| *Research on Round Intermediates* | $1,610.45 | 1 | $1610.45 | Yes/Yes |
| *Russian Journal of Blue Chemistry* | $5,827.98 | 4 | $1457.00 | Yes/Yes |

The Avail@CISTI or /ABCU column shows whether I can order an article for you on demand from CISTI, or whether the journal is held by ABCU and you can get an interlibrary loan from them in less than two days.

You might want to look at the complete list of science journals considered for cancellation on the web (see above url) in case any interdisciplinary titles you use are on it. Please don't hesitate to e-mail me or the subject librarian in those areas if you have thoughts on a particular title. Please do this by the end of the month.

As always, don't hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Cheers, Jane


Jane Doe
Librarian and Adjunct Professor of Macro Science
ABC University Libraries
ABC University
123-456-7890, jane.doe(at)abc.edu


# External reviews

**Audience**: Collection development staff, library and university administrators, faculty, external reviewers.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Internal audience is often detail-oriented, but administrators and reviewers need to have a nutshell presentation of the facts.

**Objective**: To present information about library resources for and services to a specific discipline.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Requirements may vary from discipline to discipline.

**Editors**: Subject librarians in the field, collection development staff.

**Writing resources**: Assessment documents for the collection; internal statistics about the collection: budget, amount spent, numbers of volumes acquired in a year, use statistics for books, journals, databases, cost-per-use data for databases and journals, checkout statistics, etc.

External reviews can be similar to collection assessments, although the readers will be outside the library and possibly the university as well. The format is often dictated by the external review committee.

Sample *external review*

> **The ABC Physics Library – May 2009 External Review**
> Prepared by: John Doe, Head, Physics Library
> March 2009
> **Physics Library Facts for Fiscal Year 2007/2008**
> John Doe – librarian
> Barbara Clinton and Kris Williams – support staff
> 8–10 student assistants
> 78,635 annual gate count
> 4056 reference questions
> 84 instruction sessions for 1227 students
> 61,394 average website hits per month
> 2686 journals shelved
> 6477 sq. ft.
> 2318 shelves
> 6945 linear ft. of shelves
> 73,470 volumes
> 70% of collection onsite, 30% in storage

6 public computers, 5 staff computers
18 carrels
60 table seats
2 photocopiers
1 scanner

**Overview of the collection**

In support of the first two years of the undergraduate program in physics, the library provides course-based materials for reserve and textbooks for problem-solving. Juniors and seniors in the Nuclear, Plasma and Aerospace labs use the journal literature, as well as reference materials and research-level monographs. During the junior and senior years, some undergraduates do independent study with professors. As members of research groups, they use the same materials as graduate students and postdoctoral researchers.

The faculty is engaged in teaching and research in most of the traditional areas of Physics. Among these are theoretical condensed matter physics; experimental condensed matter physics; nanophysics; nonlinear dynamics and complex systems; biological physics; atomic molecular and optical physics; beam physics; experimental and theoretical nuclear physics; experimental high-energy physics; and theoretical particle physics and string theory. In recent years the focus has been shifting to the physics of biological processes. In the past 10 years, physical biology has grown into a major new area of physics research and has created much literature of its own. Many areas overlap with the research and teaching interests of

faculty in other departments, especially Biochemistry, Bioinformatics, Chemistry, Engineering and Medicine.

In Physics, as with other sciences, the journal and serial literature is of paramount importance. In the past, the library has had a strong collection in this area. The library's decreased buying power, due primarily to dramatic increases in the cost of journals in the past two decades, has eroded the collection's strength. It is now an immediate-need-based collection, especially after the two latest journal cancellations. If further cuts must take place, faculty and graduate students will depend heavily on document delivery for journal articles.

The book collection, although smaller than that of journals and serials, is still significant for researchers in physics. Monographic sets and standing orders are a large part of the monographic collection and are heavily used. The library's approval plan provides excellent coverage of the books published by major publishers in the main areas of physics.

The reference collection contains the major print and electronic physics reference resources. In the past, considerable effort was made not to duplicate reference materials in the Libraries. Now, with electronic access to many reference materials, we are able to share reference resources that were previously held in only one library. Indexes that are not yet available in electronic format will continue to be held in print. In recent years, many updated print editions to reference materials have been published. When funds are available, these expensive sets are purchased.

# Marketing tools (bookmarks, brochures, posters)

**Audience**: Students, staff, faculty and other library users.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Seeking specific information or looking for a place to study, eat, read and socialize.

**Objective**: To share information about the library.

**Idiosyncrasies**: A friendly and informal tone works best.

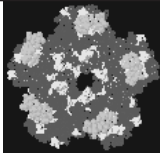**Editors**: Staff, students who work in the library, colleagues or co-workers.

**Writing resources**: Information about the library, such as hours, staffing, maps, contacts, address, etc.

Marketing gets the word out about what's going on at the library.

As with any large entity that interacts with the public, libraries need to create and share information with the people who use them. New graduate students need to know about the resources available to them; users need to know whether they can bring in food and drink; faculty and staff need to know the liaisons for their department and how to contact them if they have questions about the library. If an expensive resource is underused, you may want to advertise its presence to the people who are likely to need it. These are but a few instances that call out for some type of marketing material. We provide examples of a few types below, but we also encourage you to experiment and create your own.

## *Bookmarks*

**Formatting:** Printed on card stock, four columns on both sides of landscaped 8.5 × 11-inch paper. Below is one bookmark, front and back. To create your own, you can repeat the front four times on one side of a sheet of paper, and the back four times on the opposite side, then print two-sided and cut to get four bookmarks from each sheet.

**Chemistry Library Resources**
**ABC University**
**2009 — 2010**



**WEB**
http://library.abc.edu/chemistry/

http://library.abc.edu/

**LIBRARIAN**

**Jane Doe**

jane.doe@abc.edu

123-4567, 123 Main

Chemistry office hours, room 1234:

Mon, Tue, Wed — 1–3 pm.

Reference desk hours:
Sun – 5 –9 pm.
Mon – 4:30 – 6 pm.
Wed – 6 – 10 pm.

**INTERLIBRARY LOAN**

**Also use for library-to-library delivery for faculty and graduate students**

https://docdel.lib.abc.edu/docdel.asp

**OFF CAMPUS ACCESS**

*VPN or EZProxy*

http://library.abc.edu/offcampus.html

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**P R I N T**

REFERENCE

Main Library, $1^{st}$ floor
Q/QD call number range

BOOKS
Main Library, $3^{rd}$ floor
Q/QD call number range – you can return books to the BES library

CURRENT JOURNALS

Main Library $1^{st}$ floor

In alphabetical order

BOUND JOURNALS

In storage – use interlibrary loan request form

COPIER (Departmental)
Main Library $1^{st}$ floor

**E L E C T R O N I C**
JOURNALS
http://library.abc.edu/sch=find-ej
OR
Title search in catalog
http://catalog..abc.edu/F
DATABASES
**Databases A to Z** on library web
SciFinder and Beilstein/Gmelin are on all computers in Main

## *Brochures*

**Formatting:** Trifold on landscape 8.5 × 11-inch paper. Because this is a trifold, the beginning of the brochure comes at the end of the second sheet.

Biological Library

100 Doe Building
(000) 123-1111
biolib@abc.edu
http://library.abc.edu/
biology/
John Doe, Head Librarian
Bob Smith, Circulation
Manager
Jane Jones, Periodicals
Assistant
The Biology library supports
the Environment and Earth
Sciences; the Department
of Anthropology and
Anatomy; Biological
Chemistry; the Department
of Biology, Molecular
Biology; the Developmental
Biology Department; the
Earth and Ocean Sciences,
the ABC Program in
Ecology; the ABC Program
in Genomics; and the
Mycological Center.
The collection
encompasses botany,
zoology, ecology, molecular
and cell biology,
environmental sciences,
forestry, hydrology, and
meteorology.

Chemistry Library

100 Chemical Laboratories
(000) 123-2222
chemlib@abc.edu
http://library.abc.edu/
chemistry/
Jane Smith, Head Librarian
Harry Doe, Library Assistant
Senior

Mary Moore, Library Assistant
The chemistry library
supports the Department of
Chemistry and the Program
in Biological Chemistry.
The collection
encompasses all aspects
of chemistry, supporting
analytical, organic, physical
and biochemistry.

Medical Library

Medical Library Building
(000) 123-3333
medref@abc.edu
http://library.abc.edu/
medical/
The Medical Center library
is one of two professional
school libraries at ABC. It
provides services and
collections support
educational, research, and
clinical activities in medical
fields.
The library supports the
Medical School faculty,
staff, and students from
the Schools of Medicine
and Nursing, and graduate
departments in the medical
sciences.

Marine Library

200 Library Road
333 ABC Marine Road
(000) 123-4444
marinelib@abc.edu
http://library.abc.edu/
marine/
Amanda Smith, Librarian
The Marine Library
supports education and

research in ocean
processes, marine sciences,
coastal environmental
management, marine
biotechnology and marine
biomedicine.
The collection
encompasses marine
biology, marine
biotechnology,
oceanography, botany,
biochemistry, and coastal
resource management.

Engineering, Mathematics,
and Physics Library

300 Math Building
(000) 123-5555
emplib@abc.edu
http://library.abc.edu/emp/
John Smith, Head Librarian
Mary Doe, Library Associate
Jerry Jones, Library
Assistant
Bill Doe, Circulation Manager
The EMP Library serves the
Department of Computer
Science, the School of
Engineering, the
Departments of
Mathematics and Physics,
and the Institute of Statistics
and Decision Sciences.
The collections cover
computer science,
biomedical, civil, electrical,
and mechanical
engineering;
astronomy/astrophysics;
advanced mathematics;
physics; and mathematical
statistics.

Main Library

Main Library Building
(000) 123-6666
asklib@abc.edu
http://library.dabc.edu/
Bill Smith, Map and GIS
Librarian
Mandy Jones, Reference
Librarian

The Main library is the largest library on campus. Materials which support popular interest in science and technology are held in this library.

The geology collection in Main supports the M.S. and Ph.D. programs in geology. Specific areas of focus are petrology, seismology, structural geology/tectonics, micropaleontology, earth surface process/ geomorphology, geophysics, and geochemistry. Materials in coastal geology, geological oceanography/limnology, and hydrogeology are also held. The collection is international in coverage.

Most of the geology collection is housed in Main Library, but other ABC libraries collect in areas of geology related to their specialties.

Services
All of these libraries offer:

- Tours
- Individualized instruction
- Lab visits

Contact each library for details.

Obtaining library materials not held at ABC University
Please visit this website for details:

http://library.abc.edu/docdelivery/
For further questions, use the phone numbers and e-mails listed in this brochure to contact any library staff.

**Welcome to ABC University!**

Map of Science, Engineering and Medical Libraries

[you can insert a map here]

1. Main Library
2. Eng/Math/Phy Library
3. Biology Library
4. Chemistry Library
5. Medical Library
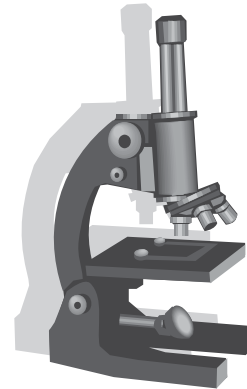
**Science, Engineering and Medical Libraries ABC University**

Science, medicine and technology library needs are supported by 6 libraries at ABC:

- Biology Library
- Chemistry Library
- Medical Library
- Marine Library
- Engineering, Mathematics, and Physics Library
- Main Library (for geology, maps and popular materials)

Inside this brochure you'll find collection descriptions, directions, contact information and a list of some of the services we offer.
Created: Summer 2009

**129**

## *Posters*

Posters share information about commonly asked questions, or give people information that is not otherwise obvious. In our example, we include the text from a modified poster that we created because people kept apologizing for asking us questions. We realized that they didn't understand what our jobs were, so we told them.

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**Welcome to the ABC Chemistry Library!**

We are here to help you:
- Find things in this library
- Find information in the literature
- Find things on the web, in databases, in the online catalog
- Find information anywhere

You can interrupt us. We love questions.

Ask us, e-mail us, call us – We are here for you!

Library Staff: John Doe, Jane Smith, Bill Jones

Librarian: Janet Moore

chemlib@abc.edu        123-2222

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# Final thoughts

This chapter focuses on presenting information about the library and its collections to a variety of internal and external audiences. Many of these people don't use the same vocabulary when talking about the library that you do. Don't use technical terms; define concepts clearly in plain language. Remember: your aim is to include your readers in the conversation about the library, its collections and the decisions that affect them.

# Online and presenting data

As you know, we recommend that your writing be short and sweet. That's even more true of the kinds of writing in this chapter.

Because of the way readers approach it and the constraints on their time, writing for the web should be clear and brief. Keep it very simple and very short, and focus on the absolute minimum necessary to get your message across. Blogs should be timely, updated regularly and succinct. E-mail is a forum that lends itself to brevity – if you have a lot to say, you can use an attachment.

Tables, graphs and charts are visual representations of numbers, or repeated data. Most people have a hard time with numbers, so tables, charts and graphs help them grasp what the numbers mean.

## Writing for the website

**Audience:** Students, casual library users, faculty, alumni, other librarians who need to quickly help a user find information.

**Demographic or professional attributes:** Most probably not experts in the field; probably need to find information quickly; may want an overview of the possibilities of information available in the field; likely to want just one small piece of information.

**Objective:** To guide users to subject-specific information or to information about the library.

**Idiosyncrasies:** May display differently on different computers and different web browsers.

**Editors:** Subject librarians in the field.

**Writing resources:** Web editing software.

A big difference between writing for a website and writing for print is that websites are frequently updated. Much of the writing you do for the web will be out of date within the year; find out how often you'll need to update, and plan ahead.

Another idiosyncrasy of writing for the web is the need for extreme brevity. Users don't like to scroll through several screens of text; ideally, everything you have to say will fit in a typical browser window – even, depending on your audience and their expectations, on the screen of a mobile device. When you revise your writing, cut, cut and cut again, trying to eliminate all unnecessary words. If you need to post long documents, add them in pdf format so that readers can download them and read them outside the browser.

Often, a library web page is similar to a chart or a graph – it presents information in a visually coherent way.

Formatting is especially important with web writing. Use menus, links, toolbars and other hypertext techniques to send readers to more information, rather than trying to fit it all on a single page. In fact, the main page for a library often includes nothing but menus and links (which is not to say there's no writing involved; the links must be described clearly and succinctly). For pages deeper in the hierarchy – subject guides, descriptions of resources, how-to guides – use headings, bullets and numbering to break information apart and make it stand out on the page.

*Sample web page*

Text that would be hyperlinked is underlined; note the absence of any introductory text beyond the page title, and how formatting makes the information easy to find.

**Where to find chemistry collections**

**Print**
**Reference**
Doe Library, 1st floor
Q/QD and T call number ranges

**Books**
Smith Library, 4th floor
Q/QD and T call number ranges

**Current Journals**
Smith Library 1st floor

**Bound Journals**
a. At storage facility – use interlibrary loan request form
b. A few titles are in Doe, Level B – use catalog for call numbers

**Copier (Departmental)**
Doe & Smith 1st floors

**Electronic**
**Journals**
E-journals Metasearch
or
Title Search in Catalog

**Databases**
Databases A to Z
or
SciFinder and Beilstein/Gmelin are on all Tier II computers in Doe/Smith and Science Center 1234

# Blogging

**Audience**: Students, casual library users, graduate students, other librarians.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Not necessarily experts in the field.

**Objective**: To showcase or share information informally and quickly.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Informative and informal; usually provides opportunity for readers to add to the discussion.

**Editors**: Colleagues.

**Writing resources**: Blogging software; your organization's policies on blogging.

To write a blog is to make a commitment. What makes a blog worthwhile to its readers is regular updating. Think of the blog as a web version of a newsletter. Unless you post to it regularly, it is no longer viable.

Just as in a newsletter, headlines are vital – they draw your readers in and let them know immediately whether they want to read the post. Make your headline informative and catchy, and above all, brief.

Make sure the post is useful and interesting. If you are writing for librarians, tell your readers about something they can use in their work. If you are writing for students or

faculty, tell them how to find resources, or share something they probably don't know about the library.

If you are paraphrasing or quoting from another source, use a consistent citation method so your readers will know which words and ideas are yours and which are someone else's.

Break up text with spacing and other formatting, such as numbered or bulleted lists. Keep to the point, and be direct. Steer clear of redundancy and talking down to readers. Keep your style conversational, and your readers will feel welcome at your blog.

To summarize:

- Post regularly

- Have an informative and catchy title for each blog entry to draw readers to your blog

- Be useful and interesting; don't just write to see your words on the screen

- Use spacing and other formatting to break up text

- Keep your style conversational, but stick to the point and avoid redundancy

# E-mail

**Audience:** Colleagues, co-workers, managers, administrators, students, faculty, anyone.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Need to manage their work and e-mail efficiently.

**Objective**: To share a succinct, informative, usable message.

**Idiosyncrasies**: It's best to share smaller amounts of information, rather than text-rich or data-rich documents (refer people to or attach these longer pieces).

**Editors**: Colleagues.

**Writing resources**: E-mail address lists, access to a shared online work space or file space.

Most of the writing you do at work is e-mail. In many places, e-mail is even considered a legal record of work activities. There are people we work with every day, in some cases for years, who we never see face to face or speak to on the telephone; we communicate only by e-mail.

E-mail's biggest asset is that it is a fantastic way to communicate information to groups of all sizes. But for this very reason – you are often sending e-mail to many people at once – brevity is key. The longer your e-mail is, the less likely it is that people will read the information you want them to see. In fact, because they get hundreds of e-mails each day and have to process them quickly, most people won't read beyond the first screen.

So, take heed – if you need to convey a lot of dense, detailed information, you are better off creating a written document and posting it to a shared web space, or attaching it to the e-mail. If you put it all into an e-mail, most people won't read it. And you'll wonder why deadlines aren't met, or why no one responded to your questions.

The best e-mails take up one screen or less, and lay out the most important details clearly. A bulleted or numbered list is preferable to a dense paragraph, and any actions needed from the recipient of the e-mail ought to appear at the beginning or end, clearly marked, with a due date. If you want the recipients to read more information, post it to a website or attach it to the e-mail.

If, as you write, you realize your text extends beyond one screen, reassess what you need to include.

A big no-no: sending an important e-mail with a blank subject line. An e-mail with a blank subject line sends the

message that what it contains is not very important, so often it gets read last or not at all. People will question your ability to prioritize your own work, or your ability to help them prioritize their own.

If you want people to read and/or act on your e-mails, the e-mails should have a short, informative subject line. If you want your recipients to take some sort of action, the subject line should say so (for example, 'response needed').

Another no-no: forwarding e-mails with no explanation. If you forward e-mail, make sure that you tell the recipients, at the top of the e-mail, why they are receiving the forward. If you use bcc to forward messages – and you should if you are forwarding to more than three people – you need to state at the top of the e-mail to whom you forwarded it (for example, 'sent to all members of the search committee'). If you don't, others may forward it again to the same recipients, clogging up their inboxes.

Think about the message you are sending about yourself. Use e-mail well and judiciously, and your reputation at work will reflect it. If you send e-mails without subject lines, or with screens and screens of unformatted text, or forward e-mails without reason, you'll just irritate people.

*Sample e-mails*

> To: Science librarians
> From: Acquisitions
> Date: 1/1/09
> Subject: Book budgets allocated – take a look, need your feedback soon
>
> Science Librarians:
>
> ■ <u>Take a look at the attached book budget allocations and make sure there are not any anomalies.</u>

- If there are, e-mail Jane Doe and let her know what to fix on the spreadsheet.

- <u>This needs to be done by this Friday at 5 p.m</u>. If you need an extension, e-mail me before 5 that day and let me know.

We used a new allocation model this year. Details about the model, and the spreadsheet with all of the library allocations, can be found in the 2010 allocation folder under Acquisitions on the intranet.

To: Supervisors of student assistants
From: John Doe, Library Human Resources
Date: 1/1/09
Subject: Student time sheets due early this week! Thur NOT Fri
Hey all,
<u>All student time sheets need to be turned in by Thursday, 5:00 p.m.,</u> because of the holiday schedule. Sorry for the late notice.
If you have students who are not here this week, they will not be affected.
Questions? E-mail me or call.

- For an updated timesheet and pay date schedule, refer to the Library Human Resources page on the intranet.

- There are also new policies affecting student pay. They are attached to this e-mail.

*Working together by e-mail*
If you use e-mail in lieu of a meeting, make sure to follow a few simple ground rules:

1. Everyone must use the reply-to-all for all e-mails related to the group meeting. No off-meeting e-mails allowed.

2. Include the history in your replies. But if you want to respond to something from an earlier e-mail, cut and paste it into your own e-mail and respond directly next to each question. Don't make people go searching for the questions you are answering.

3. Respond quickly and fully to any group e-mails that ask for your input. But don't clog your colleagues' inboxes with e-mail that doesn't add anything substantive to the discussion; for example, don't send an e-mail that says nothing more than, 'I agree'.

## Tables, charts, graphs

**Audience**: Colleagues, co-workers, managers, administrators, students, faculty, anyone.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Not everyone can easily understand information from tables, charts and graphs; labeling and legends can help them see what you want them to see.

**Objective**: To visually display data to convey ideas, trends or results from data, especially numeric data.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Used by people with varying levels of information literacy, novice to expert – all have different needs.

**Editors**: Colleagues.

**Writing resources**: Data, spreadsheets, etc.

Tables, charts and graphs rarely stand alone; they are usually included in a written document or used as visual aids during a presentation.

The biggest mistake people make when using charts, graphs or tables in their writing is in the labeling. Figures need to have a title, a legend, a citation, or a statement of where the

data came from and when it was compiled. Each type of data needs to have its source named; if it is derived from something else, that derivation must be spelled out. Otherwise, readers have no idea whether the data come from a reliable source.

Presenting information visually is a powerful way to get people's attention. In writing, use tables, charts and graphs as an alternative to long stretches of text that are heavy with numbers. Many people find it challenging to interpret data, and your visual representations will help them get a handle on your numerical results.

In your writing itself, describe in narrative form what the data are telling your reader, and explain why you included them in your report or proposal.

Small sets of data are more easily translated into visuals, so look carefully at your data to see where the greatest differences are, or where the data show that something significant happened. These are the numbers you will want to present in a table, chart or graph.

Your choice of a table, a chart or a graph may depend on the type of data you are presenting.

- To show raw totals, use a table of data with the totals in bold.
- To display relationships among something's parts, a pie chart or bar graph works best.
- To show trends over time, use a line graph.

If you aren't sure how best to show your data, try it several ways to see which one tells the strongest visual story. As you experiment, you may even see your own data in a new light.

*Converting spreadsheets to graphs*
The commonly used spreadsheet software, Microsoft Excel, has an easy-to-use graphing wizard. Highlight the data with

the labels, move it to a new sheet in the workbook using the tab at the bottom of the screen, then click on the bar graph icon or choose Chart from the upper menu bar.

*Sample table*
This table shows who gathered the data, what kinds of data they gathered, and who compiled and submitted the data; where the table uses abbreviations, it explains what the abbreviations mean. The title explains succinctly what the table contains.

### Reference questions asked: one week sampling, 2010

| Demographic | Smith | Doe | Main Ref. | Main Circ. | Weekly total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| u-grad | 180 | 36 | 274 | 171 | 661 |
| grad | 44 | 49 | 70 | 82 | 245 |
| fac | 34 | 8 | 39 | 35 | 116 |
| staff | 20 | 7 | 19 | 27 | 73 |
| prof sch | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 6 |
| consortia | 7 | 0 | 14 | 15 | 36 |
| industry | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 10 |
| gen public | 17 | 3 | 70 | 18 | 108 |
| *Mode* | | | | | |
| in-person | 245 | 81 | 413 | 334 | 1073 |
| phone | 7 | 16 | 65 | 34 | 122 |
| e-mail | 16 | 12 | 43 | N/A | 71 |
| VR and IM | 10 | N/A | 65 | N/A | 75 |
| *Duration* | | | | | |
| >5 min | 28 | 9 | 303 | N/R | 340 |
| <5 min | 279 | 100 | 110 | N/R | 489 |
| *Directional* | 77 | N/R | 481 | 88 | 646 |
| Total questions | 304 | 105 | 1067 | 353 | **1341** |

N/R = not recorded
N/A = not applicable

Submitted by: Jane Doe, Project Administrator

Submitted 18/1/2010

*Sample chart*

**Figure 1** | **Undergraduate reference questions asked at ABC Libraries by reference point. Statistics gathered over one week during autumn term 2009**

Undergraduate reference questions by service point

Main Circ
26%

Smith
27%

Doe
5%

Main Ref
42%

- Smith
- Doe
- Main Ref
- Main Circ
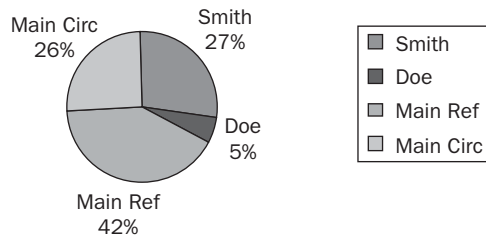
*Sample graph*

**Figure 2** | **In-library use of a well-known journal title, gathered from shelving statistics, taken over a 14-month period, from January 2008 to February 2009**

In library use of Well Known Journal

In library uses

Months (jan 08–feb 09)
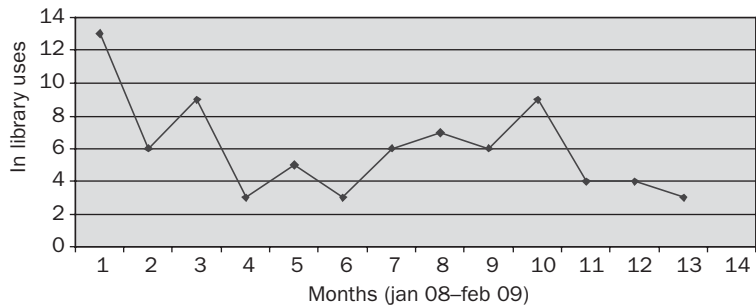
# Scholarly work and teaching

All the writing in this chapter is aimed at people beyond the library's walls.

For scholarly work, you need to carefully consider how you portray your own institution. Don't let internal politics creep into your work. Keep your language neutral and professional.

For teaching resources, don't assume that the students know anything about the library and how it works. Your writing may be their first encounter with the library; make it count.

## Articles

**Audience**: Librarians and students in the field.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Will understand the specialized language of their discipline, or will be learning it.

**Objective**: To share scholarly research and work projects.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Most publishing librarians are also practicing librarians, and most of their scholarly work has practical implications; theoretical studies are rare.

**Editors**: Other librarians, professional editors.

**Writing resources**: Articles from the journal you submitting the article to, or similar journals; submission and formatting requirements for the journal; information about the project

or work you are writing about, including proposal and plan, notes or minutes, and final report.

Librarians are often called upon to introduce new technologies or pedagogies. In library science, academic articles are thus often about what we've done at work – in a nutshell, 'Here's how we did this and how it worked out'. The aim is to help others who are considering a similar project. Occasionally, librarians conduct pure research, but this is rare.

Just like an article describing a scientific experiment, a 'how we did this' article must provide enough information that readers can replicate the project. Librarians doing a literature search in the field are usually considering a project or technology for their own institution, and they want to know how others have undertaken something similar. They want to know the intent, the tools, the outcomes and the next steps.

Before you begin, choose possible journals for your article. Browse the journals to see what types of articles they publish. Pay attention to the style, format, topics and length of typical articles. Try to match the article you will write to the journal you want to publish it in. If, for example, you are writing a 35-page article, don't choose a journal where the average article is three or four pages long – or consider slimming the article down.

Then contact the editors of the journals you choose, and make a proposal to them; they'll let you know whether they are interested. They may make suggestions about format and what types of information to include; they may even accept your proposed article sight unseen and give you a deadline, especially if the topic fits with a special issue that they're planning. On the other hand, the editors may want to see a sample of the work, or some other piece of your

writing you've done; have something at hand so that you can respond quickly.

Most articles in library science have several basic parts:

- An introduction and literature review that describe context for the project and what other librarians have done in the same vein, to provide the reader with background.

- A description of the conditions at the writer's own library, and how and why he or she set about to do the project or research.

- A description of the methodologies, tools and other requirements for the project, with a plan describing the necessary steps.

- A description of the project itself and how it was undertaken, along with the findings – that is, what worked and what didn't – and what the next steps will be. This is the bulk of the article.

We have not included sample articles, because there are so many differences among journals and among the types of scholarly articles. If you are struggling with how to structure your article or how to present the data, you should seek examples of articles that are similar to the one that you want to write. We do, however, provide a sample format, with ideas on what to include in each section of your article.

*Sample article format*

**Title:** Try to make it catchy, and avoid an overly long title.

**Abstract:** Include the key words and concepts from your paper, for databases that index only abstracts and citation information.

**Introduction/Background/Literature review:** Place your project into a frame of reference for the reader. Include the

history within your organization; summarize your reading of similar research; describe the problem you wanted to solve and explain why this solution was chosen over others.

**Methodology**: How was the project designed and put into place? What factors caused you to do one thing over another? Did you use a standard approach, or did you create a new one? If you deviated from the methodology of similar projects, why and how?

**Findings or results**: Present the data and give a narrative of what happened. Use a neutral tone. Use charts, graphs, tables or other visuals to show results can be quantified or that examine something over time.

**Conclusions**: Interpret what you found and what effect the changes have had. Spell out the next steps. Talk about how you would do the project differently if you could.

**References**: For many people, this is a valuable resource; be thorough.

# Abstracts

**Audience**: Librarians and students in the field.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Readers most probably have the expertise to understand the field's specialized language.

**Objective**: To condense information from another piece of writing to help people decide whether they should read the entire work.

**Idiosyncrasies**: You are writing a super-condensed version of the work you are abstracting, and you need to figure out the key ideas.

**Editors**: Other librarians, professional editors.

**Writing resources**: Besides the piece of writing that you are abstracting, you'll need examples of similar abstracts in the same academic field.

*Sample abstract*

> After opening chapters on style and audience, this book presents formulas for and samples of the types of writing academic librarians encounter in their careers. Includes chapters on writing for scholarship and teaching; management; public service and collection development; getting and keeping a job; online; and meetings and reports. For each type of writing, provides suggestions on audience, objectives, idiosyncrasies, editors and writing resources. Concludes with a list of resources for further study.
>
> *Keywords*: Library science; academic writing; style; audience; rhetoric

Think about the key points someone will need to know in order to make a decision about whether to read the work. But don't try to sell the work you are abstracting. You are not writing an advertisement or a review; you are writing a synopsis.

# Case studies

**Audience**: Librarians, students and others in the field.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Readers most probably have the expertise to understand the field's specialized language.

**Objective:** To create a fictional story about a real-life problem in order to teach or to show an example.

**Idiosyncrasies:** Unlike the other types of writing described in this book, a case study is fiction – you must make up characters, describe a setting, create tension or a problem to be solved, and get the reader involved.

**Editors:** Other librarians, professional editors.

**Writing resources:** The *Harvard Business Review* often has case studies – you may want to read a few to get a feel for case study elements.

Case studies are fictional vignettes of real-life experiences used to demonstrate, introduce or describe possible outcomes for teaching and learning purposes. The best case studies tell a story that includes characters, events and settings; they end with a problem to solve, and either offer solutions or let the reader do so.

Give your characters names, and include all facts that are relevant to the problem to be solved. Describe the setting as it relates to the story or characters. And even if you intend to let the readers offer solutions to the problem, you should have possible outcomes in mind. Having these in hand will help you decide how to set the stage and figure out what attributes your characters should have.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How will the sex, age or other demographic attributes of my characters affect the story?
- How will my characters' professional status affect the story?

Decide what attributes are relevant to the case, and make sure you include them in your characters.

*Sample case study*

> Hubert closed the door to his cubicle, sat down slowly and sighed. He had just come back from a meeting with the library director, who had called to ask him to present the findings of the latest library survey to the faculty library group. The faculty in the group this year were particularly difficult. They had divergent views about what it takes to run an academic library and keep it going. Some of the older professors were struggling with the transition to the digital world; some of the younger ones had no idea that the library still spent so much money on books.
>
> Although the specifics of his presentation were up to Hubert, as chair of the survey committee he had been asked to include a synopsis of the comments. He knew this would be a challenge, because many comments were about areas that the faculty group had been arguing about over the year. He also realized that more was at stake than just talking about the library survey. The director would expect him to present the library in an exemplary light, yet at the same time help the group understand the financial constraints facing the library and its need to supply electronic information as well as print materials. Hubert had a big job ahead of him. How to start?

## Syllabi

**Audience:** Students, teaching assistants.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Young and inexperienced; need help organizing their time.

**Objective:** To give an outline of the course.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Under constant revision. Don't be afraid to issue an updated syllabus in the middle of the term.

**Editors**: Other instructors.

**Writing resources**: Other people's syllabi, the academic calendar, your previous syllabi, a reference list of readings or texts, university policies.

A syllabus is a guide and overview for a course. It lays out all the information a student needs to know: contact information for the instructor; the time and place of office hours; class time and meeting place; the instructor's expectations; the grading system; course policies (including late work); a course calendar with lectures, assignments, tests, exams, etc.; and a list of the necessary texts, readings and supplies.

Some instructors write very detailed syllabi; others just give the students a framework. Find a style that works best for you. Don't be vague, however, about assignments, deadlines or policies.

There are many formats for syllabi; read other instructors' syllabi and find a format that you like. But if your syllabus will be online, make sure your formatting works on the web.

*Sample syllabus*

<div align="center">

Science Information Retrieval
Course Syllabus for Fall 2009
*Note: subject to change*

</div>

Instructor:

Jane Doe, Librarian

jane.doe@abc.edu, Reference Department, Main Library
Office Hours:
*Science Building*: Tue. 1:30–3:30 pm, Wed. 1:30–5 pm, Thu. 1–3 pm

*Reference Desk*: Sun. 5–9 pm, Tue. 5–9 pm
Class Meeting Times:  Mondays 6:00–6:50 pm; students will
also arrange a lab time of 25 minutes per week with Jane.

Classroom: 1234 Science Center
Online Course Readings: *http://scienceinfo.abc.edu/*
Blackboard for this course at *https://courses.univ.edu/*

| Month/Day | Lecture Topics | Assignments/work | What's DUE?? |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8/24 | Organization of science library information. Using the Catalog. Overview of the science library resources website. Techniques of manual and on-line literature searching. Using WorldCat, CAS registry numbers of substances. | 1. Do homework assignment 1, Due 9/7 found in the assignments area of our BB site, prior to next week's class. | |
| 8/31 | Using EndNote – why, what, how – May have a guest lecturer. | Endnote worksheet. | **HW 1 Due** |
| 9/7 | Reviews. Discussion of review paper. | Select topic for review paper. IDEAS: topic of Independent study lab research, professors or TAs, personal interest – must be science related! | **Endnote Worksheet DUE** |
| 9/14 | Using computerized databases (bibliographic and non-bibliographic). Basic techniques of online searching, locating recent review articles on a subject. Using Web of Science to Verify Citations. Compiling a complete bibliography of an author's publications. | 1. Begin literature search of common databases 2. Electronic databases Worksheet | **Topic sheet for the review paper DUE** |

| Month/Day | Lecture Topics | Assignments/work | What's DUE?? |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9/21 | Using SciFinder Scholar and Engineering Village. | 1. Begin literature search of your topic using Scifinder Scholar and Engineering Village. 2. Scifinder and Engineering Village worksheet. | **Electronic Databases worksheet DUE** |

| Month/Day | Lecture Topics | Assignments/work | What's DUE?? |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9/28 | Medline and more | Complete a comprehensive subject search for the topic of the review paper and prepare initial outline of the review paper. | **Scifinder and Engineering Village worksheet DUE** |
| Autumn Break 10/5 | AUTUMN BREAK!! Have Fun and be safe. | | |
| 10/12 | Discussion of short paper. | 1. Prepare to present your topic and discuss your outline in class 10/19 2. Begin working on short paper. | **Send initial outline as an e-mail attachment to Jane by noon Fri. 10/16** |
| 10/19 | Presentations of topics and outlines | Continue work on short paper. | **Oral presentation in class today!** |
| 10/26 | Using MathSciNet | Continue work on short paper so as to **turn in for peer review by Friday, 10/30** | **This Friday, 10/30 send in short paper draft via email to Jane for 11/2 peer review** |

| Month/Day | Lecture Topics | Assignments/work | What's DUE?? |
|---|---|---|---|
| 11/2 | Locating literature on patents – May have a guest lecturer. Peer Review of short papers | 1. Revise short paper with input from peer review.<br>2. Patent Worksheet | **Peer Review of short papers in class today** |
| 11/9 | Methods for staying up to date on a subject, Web of Science | Begin 1st draft of Review Paper. Include pertinent information found in patent search section | **1. Patent Worksheet due**<br>**2. Short papers due** |
| 11/16 | Writing labs – each student must meet with me for 30 minutes this week | Continue work on draft of review paper | **Draft 1 of Review paper DUE** |
| 11/23 | Writing labs – each student must meet with me for 30 minutes this week | Continue work on draft of review paper | **Draft 2 of review paper DUE** |
| 11/30 | Writing labs – each student must meet with me for at least 30 minutes this week | Continue work on draft of review paper | **Draft 3 of review paper DUE** |
| 12/4 | Review Papers DUE Midnight of the 4th!! | | |
| 12/11 | Pick up graded papers | | |

Attendance policy: If you must miss class for any reason, e-mail me before class begins and make arrangements to meet with me at another time to catch up on what you missed.

Late work policy: With a few exceptions there is no late policy. All work is due by the last day of class. However, if you want feedback on assignments, you must turn them in by the due dates in the syllabus. Exception: Short paper draft (you must turn in your short paper in time for your peer reviewer to review it for you; otherwise, you will not get a grade for peer reviewing).

Conduct Requirements: Students will follow the Student Code of Conduct. Please visit *http://conduct.univ.edu* for details.

Remember, the syllabus is the guiding document for your students. Carefully consider your policies, and spell them out. Without clear policies in place, most students will push the boundaries, and you need to be prepared to respond to behavior you don't like. It is always nice to have your syllabus there to back you up.

# Handouts

**Audience**: Students.

**Demographic or professional attributes**: Not experts in the field; probably need to find information quickly; may want an overview of what information is available in the field; likely to want just one small piece of information.

**Objective**: To serve as an accompaniment to an instruction session, as a reminder of the activities covered in the session and as a mini how-to for what you cover in class.

**Idiosyncrasies**: Will not take the place of your instruction session; serves as a reminder to prompt students on what was covered in class.

**Editors**: Subject librarians in the field, colleagues, students.

**Writing resources**: Web addresses and call numbers for resources, contact information, notes from contact with the professor, the course syllabus and the assignment related to the instruction session.

Students like to get a handout from their library session. It serves as a reminder of the key points you made in your lecture, and it gives them your contact information should they want to ask you questions. If you print it on colored paper, it will stand out in the students' minds – and it will be easy to find.

*Sample handout*

> **Auto Safety and Society – session on database searching, autumn 2009**
> Jane Doe
> jane.doe@abc.edu
> 123-4567, 111 Science, ABC University

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> **OVERVIEW**
> For most assignments in this course, you will use just a few databases:
> **Lexis-Nexis Statistical** for facts and numbers on car accidents and economics related to car safety
> **Lexis-Nexis Academic** for popular news stories
> **Science Direct, MedLine** and **Web of Science** for primary research papers
> **Google** for Web resources, especially non-profit and governmental information
>
> **Lexis-Nexis Statistical** and **Academic, Science Direct, Medline** and **Web of Science** are just a few of ABC Libraries' close to 400 electronic databases. These databases are like cable television: they are not available free on the web. You must be on the ABCUNet to access them. For information on how to access them off campus, go to library.abc.edu and click on **off campus access** under *Services*.

How to get to Lexis-Nexis on the library's website:

- Library home page *http://library.abc.edu/*
- Articles and Databases *http://metasearch.library.abc.edu/*
- In the alphabet at the lower left of the page, choose L
- Then choose Lexis-Nexis Academic

To access the other databases, use the alphabetical list.

Tips for searching:

- Use truncation in your search statements (could be * or ! or $)
- Look at the references in articles you find to see what resources they used
- When in doubt, e-mail me. Don't wait – Remember the two-minute rule

# Final thoughts

The audience for all the types of writing in this chapter is external. Think carefully about information that may be obvious to someone inside your library but not to others.

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# More resources for writing

## People resources

### *The writing center*

If you work for a university library, it's likely there's a writing center on campus.

Check your writing center's policies. Some are open only to undergraduates; others accept anyone in the campus community, including faculty, staff and graduate students. If so, you can make an appointment to get help at any stage of the writing process, from organizing your thoughts and getting started to final proofreading.

Your writing center may also have people available to give writing workshops in your library or department – on writing in collaboration with others, for example, or on how to overcome procrastination.

Finally, many writing centers offer collections of writing handouts online that are available to anyone. Two of the best collections we know are at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill (UNC) Writing Center and the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL):

■ UNC Writing Center: *http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb*

■ Purdue Online Writing Lab: *http://owl.english.purdue.edu*

A lot of the handouts are geared toward undergraduates, but not all of them. For example, OWL has guides to APA and MLA formatting, and UNC has a handout on writing grant proposals.

## *Feedback*

Revising is good. Informed revising based on feedback from others is better.

Seek feedback on your writing from colleagues, friends, family or anyone whose opinion you trust. Try to get feedback from more than one person; if several people see the same problem in your draft, you can be certain something needs fixing.

Ideally, you'll get feedback from at least one person who represents the audience you're writing for. If you're creating a subject guide aimed at undergraduates, for example, show your draft to a student assistant. If you're writing a report that will go to administrators, ask your supervisor for comments.

And remember: you get the kind of feedback you ask for. If you just say, 'Look this over and tell me what you think', you're likely to get feedback that's vague, unfocused and not very helpful. Tell your reader exactly where you're having trouble, and you'll get the answers you're looking for. Use statements like these:

- 'I'm worried that this subject guide is over the head of first-year students. What do you think?'
- 'Do you see anything I've left out that would help faculty understand the journals cancellation?'
- 'I'm wondering whether I need charts or graphs to illustrate the data in the Results section.'

## Print resources

These are guides to writing and argument that we have read and used ourselves. This short list is not meant to be comprehensive. We recommend them because they helped us, and we think that they will help you.

**Help with getting started**
Elbow, Peter (1998). *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Help with style**
Williams, Joseph M. (1997). *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. New York: Longman.

**Help with research-based writing**
Booth, Wayne C., Colomb, Gregory G., and Williams, Joseph M. (2008). *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Help with citation**
Lipson, Charles (2006). *Cite Right: A Quick Guide to Citation Styles – MLA, APA, Chicago, the Sciences, Professions, and More*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Help with making your arguments more persuasive**
Whyte, Jamie (2004). *Crimes Against Logic: Exposing the Bogus Arguments of Politicians, Priests, Journalists, and Other Serial Offenders*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

## Style guides

These are the major style guides used in scholarly publishing. They are not the only ones, however; for example, some journals have in-house style guides. Check with the journal or publisher you hope to write for to see which style guide they want you to follow.

## AMA style

*AMA Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors*, 10th edition (2007). New York: Oxford University Press.

## APA style

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition (2009). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

## Chicago style

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (2003). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Turabian, Kate L. (2007). *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## CSE (formerly CBE) style

*Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*, 7th edition (2006). Reston, VA: Council of Science Editors.

## MLA style

*MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, 3rd edition (2008). New York: Modern Language Association of America.

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition (2009). New York: Modern Language Association of America.

## Vancouver style

*Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publications* (2008). International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Available as a download in pdf format from *http://www.icmje. org* (accessed 7 November 2009).

## MHRA style

*MHRA Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses*. Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008. Available as a download in pdf format from *http://www. mhra.org.uk* (accessed 19 November 2009).

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