

Sittler, Ryan L., and Douglas Cook. *The Library Instruction Cookbook*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2009. 196 pp. ISBN 9780838985113. \$48.00.

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Instructional librarians may recognize the value of hands-on activities to teach information literacy skills in the field, but books which list hands-on activities often default to a small number of tried and true but correspondingly stale practices. Over the years, some clever librarians have attempted to develop new, more creative activities—in part to hold students’ interest in what can be an admittedly dull subject, and in part to hold their own interest in a subject that they may teach semester after semester. Examples of tools that offer more creative activities include the two editions of the Birks and Hunt publication *Hands-On Information Literacy Activities/More Hands-On Information Literacy Activities*.¹ Both texts offer game-like activities, including (from the first text) the “Hot Seat/Concept Review Game,” a clever variation of the 1960/70’s television game show *Password*, adapted by limiting the “Hot Seat” vocabulary words to those found in library/information-seeking terminology.

Now, in 2009, an additional layer of cleverness has been added, with the publication of *The Library Instruction Cookbook*, edited by Ryan L. Sittler and Douglas Cook. This conceit, of a cookbook’s being used to “dish up” new instructional activities, seems at first to promise a fun and informative read, since using an extended metaphor can be an effective rhetorical tool—especially in writing that is meant to promote new ideas to a highly specialized audience. While this attempt at cleverness is to be applauded, cleverness not deftly handled can slide into gimmickry. Unfortunately, this tendency toward gimmickry is evident in the Sittler and Cook

offering. There is a tendency for the reader to roll his or her eyes at yet another awkwardly stretched pun.

That being said, if after taking a cursory look at this title, one decides to dismiss it as an example of a clever idea taken to its silliest conclusion, that would be a mistake, because as distracting as the seemingly never-ending cooking puns are, ultimately the book must be judged not only by its messengers' style, but also by its message. While the quality of the individual submissions is uneven, it would be remiss to not point out the many notable submissions which deserve attention. The table of contents itself, as a welcome relief, eschews the punning and simply informs the reader that the book is divided into seven sections: Library Orientation; Basic Library Skills; Citations and Plagiarism; Evaluating Various Types of Sources; Specialized Research Skills; Discipline Related Research; and Technology.

The template for each submission, or recipe, is arranged into the rubrics of a traditional cookbook: Nutrition Information, Cooking Time, Cooking Technique, Ingredients, Preparation, Allergy Warning, and "ACRL Information Dietary Standards Addressed." This final rubric appears to be included in order to provide a pedagogical underpinning for all of these activities and, as such, is certainly laudable. On the other hand, this homage to the standards is not developed beyond a listing of those standards that apply to each recipe, as in this example from "Keyword Reduction Sauce": "Standard Two: 2.2, 2.3, 2.4." In fact, the actual written ACRL Standards are nowhere to be found in a book that supposedly relies in part on those standards for its pedagogical validity.

Of the fifteen recipes in Section 1, "Library Orientation," a few stand out. Alison Gregory's submission, "An Eight-Course Library Meal," receives high marks for thoroughness. Her activity is described as "a banquet for First-Year-Students . . . [where] small groups of

students learn and then teach each other about the library” (12). In this classic example of group work, Gregory describes the preparation, the instruction methodology, and the eight *courses*—the subsets of library instruction: Reference Collection; Online Catalog; Periodicals; Academic Search Elite database; Newspaper Source Database and WorldCat; LexisNexis and NYT Historical Backfile Databases; Library Web Site; Web Site Evaluation and Boolean Operators. These eight courses then inform and provide a tighter focus for the students’ assignment. Gregory also notes that the menu worksheets could “be easily adapted to subject specific courses” (13). In the final paragraph, she gives the link for online access to the eight worksheets and the template for a note-taking booklet. While it seems obvious that having links to supplemental online resources for these activities would be beneficial, regrettably, not every author provides links.

Section 2, “Basic Library Skills,” has several interesting recipes. Among them is “Sauté Your Own Search Interface” (Shannon Pritting and Karen Shockey). “Sauté” is an exercise that should resonate with all librarians—it uses a simplified version of the library school assignment of creating a database. The idea of forcing all of the students in the class to think beyond the overly familiar *Google*® interface while allowing them to learn how an interface actually functions is perfect for capturing all levels of student interest and ability. Instructors in all disciplines know how varied their students’ levels of interest are in any subject, and these same instructors are often challenged to create assignments that provide multiple “platforms” of engagement/learning—providing learning opportunities for those who are minimally engaged without losing the interests of those who are potentially highly engaged.

Section 3, “Citations and Plagiarism,” begins with an especially creative exercise, “Bibliographic Barbecue” (Cassandra Jackson) in that it uses a popular hip-hop artist’s

plagiarism law suit to clarify just what plagiarism is and why it is important to avoid. After the students' attention has been grabbed by the popular culture reference, they are given a lesson in how to appropriately cite sources in APA style, focusing on the main resources: books, newspapers, electronic journal articles, and magazines.

Section 4 is devoted to "Evaluating Resources." Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of assigning research papers to undergraduate students comes when explaining how to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate online resources. Even if students eventually grasp the difference between scholarly publications and popular publications, peer reviewed articles and non-peer reviewed articles, they still seem to fumble when it comes to separating fact oriented websites from opinion oriented websites. To be fair, this ability to judge quality websites is not that easy for anyone—seasoned researchers as well as relatively new researchers often find it challenging to make accurate judgments about Web material. For the undergraduate, the temptation to just take what is quickly found adds to the dilemma. To help students with this challenge, Allison Carr of California State University, San Marcos offers a recipe called "Not All Web Sites Smell Bad—Infusing the Internet with the Essence of Evaluation." If one overlooks the odiferous analogy to bad food, one will find a well-conceived lesson plan designed to instruct students on how "to evaluate a Web site for authority, currency, purpose, and validity" (88). This exercise, best implemented in a workshop atmosphere, uses the methodology of having students break into groups, gather information and evaluate according to pre-set criteria, and then share their findings with the students outside of their immediate groups.

Sections 5 and 6 are devoted to specialized and discipline-related research skills. Attention is paid to those skills that might benefit students who have already mastered the basics—upper division or even some graduate students. One still finds a lot of variance in the

overall quality of the exercises; for example, the recipe entitled “Cooking Up Concept Maps” is a well developed exercise utilizing the clustering method familiar to writing instructors—a form of brainstorming in which ideas are graphically connected by means of circles and arrows and included in such well established sources as the *St. Martin’s Guide to Writing*, now in its eighth edition (as Amazon.com describes it, “The best-selling college rhetoric for over 20 years”). On the other end of the spectrum, a far less developed exercise promoting the use of government documents as primary source material is disappointing in its lack of providing anything fresh; it simply asks pairs of students to locate government resources on a topic and report results. Other than the aspect of teamwork, nothing about this exercise is any different than asking individual students to use government information in their research. Amazingly, this exercise states that it addresses eleven separate ACRL Information Standards, but “Cooking Up Concept Maps” states that it addresses only three. Apparently, the number of Information Standards addressed is not necessarily related to the creativity or complexity of any given recipe, an observation that brings into question the model of using the ACRL Standards in the first place.

The final section, “Technology,” has its own sub-section just for classroom clickers. Clickers, also called student response systems (SRS), audience response systems (ARS), or personal response systems (PRS), have surfaced as a technologically savvy way to promote classroom response during discussion. Possibly the most unique aspect of using these devices is that they provide anonymity. Thus, students can interact in classroom discussion without the traditional fear of “looking stupid” if they give incorrect answers to questions or make off-point comments. One of the most intriguing exercises that uses this technology is “The Cite is Right! A Game Show about Academic Integrity.” Laura Braunstein (no relation to this reviewer) of Dartmouth College has developed an exercise that covers several aspects of the academic

conventions of which first-year students are traditionally unaware: “This recipe begins a conversation with first-year students about institutional values and the norms and conventions of academic discourse. It provides an environment for discussing the ethics of scholarship, and helps students to understand the principles of proper citation” (170). The fact that all of this can be accomplished by using a game show format makes the exercise a perfect example of using a light-hearted approach to demonstrate what is possibly the most serious academic issue of all.

Despite the unevenness of the recipes in this cookbook, it is a worthwhile addition to an information literacy librarian’s library, but this recommendation comes with a warning. Librarians should look for the more detailed recipes that provide authentically new main courses—not just warmed-over hash; and they should try to overlook the cutesy clip art of colanders, potato peelers, and Bundt cakes that are liberally sprinkled throughout the text, along with the overwrought cooking metaphors. They need to be especially careful about the latter. As readers of this review may have noticed, occasionally the temptation to resort to those metaphors is too strong to fight, and one may need to plan a trip to the drug store for Pepto-Bismol.

¹ Jane Birks and Fiona Hunt, *Hands-On Information Literacy Activities* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2003).
Jane Birks and Fiona Hunt, *More Hands-On Information Literacy Activities* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2008).