

Book review

Augustine, K. 2024. Book review of Oehrli, J. A. (2022). *Practical academic library instruction: Learner-centered techniques*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions

Journal of Information Literacy, 18(1), pp. 240–242

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/18.1.605>

Kevin Augustine

Research & Instruction Librarian, California
State University, Stanislaus.

Email: kaugustine@csustan.edu.

ORCID: [0009-0000-8623-063X](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8623-063X).

Oehrli, J. A. (2022). *Practical academic library instruction: Learner-centered techniques*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions. 123 pp. ISBNL 978-0-8389-3642-9. £51.36. Pbk.

Teaching information literacy (IL) instruction can be a turbulent time when seeking to establish presence on campus, approaches in the classroom, and rapport with students. Professional development that turns the act of teaching into an art requires mentorship that provides practical advice, vulnerability, and perseverance. In the book *Practical academic library instruction: Learner-centered techniques*, Jo Angela Oehrli shares a wealth of teaching knowledge and experiences to provide readers with a guide to navigating the IL instruction experience.

The book's eleven chapters are organized into four parts centered around the instruction experience: "The basics"; "The starting point of class"; "The middle of class"; and "Looking back and forward on your library instruction". Each part includes at least two chapters framing Oehrli's experiences with and knowledge in situating the components of an instruction session experience. Each chapter begins with poignant quotations, includes engaging headings, and ends with a notes section guiding readers to more readings. At 124 pages, this is a concisely written text.

Oehrli's voice situates a very accessible text. The use of second person throughout the book evokes a mentor-like connection. With this approach comes a very clear, friendly expository style that carefully navigates the successes and challenges of teaching an instruction session. By providing practical examples or hypothetical classroom scenarios, Oehrli organises a compelling case for teaching librarians to plan experiences that emphasise active learning, process-based learning, and learning through discussion. Oehrli's themes include teaching adaptability, principled instruction practices, professional reflection, and fostering a dynamic

This [Open Access](#) work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), allowing others to share and adapt this content, even commercially, so long as the work is properly cited and applies the same license. Copyright for the article content resides with the authors, and copyright for the publication layout resides with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Information Literacy Group.

lens of trust with students. These themes are established in the early chapters and blended within the experiences and scenarios throughout the book.

Oehrli's approach weaves personal anecdotes from the classroom, shared experiences from colleagues, and foundational research in education and librarianship that provides a grounded view on approaching IL instruction. As the author takes readers through the process of an instruction session experience, Oehrli includes teaching wisdoms with a sensible tone that is cordial and welcoming.

As Oehrli scaffolds readers through the instructional experience, instructional design models, and lesson plan development, learning strategies and methodologies are introduced and equally approachable. The book avoids jargon or technical language that would detract from the larger purpose and Oehrli engages readers at every part of an instruction experience effectively and without being dense.

The critical IL theory concepts, reflective practices, and ideas like seeking vulnerability with students that Oehrli shares are timely and relevant in refining the knowledge generated about the professional practice of IL instruction. The dedicated portions of the text that uncover the struggles of teaching, whether that be grappling with distracted students or feeling unmotivated after a difficult session, are confronted with a prudent gentleness that situates a complex yet honest portrayal of the realities in and out of the classroom. This is a welcoming and relatable perspective for new and established teaching librarians.

The conversational tone Oehrli sustains throughout the text fosters a connection to readers. The author's references to education and librarianship concepts, theories, and foundational texts introduce and ultimately strengthen the colloquial nature of the content. Like any vulnerable conversation between mentor and mentee, Oehrli strikes a balance without overwhelming and undermining the purpose of shared growth in professional development. For those experienced in the field of IL instruction, Oehrli's suggestions are refreshing strategies. The only weakness of the content is the lack of structural signifiers to assist readers when Oehrli pivots between anecdote, hypothetical, concept, and outcome. This may be due to the detriments of taking a casual approach; however, readers may need to pace themselves through sections that casually explore the rich connections tied to IL instruction.

After navigating the instruction experience with readers, Oehrli shares a number of insights on the state of IL instruction that form a praxis of professional advocacy for readers. Viewing oneself as librarian and teacher, the challenge of motivation, accessible professional development, and more are addressed eloquently as a final send off from an experienced mentor.

Practical academic library instruction: Learner-centered techniques offers a succinct manual on the experience of teaching IL instruction through Jo Angela Oehrli's knowledge and practices. Oehrli's compassionate voice, which offers accessible introductions to strategies and methods, and the compartmentalisation of the instruction experience provide opportunities for readers to hone their professional development. While the text could use more structural cues to assist readers with the shifts in content, this is minor in comparison to the work's overall mentorship impact. Oehrli's approach in addressing the challenges of teaching is skillfully combined with an encouragement that will resonate with readers. Whether you are new to teaching IL instruction,

facilitate an IL instruction programme, or are an experienced instruction librarian, *Practical academic library instruction: Learner-centered techniques* is an essential text.