

# Writing the Book You'll Teach

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## ABSTRACT

As the field of LIS education changes—re-engineering standard practices to become viable in a rapidly changing educational environment—LIS textbooks must change with the times. Students need to learn both the practicalities of librarianship and the history, ethics, and pedagogies of their chosen career. It's increasingly important for textbook authors to be innovative thinkers while still being deeply grounded in the area of their expertise.

Textbooks are changing along with the field—professors require that the books they assign include the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. They may be asking students to read a big foundations textbook or a number of smaller texts more specific to a particular track. Student demographics and interests are changing with the times, and textbooks need to keep up.

So who writes these textbooks? You and your colleagues do. In this informative and entertaining discussion designed to introduce you to textbook authorship and publication, you'll learn from a senior acquisitions editor and published authors how to propose, write, and market a textbook.

Senior acquisitions editor Jessica Gribble will offer information about coming up with and refining an idea, writing a proposal, signing a contract, working with an editor, and the challenges and joys of writing the book.

1. Coming up with and refining an idea: I like to tell potential authors that professional development books do one of two things, and they're two sides of the same coin. Either a librarian has found a way to meet a challenge or they've had an exciting new idea for a program or service; either way, other librarians will want to learn how to apply these ideas in their own libraries. Ideas for textbooks are different; in some ways they're easier to come by, and in others they're far more difficult. Many textbooks come about because a professor has started teaching a new course and has cobbled together some reading materials, but wishes there were a textbook. That professor is a great potential author. Of course, we'll do some research together to learn if this class is being taught at other schools and if other professors would use a textbook. It can be more difficult to publish a textbook as an alternative to books that are already established in their courses, but sometimes it's warranted. This is when we (the potential author and publisher) need to determine what's missing or outdated in the current texts, what will make the new textbook different, and how we'll let professors know about it.

2. Writing a proposal: I'll share our proposal document and some things to think about when proposing a textbook. The potential market is very important; what courses will use the book? How many schools are teaching that course? The structure is, of course, also very important. If the textbook is a revision, which parts will be updated? How will the author take pains to keep the textbook relevant in the 5 or so years between editions? Are there any new theories or practices that need to be included? How does it compare to the competition? How long should the book be? How long does it take to write a book?

3. Signing a contract: Although most contracts are fairly standard, what should potential authors understand? Areas for conversation include royalties, index preparation, the often-confusing "protection of the work from competing publications" clause, and registration of copyright vs. publication rights. Some important things aren't included in the contract, like title and cover decisions.

4. Working with an editor (from the editor's perspective): I'm available to work with authors in many ways, depending on how they work best. I'll talk about my role as a therapist of sorts (guilt/nudging/check-ins) and tell a funny story about an author encounter at a conference. I'll describe what authors can expect from an acquisitions editor and what will happen later in the process, when the book is in production.

5. Writing the book: Here, authors Marcia A. Mardis and Laura Saunders will share their experiences during the writing process. Both have authored and edited books, and both have worked alone and with co-authors or co-editors. They'll share the nitty-gritty of what it's like to write a textbook, what makes it different from an article or professional development book, how to overcome writer's block and fatigue, and how to use your published textbook as part of your professional development moving forward. They'll talk about time management, collaboration tools, responding to changing community needs, new technologies, learning approaches, professional standards, strategies for engaging readers (students and faculty), ideas for formative feedback, managing multiple authors and drafts, and dealing with the "too much to cover" problem.

6. Marketing the book: I'll give a brief overview of our general marketing efforts, including catalogs, e-mail marketing, and conferences.

In our question-and-answer session, we'll encourage all participants to share their experiences with textbooks, both good and bad, and to ask questions about the publication process and the writing process. Our conversation will be open to discussion of the future of textbooks, open educational resources, and textbook affordability initiatives.

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

curriculum; education programs/schools; pedagogy; teaching faculty

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

professional development; curriculum; textbook development; LIS education