



University of Massachusetts Amherst

From the Selected Works of Ellen E Lutz

May, 2021

A Busy Instruction Librarian's Survival Guide

Ellen E Lutz



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC_BY-NC-SA International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

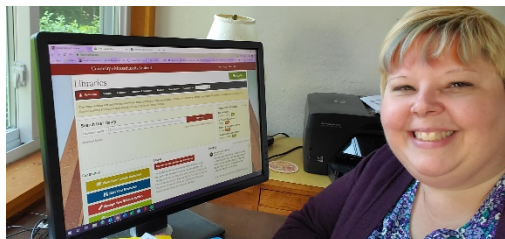


Available at: https://works.bepress.com/ellen_lutz/12/

A Busy Instruction Librarian's Survival Guide

*Are you a busy instruction librarian who sometimes feels overwhelmed?
Here are my tips for surviving "instruction season!"*

Ellen E Lutz, Health Sciences Librarian, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Virtual poster prepared for ACRL/NEC & NELIG Joint Annual Conference May 2021 –
[Original version created in Microsoft Sway](#)



Instruction librarians often experience a large number of requests for library instruction sessions in a relatively short time period. Trying to accommodate all these requests can lead to stress, anxiety, physical and mental exhaustion, and burnout. This poster details how I navigate through those times when I am managing the equivalent of a full-time teaching load. I share my tips for scheduling time and advocating for yourself, nutritional considerations, and practicing self-care.



SCHEDULING TIME & ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

- Know your limits & set boundaries!
 - My guidelines are no more than 3 instruction sessions per day, and I try to limit to 2 back-to-back.
 - When I've reached my limit, I suggest alternate dates to instructors who contact me.
 - I make a very limited number of exceptions to these guidelines - primarily for classes that only meet once per week.
 - Students deserve quality instruction, and if I'm exhausted or frazzled, they don't get it.
- Get organized!
 - In addition to my color-coded Outlook calendar, I use the online list-making tool Trello to help me stay organized.
 - I make a "card" for each class, grouped by department.
 - I add a checklist for each class, which includes things like making an outline, creating/modifying a LibGuide, sending a follow-up email to the instructor with a link to the LibGuide, and entering the statistics for the class.
 - I make an outline for each instruction session (as a Google doc) and print it out so I have a hard copy to refer to during the session. I include estimated times for each section to try to keep myself on target.



- The outline, along with any supporting materials (assignment details, syllabi, topic lists, etc.) and printed handouts, go into a file folder ready to grab and put in my bag.
- As a visual person, I also write the details of each instruction session on a physical sticky note that I put on the wall above my computer, loosely arranged by date.
 - One of my Friday activities is to move the stickies for sessions the next week into my "This Week" column. I add stickies for non-instruction things that need to be done, too. The stickies are also color-coded.
- Give yourself adequate time for preparation!
 - I block off my calendar on Friday afternoons to prep for the next week, but will also schedule time during the week, if needed.
- Schedule time for lunch! (more about this in the next section)
- Just say no!
 - I don't say no to instruction, but I do to other things.
 - I decide which meetings and events I really need to attend, and skip the others. (You may need to discuss this with your supervisor to get their input and support.)
 - I only read and respond to email that is time-sensitive and save the rest for later.
- Ask for help!
 - I am fortunate to have great colleagues who are willing to assist when I need it. I can then reciprocate at other times of the semester.



NUTRITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Don't forget to eat & hydrate!
 - I pack granola bars & chocolate in my backpack, and add easy-to-eat fruits, cheese & crackers when classes happen during my normal lunch time.
 - I carry a reusable water bottle with me - and refill it between classes.
 - I schedule time on my calendar for lunch.
 - Know what types of food your body needs to keep you healthy and focused.
 - For me, that means the right amount of caffeine and “junk food.”
- Plan ahead to simplify meals before & after work!
 - Although I might grab takeout more often on the way home from work, I try to cook & prep on weekends so I have something easy to bake or reheat when I get home from work.





PRACTICING SELF-CARE

- Find things to do that give your brain - and voice - a break!
 - I often take time at the end of a busy day to tidy my office or do tasks that take time, but not a lot of thought.
- Again, just say no!
 - Setting boundaries and not getting over-extended or burned out are acceptable ways to take care of yourself.
- Make time for the things you enjoy!
 - I like to scrapbook and crochet, and am quite fond of other paper crafts that involve stickers.
- Take time off when instruction season is over!
 - I typically take a day off once I've made it through the busy time - often a Friday or a Monday to give me a long weekend.
 - For Fall semester, I try to find a weekday for a drive to enjoy the amazing New England foliage.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to my colleagues at the Science & Engineering Library at University of Massachusetts Amherst for their suggestions and support.

Image credits:

- Ellen Lutz: Ellen in her home office, Fall 2020; Reusable water bottle; Scrapbooking tools - used with permission
- Pixabay.com: All other images - no attribution required