The School Librarian's Guide to (Almost) Everything

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TRANSFORMING LEARNING

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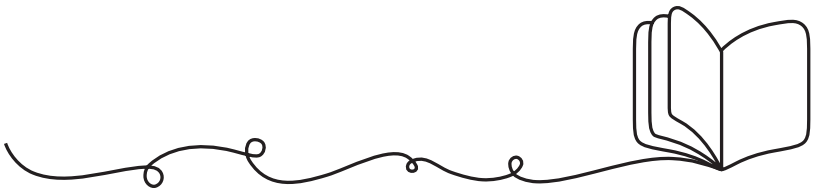


PREFACE

Hello, Reader:

I love being a school librarian. I truly believe it's the best job in the world, and I hope you do too. I wrote this book to answer questions that school librarians often post on social media. Because school librarians assume so many roles—leader, instructional partner, teacher, information specialist, and program administrator—their responsibilities vary widely. It's difficult to be an expert in everything, especially when some questions or tasks pop up only once or twice a year. Both new and experienced school librarians need advice sometimes. That's when this guide can help.

The ideas in this book have evolved over time, often based on discussion with other school librarians, and are rooted in ALA and AASL best practices. Here are the beliefs that ground this work:

- The most important and fundamental part of a school librarian's job is to ensure that learners see the library as a welcoming, safe place. This perspective guides all decisions.
- Children and their feelings are more important than books.
- The comfort of adults should never come before what's best for students.
- Equity should be woven into every aspect of our libraries.
- The school library belongs to everyone.
- Every school deserves a fully funded library with a professionally trained librarian.
- School librarians are important. What we do matters.
- School librarians get to make the rules in the library. Educators get to make the rules in their classrooms.

- School librarians and classroom educators support reading in different ways. An educator's goal is to help students become better readers. A librarian's goal is to promote a love of reading. They complement each other and can overlap, but they are distinctly different.
- Everyone who works in education needs to hold each other accountable. Don't avoid tough conversations if a child's welfare is at risk.

Thanks for reading my book. I hope it helps make your job easier and your days brighter!

All the best,
Maura

INTRODUCTION

This book is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to everything a school librarian needs to know. It's meant to touch on topics and provide guidance to both new and veteran PreK–12 school librarians by supplying definitions, how-to steps, helpful tips, and considerations about topics school librarians encounter most.

The list of topics included is based on social media posts, questions from new school librarians, and conversations with other school librarians. Topics are organized alphabetically, like an index, to make it easier for you to quickly find the information you need. The format encourages you to consult topics as needed, instead of reading the text straight through.

The Read More appendix provides suggested resources for deeper exploration, including some topics that do not appear in the table of contents.

If you can't find your desired topic, try searching the index. Many subjects may appear under alternative names or as subtopics. For example, digital literacy is discussed under information literacy.

Applicable AASL position statements, ALA interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights, the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*, and best practices are referenced throughout the book. *The School Librarian's Guide to (Almost) Everything* is designed to act as a trusted companion, a book you'll dip into again and again.

ACCESS

Equitable access is fundamental for school libraries that serve as learning hubs. For school librarians, promoting and protecting this access is their most important responsibility. Access is woven into every aspect of school libraries.

Consider ALA's "Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" when evaluating your school library's accessibility: "Equitable access to all library resources and services should not be abridged based on chronological age, apparent maturity, educational level, literacy skills, legal status, or through restrictive scheduling and use policies" (ALA 2019a). So, what does this look like in practice?

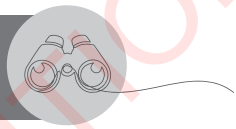
Access Questions to Consider

- *Circulation policies and procedures:* Can any learner check out any book, even if it's not on their reading level? What if they have overdue or lost books? Do policies limit the number of books learners can check out?
- *Schedule:* Is the school library available for open checkout, research, and other uses at a variety of times to suit learners with different schedules and needs? Does the school library schedule provide enough time and opportunities to collaborate with other educators?
- *Physical layout:* Are the school library space and signage ADA compliant? Does the signage promote independent use for beginning readers, English/multilingual learners, and students with disabilities?
- *Collection diversity:* Does the collection include resources that reflect and support learners' personal interests, curricular needs, languages, and unique identities in a variety of formats?

- *Digital access:* Can learners locate and use online resources and tools at school and remotely? Is the school library website/web page ADA compliant? Do learners know how to access their library accounts to find or renew books and put books on hold? Are families of young learners able to access this information so they can support their children at home?

After reflecting on these questions, make a list of changes you can make and necessary steps to improve access for your school community.

See also Circulation Policies and Procedures; English/Multilingual Learners; Schedule; Students with Disabilities



ADVOCACY

You might be the best school librarian with the most incredible library program in the world, but does anyone else know it? Many people don't like to shine the spotlight on what they're doing because it can feel like bragging. However, there's a difference between bragging and advocating. Because much of what you do isn't public, you have to make the hidden visible. Unfortunately, at some point you may be forced to prove your value to protect your job. By "clearly and frequently articulating the school library's impact when communicating with administration, faculty, staff, learners, parents, and the community" (AASL 2026, School Library II.D.3.), you create strong supporters who can help you advocate.

Ways to Advocate for Your Position and Your Program

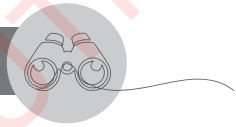
- Highlight what learners are doing in the school library. You can include photos and short descriptions on the school news show, in the principal's weekly newsletter, on the school/library website, and on social media. Show how you're supporting content-area standards while targeting the AASL Standards.
- Post regular snapshots of school library statistics. These might include circulation statistics, hold statistics, number of classes or collaborative lessons taught, special events, books added to the collection, and popular titles. Postings could appear in the school library window as well

as the places suggested in the preceding bullet point. You might also create stall story posters, taping them inside the staff bathrooms where you have a captive audience.

- Offer to attend and present at a PTA meeting. Families have power and can be valuable advocates.
- Attend school events, including some outside school hours. This effort shows you're a team player who cares about what's happening beyond the school library. It's also a great way to get to know learners, colleagues, and families in a less formal atmosphere.
- Invite families, staff, and other learners to the school library when classes present their projects.
- If you're teaching a cool lesson or need an extra set of hands when facilitating a project, invite your principal or assistant principal to join you.
- With your principal's permission, invite school board members, district supervisors, and the superintendent to visit, so you can showcase the school library.
- Take photos of learners working in the school library (with their permission) and send the pictures to their families. Most families love seeing their kids in action.
- When possible, attend classroom educator planning meetings to facilitate collaboration and demonstrate your support.
- Join professional organizations, such as ALA, AASL, and your state and local library chapters, in their efforts to advocate for school libraries and librarians.

These are just some of the steps you can take to build a strong network of advocates. However, there might still be some individuals who don't acknowledge your value. They may assume that you have free time whenever you aren't engaged with learners, and they may try to fill that time with other duties. Keep track of the many diverse tasks you complete each day and how long each takes. This list will be a good tool to use when advocating for more help, more funds, and even a different type of schedule. If you're asked to add more to an already overloaded list of responsibilities, ask your principal what they will remove. What is their higher priority? Hopefully, they'll agree that the best use of your time is to support teaching and learning.

See also Building Relationships; Usage Statistics



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Artificial intelligence (AI) and its use are changing at a rapid pace. This technology will most likely continue to evolve and become more embedded in education. AI presents many logistical and ethical issues that directly relate to inquiry and research. School librarians must keep current in the field, so they can educate staff and learners on advances in the technology.

How to Approach AI Use in Schools

1. *Educate yourself.* Before you can teach something, you'll need to know as much as you can about the subject. It's okay to reveal that you're still learning about the technology.
2. *Involve stakeholders.* Administrators, other educators, families, and learners may have opinions about AI and its use in your school. Encourage discussion on the topic.
3. *Create an acceptable use policy.* Your district or school may already have a policy in place. If not, ask to be part of the policy development committee. It's essential for all stakeholders to have clear guidelines on whether, when, and how to use AI. Consider including examples of acceptable and unacceptable uses.
4. *Teach others.* Both staff and learners may benefit from lessons in how AI works, how they can effectively use AI, and the ethical implications.

Remind them that they still need to use basic inquiry skills when evaluating a source.

See also Copyright Issues; Information Literacy; Inquiry

ASSESSMENT

Although school library classes are often not formally assessed for a grade, formative and summative assessments are ongoing. Anytime you teach a lesson, begin with the end in mind. What standards or skills are being targeted for mastery? This approach will help you choose the best resources, format, and activities so all learners are successful. Share the objective with learners so they can take an active part in the process.

Assessment Approaches

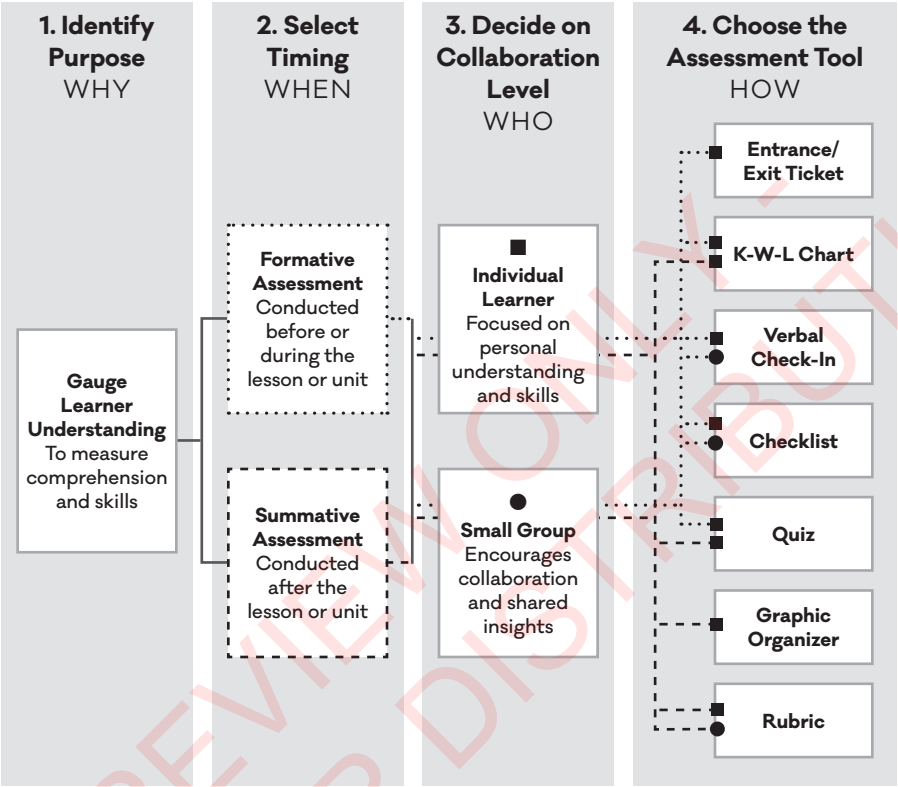
Pre-assessments tell you what learners already know, so you can tailor the learning experience to suit their needs. Throughout the lesson, you'll likely use formative assessments to monitor learner progress and modify the lesson as needed. At the end, summative assessment is used to determine learner mastery and decide next steps.

Assessment methods vary according to the standard, the purpose, and the product chosen to demonstrate mastery. These products might include research essays, speeches, digital or 3D models, infographics, videos, slideshows, and other creative presentation tools. Ideally, learners will be able to choose how they demonstrate content/skill mastery. Common assessments include digital/print quizzes, entrance/exit tickets, thumbs up/thumbs down, graphic organizers, rubrics, checklists, and K-W-L charts. Often, observation and discussion are the most authentic ways to assess learning and provide personalized instruction. Offering a variety of assessments can ensure that all learners' needs are met.

When collaborating with other educators who do assign grades, you'll be more likely to use formal assessments. Offering to help assess collaborative projects with other educators will make them more likely to collaborate with you in the future. The Assessment Decision-Making Tree to Gauge Learner Understanding (figure A.1) can help you select tools best suited to assessing mastery.

FIGURE A.1

Assessment decision-making tree to gauge learner understanding



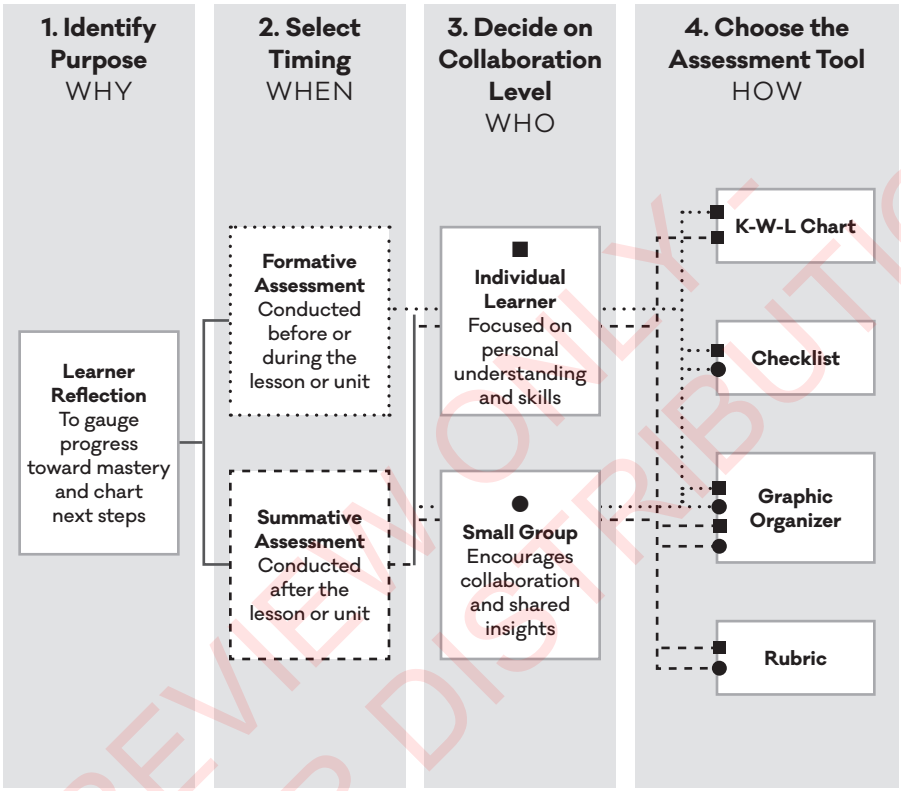
Learner-Led Assessment

Self-assessments, used throughout a project or series of lessons, make learners more active participants. When planning lessons or projects, it's important to build in time for learners to reflect on their progress and consider next steps. This type of formative assessment, completed individually or in small groups, supports executive functioning skills and helps learners move forward in projects. Asking learners to pause in the middle to evaluate what's been accomplished and what still needs to be done or redone will likely result in a better finished product and deeper learning.

Summative learner reflections may vary in focus depending on whether they're an individual or collaborative effort. Individual reflections ask learners

FIGURE A.2

Assessment decision-making tree for learner reflection



to consider what they learned and the quality of their effort and product. These reflections might also highlight goals for the next project or unit of study. Small-group reflections are a bit more challenging. It's unlikely that all group members will agree on the quality of the work, the level of effort, and so on. The conversation and focus for small-group reflections might be on the level of collaboration and how well the group worked together to achieve its goals. Figure A.2, Assessment Decision-Making Tree for Learner Reflection, provides suggested tools for formative and summative reflection.

When learners complete group projects, consider including peer assessments also. Learners will feel validated and gain practice in evaluation. They may be more likely to answer honestly if assured that their responses will be confidential. Before administering any learner-led assessments/reflections,

explain the purpose of the task and read through the questions/answers to ensure that all learners understand. Consider reading the questions aloud to elementary school learners. This approach supports learners with different needs. In the beginning, learners may need more guidance, but most will gain confidence with repeated practice.

FIGURE A.3

Self-reflection sheet

Think about the project you finished and put a check mark in the column that makes each statement true.

Statement	Hardly Ever	Some of the Time	Most of the Time	All of the Time
I worked hard.				
I shared ideas with my group.				
I stayed on task and focused.				
I listened carefully to other ideas.				
I helped solve problems.				
I was resilient and didn't give up.				
I asked for help when needed.				
I feel good about my work.				

What are you most proud of?

What would you like to change or improve next time?

FIGURE A.4

Peer-reflection sheet

Think about the project you finished and put a check mark in the column that makes each statement true. Complete this sheet for each member of your group.

Statement	Hardly Ever	Some of the Time	Most of the Time	All of the Time
PARTNER				
This partner worked hard.				
This partner shared ideas with the group.				
This partner stayed on task and focused.				
This partner listened carefully to other ideas.				
This partner helped solve problems.				
This partner was resilient and didn't give up.				
This partner asked for help when needed.				
PARTNER				
This partner worked hard.				
This partner shared ideas with the group.				
This partner stayed on task and focused.				
This partner listened carefully to other ideas.				
This partner helped solve problems.				
This partner was resilient and didn't give up.				
This partner asked for help when needed.				

Sample Self- and Peer-Assessment Questions

You can use the term *reflection* instead of *assessment* for self-assessments and peer assessments. Learners may find that term less intimidating. The sample worksheets in figures A.3 and A.4 for self-reflections and peer reflections from *Project-Based Learning for Elementary Grades* (Madigan 2022) can be used after learners complete group projects or can be modified for other lessons.

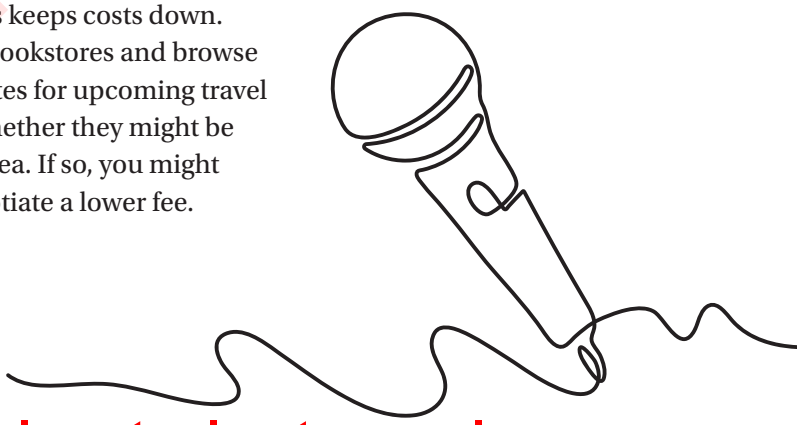
See also K-W-L Charts; Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

AUTHOR VISITS AND GUEST SPEAKERS

A great way to get kids excited about reading is to host a popular author or illustrator visit. Meeting a favorite author can be a memorable experience, inspiring young readers and writers. It can also be an expensive one. Weigh the value of an author visit versus the number of new books you could add to the collection.

Cost-Saving Tips

- Look for free author visits. Many authors offer free virtual visits on World Read Aloud Day and during Read Across America Week. Scholastic usually has some authors presenting live on its website during these events.
- Find local authors for in-person visits. This way you don't need to pay their travel expenses.
- Consider new authors who may speak for free if you agree to buy their book or who may charge less than more-established authors.
- Split the day with other schools or the public library near you. Sharing travel expenses keeps costs down.
- Contact local bookstores and browse authors' websites for upcoming travel plans to see whether they might be visiting your area. If so, you might be able to negotiate a lower fee.



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