A practical writing guide for academic librarians: keeping it short and sweet

Anne Langley and Jonathan D. Wallace. Oxford, Chandos Publishing, 2010, £45.00

Reviewed by Michelle Blake, Focus *Editorial Board*

This is a very thin book, with a rather large price tag. The introduction outlines what to expect and states the aims of the authors in writing it.

The first two chapters concentrate on style and audience, focusing on writing generally. I found this useful revision of aspects of the English language that I had not studied since school and university; and as some schools no longer teach grammar at all, it could be an invaluable tool for some practitioners. There are examples of words and phrases that one should avoid in order to make one's writing clearer and more concise.

I found the chapter on audience particularly helpful. The authors cover the four main audiences for academic librarians: administrators, faculty and graduate students, colleagues and undergraduates – and how to adapt writing for these audiences. Although the content of this chapter is quite broad, it is relevant because the examples relate to academic libraries.

The following chapters focus on getting and keeping a job; meetings and reports; managing; public services and collections; online and presenting data; scholarly work and teaching; and finally more resources to help with writing.

The authors are North American and at times it is evident that the book has been written specifically for a North American audience. Some parts – such as the chapter on getting and keeping a job – are not relevant for the UK academic librarian.

The authors say they have aimed the book at all levels of academic librarians. I think it would be particularly useful for recent graduates starting their first qualified role or for someone who has recently been promoted to a junior or middle management position. The sections on meetings and reports would be especially helpful for the latter as they may have limited experience. I felt that some chapters did not give enough detail, but there was a good overview of what most academic librarians are expected to do. Further reading would be needed in some areas for some people.

The chapter covering online and presenting data covers writing for websites, blogging, email, tables, charts and graphs. The main message here is to keep it really brief and concise.

There are many good tips in the book; I particularly liked the advice about re-reading what you have written. I think the subtitle sums it up – keep it short and sweet – and the authors have certainly done this themselves. It is a useful reference tool, with tips that one can dip into as the need arises.