Book reviews


This textbook was written in recognition that students of Information Studies need to understand the traditional topics which comprise Information Retrieval (IR) and learn more about computerized information retrieval along with the developments which it is claimed have changed the way we store and retrieve electronic information. This book, the author states, “tries to make a blend of the traditional as well as the new theories, techniques and tools for information storage and retrieval” (p. xvi). A listing of the 23 chapter headings provides some appreciation of the topics covered in the endeavor to meet this aim: Basic concepts of information retrieval systems; Database technology; Bibliographic formats; Subject analysis and representation; Automatic indexing and file organisation; Vocabulary control; Abstracts and abstracting; Searching and retrieval; Users of information retrieval; Evaluation of information retrieval systems; Evaluation experiments; Online information retrieval; CD-ROM information retrieval; Trends in CD-ROM and online information retrieval; Multimedia information retrieval; Hypertext and hypermedia systems; Intelligent information retrieval; Natural language processing and information retrieval; Natural language interfaces; Natural language text processing and retrieval systems; Problems and prospects of natural language processing systems; The Internet and information retrieval; Trends in information retrieval.

The scope is impressive, however there is considerable variation in the depth of coverage across and within the chapters. For this reason I am of the opinion that students would benefit from consultation with a number of different sources to learn about the different aspects of IR, contrary to the book’s aim. That said, good comprehensive texts on IR exist, but some are now dated and there is a need for new texts which present both the user (soft) side of IR alongside the more mechanical (hard) IR topics which are often written for an audience with the necessary technical knowledge. This was the challenge I had in mind when reviewing this book. The main question being does it provide students of Information Studies an understanding of the recent developments while at the same time providing an appreciation that the essence of IR and its problems essentially remain the same.

Thus it was disappointing to be presented in Chapter 1 with a listing of key points to introduce the functional requirements and the design phrases of an IR system. This lecture-notes style is used in other chapters and does not help to grab the reader’s attention. For an introductory chapter a thoughtful discussion on the problems, issues and an overview of a typical IR system might have been more effective in directing the reader to the more detailed chapters. The following chapters cover the basics of database systems and a fairly detailed description of bibliographic formats before moving on to the central operation of subject analysis and representation.
This covers a range of manual systems and a succinct, but informative, discussion is given of the concepts of exhaustivity and specificity. For a deeper understanding of theory and principles the reader is directed to a number of referenced sources. The controlled vocabulary vs natural language debate is covered in Chapter 6 but is not followed through into Chapter 8 on searching and retrieval or Chapter 12 on online information retrieval. Given the aim and audience of the book I was surprised to find that the author chose to adopt a rather pedestrian approach to the subject of searching which lacked crucial links between information searching and language and insight into search tactics. Chapter 12 takes the reader through a search process giving equal attention to the logon procedure as to search formulation which it is rightly stated is “the most intellectually demanding aspect on the online search” (p. 242). Similarly, the chapter on users and information needs is important but little attempt is made to place the observations on user behaviour in the context of current system developments in supporting the end-user. Chapter 13 covers CD-ROM technology concentrating on the physical characteristics and production. Chapter 14 takes up the CD-ROM versus Online debate but for a chapter headed Trends in CD-ROM and Online this was a disappointing reflection of the developments taking place in the information industry.

On a more positive note Chapter 5 presents a useful explanation of the inverted file system. This goes into some detail followed with an interesting discussion on file organisation for efficient access and alternative search methods. It is unfortunate that the same cannot be said of the stated theme of this chapter which was to cover the major areas of automatic subject analysis and indexing, automatic approaches to thesaurus construction and so on (p. 83). This I thought would be the acid test and hoped to find lots of clear simple worked examples to illustrate these areas. The account of automatic indexing is dense, but accessible. A summary of the steps taken in the SMART system with brief mention of feedback, clustering does not substitute for the explanation needed. The reader is referred to Chapter 8 on the classic IR models, boolean, probabilistic, and vector but with the rather heavy presentation the reader is likely to gloss over this section before moving onto a look at search features “offered by most text retrieval systems” (p. 169), namely boolean. Two chapters are given to evaluation. There are some useful sections here, but also omissions. The central concept of relevance is briskly covered and little discussion is given to the interesting and non trivial issue of interactive user evaluation. Evaluation is crucial to understanding IR system development and so it is perhaps unfortunate that an error on p. 204 “recall tends to increase the exhaustivity of indexing terms” could lead to misunderstanding. Chapters 15 and 16 cover multimedia, hypertext and hypermedia. These technologies are defined and application areas identified. The challenge of image retrieval is not covered although reference is made to this large area of research. The use of hypertext for IR is considered in a general way which does not reflect the references to work such as Maybury’s collection on intelligent multimedia IR. The chapters on intelligent IR and natural language processing are comprehensive and generally well explained. Some of the systems referenced are
dated and it does not seem appropriate to cover interfaces concentrating on natural language front-ends when more recent developments are taking place in the field of information visualisation. It would be too easy to criticise a chapter on Internet retrieval which describes proprietary systems and a number of potentially short lived issues. Possibly in recognition of this the author includes a final chapter on trends which reads well covering a range of important topics with useful references (from early to mid 90s).

My initial reaction to this book was to applaud the author. There is no doubt that there is a place for a comprehensive up-to-date IR textbook and I had high expectations of one which claimed to blend the traditional and newer aspects of IR. For students of Information Studies the range of topics covered is good and within the chapters some useful material can be found. However, in my mind, this text relies too heavily on reproducing the author’s lecture notes which require some re-working to come closer to achieving the stated blend. Our students require a deeper understanding of the theory, principles and practice of IR and more guidance by way of detailed explanation to appreciate the IR problem, the predominantly computerised solutions, the impact of the end users, and current research issues in the context of today’s developing IR systems.

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The edited collection of papers is intended as a state-of-the-art overview of the current status of automatic text summarisation, highlighting trends and possible future developments. Many of the contributions are revised versions of papers which first appeared at the ACL’97/EACL’97 Workshop on Intelligent Scalable Test Summarization held in Madrid in July 1997, and the remainder comprise four new submissions plus 13 reprints of influential articles. There are six sections: Classical approaches; Corpus-based approaches; Exploiting discourse structure; Knowledge-rich structures; Evaluation methods; New summarisation problem areas.

For teaching undergraduates and postgraduates in information studies this volume does appear daunting if one has no background in linguistics or computational linguistics. The volume claims to be useful in undergraduate and postgraduate seminars, but if so, the tutors need to have some specialist background in one or more of the fields covered, or the motivation to unpick some of the principles from the papers.

It is obviously impossible to give a brief review of such a large and varied collection as this. What we have done is to give an overview of the book, with an estimate of its potential use in information studies. We then look in some detail at some aspects
of Section 3, with the aim of showing that the linguistic and rhetorical analyses are neither as abstruse as might at first appear or immune to criticism.

Text summarisation, or abstracting has had a low profile for many years and it is only since the mid 1980s that interest has increased among the research community, and among practitioners, though to a lesser extent. The Internet has changed that, as it has changed many aspects of information professionals’ activities. This volume does provide some help to those who wish to catch up with developments. Karen Spark-Jones’ overview in Chapter 1 provides a useful framework for selecting the most appropriate chapters for particular interests, as well as giving an overview of developments to date. Other contributions require a little more effort on the part of the generalist to see the connections between their interests and the ideas presented in the papers, but it is likely there will be connections. For example, with the growth of the Internet, particularly with the availability of multi-media information, summarisation is moving beyond text extraction or extraction of facts from texts to guidelines for summarising multimedia presentations. Merlino and Maybury (Chapter 5) evaluate the effect of different mixes of media on readers’ recall and comprehension, using the BNN (Mitre’s Broadcast News Navigator) which extracts multiple media elements from the source content.

Structured abstracts appear not only in the professional journals (e.g. the biomedical journals) but the principles appear in research on the headings required to structure messages sent between health professionals concerning patient care and records of that care. At one level, the ‘abstract’ or ‘summary’ should be easy to scan, to skim information in non-linear reading but the linear reading of the entire abstract should also be satisfactory. Teufel and Moens (Chapter 13) usefully review some of the functions of abstracting for scholarly communication, pointing out that flexible abstracts, generated at the time required, will become more common. Their research uses the rhetorical structure of the scientific research article, extracting sentences which appear to carry rhetorical roles (background, topic/aboutness, related work etc.) and further checking and classification of the rhetorical role. If the type of algorithm can be made to work in other types of research documents then it would be possible for users to search systematically but selectively in full text databases for details of the ‘methods (or solutions)’, or ‘related work’ for particular topic areas, an idea that has its attractions for those trying to fight their way through MEDLINE for details of research designs for systematic reviews of the medical literature.

Without the specialist software, or specialist programming support, it would be difficult to replicate exactly some of the experiments described. That is a pity, as information studies teaching sometimes tends to focus more on evaluation of existing software, existing search engines, rather than encourage students to create, experiment, test and evaluate. Some of the ideas for experiments are certainly not beyond good postgraduate students on conversion Masters courses (as a recent Library and Information Research Group award to Amanda Tinker for a Masters dissertation on summarisation demonstrates).
Section 3, Exploiting Discourse Structure, deals with attempts at automatic summarization using features of natural language. As suggested above, much of the writing appears difficult and technical. It would be a pity if this put readers off, however. It’s not just that the studies have obvious practical uses, and that the methods investigated seem to be having a reasonable amount of success. There is also the fact that the Linguistic knowledge needed to understand the papers is not particularly abstruse – in fact, in this respect the analyses are sometimes crude (this is not intended as a criticism) and for anyone interested in natural language texts, the operations described seem a lot of fun.

A distinction is drawn between Shallow approaches, which rely on surface features of language (words, phrases, etc.) and Deep approaches, which try to model the way humans extract meaning from texts. This is paralleled in Discourse Analysis by a well-known distinction between Text, the physical object consisting of words on a page or screen, and Discourse, which takes participants’ knowledge and purposes into account. The distinction is important since computers are likely to be very good at Text analysis, better in fact than humans, but less good at Discourse Analysis.

Another useful distinction, made in the helpful editorial introduction to the section, is between summaries made up of selecting parts of the text, and those which begin with a pre-established ‘template’ and select document information to fit into relevant bits. This last approach is similar to the best-known model of human reading and summarization, that of Kintch and van Dyk. The reader is seen as moving through the text constructing a microstructure, largely by means of repetition (cohesion) between different propositions, while at the same time building up a macrostructure by fitting selected parts of the microstructure into a template. This template is shaped by the readers’ schemata, which vary depending on, say, type of text (genre) and reader’s purposes.

Marcu’s paper can be taken as an example of an approach which is both ‘deep’ and ‘text-based’. A parser divides the text into ‘clause like units’. These are then paired by means of rhetorical relationships such as Cause, e.g. John left the team because he didn’t get to play enough’. Normally one member of a pair is subordinate (the satellite) to the other (the nucleus). Then the pairs are arranged in a hierarchical discourse tree. Scores are assigned to the nodes of the tree depending on their height in the overall structure and a summary is constructed by selecting those units with the highest scores – an attractive feature of the system is the fact that the length of summary can be automatically adjusted by selected more or fewer units.

The notion that summaries can be constructed from units high up in a discourse tree is a comparatively old one. But in spite of its attractions, we are not convinced that Marcu’s system will work. In English written texts, rhetorical relations between clauses in a sentence are virtually always signalled, e.g. ‘John left the team because he didn’t get to play enough’. Between sentences, however, signalling is usually optional. e.g. ‘John left the team. He didn’t get to play enough’. It was suggested years ago by the linguist Eugene Winter that this inter-sentential signalling occurred only one third of the time. We checked with two randomly selected New Scientist
articles. In one, 27% of inter-sentential relationships were signalled, in the other 15%. Recognition of unsignalled relationships often depends on readers’ background knowledge. Thus it seems that Marcu’s program, which relies ultimately on the text feature of signalling, will be unable to detect them, and there will be a major gap in his discourse trees. If this is true, it would seem to be an example of a ‘Deep’ approach failing because the computer is unable to replicate the human reader.

We can contrast this with Paper 12, A Robust Practical Text Summariser’ by Stzalkowski et al. Here the linguistic, or rhetorical analysis is definitely of the Cheap and Cheerful variety. The system, which in this account is directed at newspaper reports, works fundamentally with paragraphs as units. Paragraphs, we are told, are ‘generally self-contained units’ which ‘address a single thought’. Query: – How many thoughts are there in this document? The criteria for selecting paragraphs are definitely on the robust side. They include whether the paragraphs occur near the beginning; if they contain words from the title; or if they contain sentences which share the same ‘first non-trivial phrase’ with other sentences in the document.

But though the rhetorical assumptions seem crude when compared with Marcu’s, Stzalkowski et al add the sophistication of a Macrostructure, into the selected paragraphs are fitted. Admittedly, the particular macrostructure they describe is a very simple one, made up of New Information and accompanying Background information. But the authors point out that the macrostructure can be varied to deal with different kinds of text, which is likely to give the system much greater flexibility than Marcu’s. Finally, back to the Cheap and Cheerful, with the construction of the actual summary. Pronouns, and other forms of anaphoric reference are a problem for systems which select material from a text. The referent of a pronoun may be missing in the summary. We can’t resist quoting the authors on this:

An easy way to deal with cohesive links is to simply get rid of them. If your summary begins with But, And, or contains also, therefore, . . . within the first few words, just remove them . . . We use this little trick regularly in our summaries.

Cheerful pragmatism can hardly be taken further.

Other features employed are lexical chains (Barzilay and Elhadad), e.g. occurrence in the text of dictionary-related items like ‘dog, animal, St Bernard, pooch’; rhetorical functions such as Solution and the features that signal them (Teufel and Moens); and co-referential sets, (Boguraev and Kennedy), e.g. Tony Blair, the PM., Cheri’s husband, he, that ****.

Altogether, the volume presents a rich and interesting variety of approaches. One final note – the volume is not light reading in the physical sense, though being hardback, and A4, it makes a splendidly impressive coffee table item.

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The publication is a very timely one as more and more services in the education sector are linked together as for example library catalogues, electronic journals and document delivery.

The editor stresses that the contributions to the publication have been written over a period of time and that some areas might have experienced some changes and enhancements by the time the reader picks up the book. It is still a very good introductory guide for system developers, library managers, publishers, subscription agents and information professionals interested in the inherent standards, including international standards, and technologies of serials management. The publication is based on the results of the UK MODELS (Moving to Distributed Environments for Library Services) project.

The five main chapters of the book are

- Introduction
- Descriptive standards for serials metadata
- Standards for terms of availability metadata
- Standards for serial holdings and for serials data in the serials analytic record
- Standards for document requesting

The editor points out on p. 5 that “three chapters focus on standards relating to metadata and accompanying issues, thus addressing some of the current discovery and location problems.”

After an introduction, the second chapter, *Descriptive standards for serials metadata*, gives a brilliant overview of various identifiers and descriptive data elements both past and present.

**Identifiers**

ISSN
CODEN (mainly US, predates ISSN)
SICI (most widely accepted identifier for journal articles)
PII (publishers’ number)
DOI (unaffected by change of ownership or location)
ADONIS number (specific to ADONIS CD-ROM based subscription service)
CCC number (Copyright Clearance Center number)
BIBLID (never been much used)

**Serials metadata formats**

ISSN data elements for serial titles
MARC serials formats
It discusses the current practice at title level, issue level and article level and provides recommendations to organizations for the supply of serials metadata. With six appendices this chapter stretches over 60 pages which includes details about the questionnaire that forms the basis of the data collection for this report as well as metadata examples.

The third chapter, Standards for Terms of Availability metadata, can be seen in a much larger context than just serials but concentrates on serials due to their ever increasing availability in electronic format. It focuses on MARC formats, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) formats and SGML formats. Terms of Availability (ToA) metadata indicates the copyright, financial terms of sale, interlibrary loan rules and downloading from an electronic format. The authors see system interoperability as the main drive behind the ToA standards development. Access management systems such as ATHENS which become more and more prominent in the world of electronic documents do not get much of a mention here. Interestingly the term USMARC instead of MARC21 has been used throughout the text.

The fourth chapter, Standards for serial holdings and for serial data in the serials analytic record, mainly looks at if and how serial holdings are recorded in a catalogue and which standards are used for doing so. The standards are described very thoroughly. Again, by concentrating on journal articles it would later be possible to extend this to monograph contributions. It differentiates between source data from secondary services and source data from library catalogues. The data structures of several abstracting and indexing services as well as from automated library catalogues are compared here and the lack of an accepted serial holdings standard has been concluded. The description of standards for the holdings of electronic serials is not very extensive in itself but the author points out that “any recommendations relating to holdings of hard-copy journals should also be applicable to electronic serials” (p. 104). The author does give recommendations for the implementations of standards for serial holdings which is a lot more than ordinary guide books do.

Document request and delivery is a key issue in every library and publishing house. The four "MODELS verbs" spring mind here: discover, locate, request and deliver. In the first part of the last chapter, Standards for document requesting, Rosemary Russell discusses the traditional interlibrary loan service as well as the more up-to-date document delivery service plus the accessibility of electronic documents.

The last chapter is divided into five parts: 1) An introduction and overview; 2) The ISO ILL Protocol; 3) Document requesting with Z39.50; 4) EDIFACT – the international standard for EDI; 5) Document requesting with HTML. Related issues such as copyright, authentication and billing/payment are not within the scope of this chapter and are therefore only mentioned briefly. The last part of this chapter, Document requesting with HTTP, appears a little bit meagre. It is a short and technical
account of the procedures involved when exchanging documents on the Internet but does not mention any shortcomings or particular benefits.

Many of the metadata standards described here are not necessarily unique to serials but it is hoped that the reader will draw conclusions which will be extensible to other bibliographic formats. The publication appears to be very well written. It uses clear language and on the whole goes into very much detail which would allow even a newcomer to the field a good understanding of the issues involved in serials management.

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This is a book in which lawyers loom large. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising given the title of this collection of essays, yet here is a work aimed squarely at information scientists and librarians rather than members of the legal profession. However, if there is one guiding principle that readers should take away from this book, a point that is made in almost every essay (sometimes ad nauseam), it is that one should always seek professional legal advice before undertaking any activity involving copyright or intellectual property rights.

The essays have been collected together by Chris Armstrong, with the intention of alerting readers to the legal issues surrounding the creation and use of electronic media. The authors assume a basic familiarity with Internet tools and concepts (e.g. web browsers, e-mail etc.), but as the vast majority of discussions focus on legal and moral issues, there is little in this work to frighten even the most technophobic reader. Armstrong intends the collection to serve as a handbook, enabling readers to identify areas of actual or potential concern, and in this he is largely successful.

The eleven essays in Staying Legal are grouped into a handful of broad categories. The first three papers provide a context for the creation and use of electronic information, whilst the next two focus specifically on issues of intellectual property rights and copyright. The sixth concentrates on the Data Protection Acts of 1984 and 1998, whilst the two that follow examine criminal liability and self-regulation. The ninth deals with agreements, user licences and codes of practice; the tenth with information security management, and the final essay offers a commercial view of database production. It is unlikely that many readers will choose to read this book from cover to cover, but most of the essays provide a short introduction, and when coupled with the collection’s effective index this makes it a simple matter for readers to identify the relevant sections of the book.
Duncan Langford’s essay ‘Universal access to information’ opens the collection with an examination of how the introduction of the Internet has altered the nature and methods of information exchange. Langford identifies two categories of electronic information (‘active’ and ‘passive’), and discusses several ways in which the exchange of information over the Internet may affect the development of our society. John Lindsay takes up different, but related, issues in his essay ‘Open.gov.uk?’ . Lindsay’s arguments and concerns are much more overtly political and economic than Langford’s, and he also proposes new roles for the professional associations of information scientists and librarians. The last of these first three essays, John Williams’ ‘Legal information – the rich and the poor’, draws on a variety of legislation and case law to illustrate how access to legal information in electronic form, as well as the availability of technology to help lay people understand their rights and duties under legislation, will shape society.

Charles Oppenheim’s essay ‘Copyright and intellectual property rights’ provides a wonderfully accessible and concise introduction to all the important topics in this difficult area of the law. For anyone seeking an answer to those frequently asked copyright questions of the type which plague so many electronic mailing lists and committee meeting discussions, this essay is an excellent place to start – although as Oppenheim would no doubt point out, his essay is not intended to be a substitute for proper legal advice. Oppenheim’s piece is followed by Frederick Ratcliffe’s essay ‘Legal deposit’, which offers an historical perspective on copyright legislation and the establishment of the deposit libraries, and then provides an extensive discussion of recent deliberations (such as the Report of the Working Party on Legal Deposit) and their possible implications for the creators and publishers of electronic resources. Like Oppenheim, Ratcliffe also offers a succinct and extremely readable summary of the many complex issues surrounding a contentious area.

Angus Hamilton’s essay ‘The Data Protection Acts 1984 and 1998’ very much lives up to its title, offering a no-nonsense guide to the key features of both Acts and to the crucial differences between them. Hamilton predicts that in the transition period between the two Acts there will be ‘much confusion and little enforcement’, but this essay should go some way towards alleviating readers’ perplexity. Andrew Charlesworth’s essay on ‘Criminal liability’ follows a broadly similar approach, examining the issue of criminal liability for the provision, use or ownership of electronic information, and offering an overview of the relevant UK legislation. Regarding the latter, Charlesworth summarizes the key features of English law concerning computer misuse, pornography, racial hatred, contempt of court, and even deals briefly with blasphemy and gambling. He concludes with a discussion of the regulation of information exchange in a global electronic environment, and the problems of international enforcement. Some of these concerns are taken up in Heather Rowe and Mark Taylor’s essay ‘Self-regulation and other issues’, which examines the existing legislation which can be applied to information delivered via the Internet or some other form of electronic media, paying particular attention to the problems surrounding advertising. As in the previous two essays, Rowe and Taylor summarize
the relevant legislation and support their arguments by drawing on real examples. Their recurrent theme is that users and information providers should be careful not to let the apparent informality and ease-of-use of the Internet lead them to take the new electronic media any less seriously than more conventional forms.

Anyone involved with defining or negotiating a licence for the use of electronic products will be grateful for Richard McCracken’s essay, ‘Agreements, user licences and codes of practice’. He offers a set of general principles that should enable readers engaged in such activities to establish what rights are being offered, and thus the usefulness and value of any licence. Rather than discuss particular licences, McCracken adopts the extremely effective approach of setting out a model licence structure and then identifying the key issues pertinent to each element.

Tony Hadland’s essay on ‘Information security management’ will doubtless appeal to anyone needing an introduction to ‘InfoSec’ matters. He offers a brisk, practical account of the main issues, rather than the reflective discussion which characterizes some of the other essays – although he supplements this with no less than six appendices which offer a wealth of additional information. Although Hadland’s approach may not appeal to all readers, he deals with matters which should concern every Internet user.

The final essay in the collection, Michelle Green’s ‘Database production: a commercial view of the law’, provides some valuable advice for every electronic information provider. Green uses a number of theoretical scenarios to lead into discussions of copyright and intellectual property rights, and from there into the key features of the relevant legislation. In many respects this essay offers a summary of the points raised by some of the other contributors to this collection, but without an attempt to reproduce the depth of earlier deliberations. Indeed readers who share Green’s commercial background may find it useful to treat this as an introduction to the rest of the collection, using her discussions to help them identify the issues of most concern.

This book will make a worthy addition to the small collection of accessible works on copyright and intellectual property rights intended for librarians and others outside the legal profession. It is not comprehensive or exhaustive in its examination of legislation and legal matters, but then it was never intended to be. However, as an overview designed to help the concerned user identify which legal issues may affect the creation and use of electronic media, this collection of essays succeeds admirably. Although staff involved in information studies education may not wish to recommend the entire volume, it is highly likely that particular essays in this collection will be used to provide background reading on specific topics dealing with electronic media and the Internet.

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The Reviews Editor was not to know that this book would make me erupt in fits of astonishment and anger. Rarely have I read and reviewed a text that deserves so little consideration. The puff on the back cover of book written by a ‘Distinguished Professor of English’ claims it to be the product of an ‘elegant, incisive and quirky intelligence’. Elegant and incisive it is certainly not and quirky is, perhaps, too discrete a rendering of its bizarre pomposity. I find it impossible to reserve my criticism for the concluding paragraphs of the review. This text doesn’t deserve that academic nicety.

The text is structured around a set of arguments which advance a critique of certain views of language, language practice and language pedagogy. At the heart of these is the notion that the supplanting of the oral by the literary in the modern world has served to devalue and marginalise the linguistic traditions of women, Afro-Americans, Native Americans and many others. The writing of Isocrates, a minor Sophist philosopher, is used critically to support these arguments. His ideas about language, the relationship between the oral and written, as well as his ideas about teaching are invoked as criticism of the Platonist legacy, where language has been treated as a neutral instrument for conveying thought and meaning, and for the objective representation of the real world. Salvation is at hand in the form of what Welch calls ‘Next Rhetoric’, which will become the basis of new approaches to language teaching (writing and composition classes), particularly in higher education. ‘Next Rhetoric’ will examine the constitution of oral, literary and visual rhetoric in the age of the new machine. Television and computers are contributing towards new forms of orality, which will, she argues, weaken the dominance of the literary.

The manner in which criticism is rhetorically constructed in the book leaves much to be desired. First comes the flail, a lashing out in many directions. Next to appear are the ‘straw men’, killing off those that are already dead. Third are the dressed up claims of the obvious. Fourth, the liberal dropping of names to support those claims. Finally, there is the use of grandiose and pompous statements and proposals. Some sense of this is contained in an early statement of aims,

I aim . . . to redirect enquiry into historicized Western rhetoric and writing prac-
tices, current literacy, and electronic screens, all of which are central to our culture . . . In addition, I hope to contribute to a repositioning of the humani-
ties/posthumanities from the wizened, dull, uncommunicative, elitist studies that has been for much of this century to a set of interrelated Sophistic logos studies that are performative, democratic, and open to all kinds of symbol systems as well as to all racial and ethnic groups and genders. (p. 9)

The arguments are presented with such force and repetition that the reader almost begins to believe that they are new after all. However, this rhetorical screen cannot conceal the belief that Welch has woken up to these criticisms after a prolonged sleep
of at least half a century. Furthermore, there is little humility in the writing which, when combined with misunderstandings and inconsistencies, edges this reader ever closer to what she might describe as a splenetic evanescence. A few examples might illustrate my point.

I, in a continuing project, reconstruct classical rhetoric for the twenty first century in an after-postmodern world, a world where a shifting episteme is taking place. (p. 33)

... the computer promotes activity; television almost demands passivity ... (p. 182).

The literacies of Next Rhetoric (Welch’s proposals) are positioned in our universities not only to resist this normal capitalist cultural imperialism but to provide radical alternatives to it. (p. 189)

New vistas lie open before us as the world speeds ahead with new technologies and their attendant literacies. If we refrain from theorising this new era, then other forces will continue to dominate it. (p. 210)

I am conscious of how easy it would be for the writer to defend her writing as a rhetorical flourish, which I have misunderstood. I admit that I have no background in either classical or modern rhetoric but I know that at the heart of rhetoric, electric or otherwise, is persuasion and this book and its Rococo banalities singularly fails to persuade me of anything in particular.

So given my criticism of what use might this book be for those involved in information education? For those interested in a new approach and interpretation of language use and the electronic media then the answer probably lies elsewhere. The analysis of new technologies is almost non-existent. For example, the rhetorical features of a more ‘visualised culture’ which could have been woven into her arguments are entirely missing. The importance of visualisation would have supported the general view of language she seems anxious to present. Equally, the much discussed, and frequently trumpeted radical possibilities of, hypertext and hypermedia receives the most superficial reference in her account of new forms of language practice. If you are interested in a book that singularly fails to engage with its own rhetoric, that as an example of new ways of making and conveying meaning displays a poverty of writing, and if your aesthetic judgement extends to the garishness of the luminous orange dustjacket then you will not be disappointed.

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This book, the blurb tells us, builds and expands on a 1996 classic text “The evolving virtual library”. The book comprises ten contributed chapters, with an introductory one by the editor and the remainder from US libraries, with one exception from Finland. The authors, in fact, rarely use the term “virtual library”, preferring “digital” or “electronic” instead. This is something I welcome, since I believe the term “virtual library” is both inaccurate [1] and has largely fallen out of use. Some of the chapters are trite, all ignore the world-wide implications and concentrate on parochial issues, and none take a philosophical approach.

So it’s best to ignore the title and sub-title and simply ask the question: is this a useful book? The chapters cover a range of topics, including networking, setting up intranets, developing content, managing content, public libraries, and remote users. It sounds promising, but too many of the chapters are a disappointment. The reason is simple, but all too common in books of this kind. Too many of the contributions are of the “how I do it good in my library” genre, with little or no examination of the broader issues or implications. The only pieces taking a broader view are those by Saunders herself, Valenza on school libraries and Keys looking to the future.

Some of the bibliographies at the end of chapters are incomplete (no pagination given), some are uninteresting personal histories (“Mike Miller and I met with my library’s Computer Rook staff. It was at 7.30 am, March 14 1994 in my office.”), some include hyperbole (“the world’s most powerful listserv, LM_NET…” and “the search engine is more powerful for retrieval than traditional access created by the human cataloguer”), and one appears mis-placed (a basic primer on networking).

Hanson and Day’s book Managing the Electronic Library is far superior to this book. Although Hanson and Day’s book [2] concentrates too much on academic libraries, and also has a surfeit of “how I do it good in my library” chapters, it has excellent linking pieces examining the broad themes and coming to critical conclusions. This book, in contrast, has little linkage and little in the way of deep thinking. The impression given by Saunders’ book is that she persuaded a number of her friends and colleagues to submit articles pretty much on their choice of topic and intervened little as an editor. The result is a book that has the feeling of being put together in a rather relaxed fashion.

All told then, this book compares unfavourably to Hanson and Day, which remains the book of first choice for those wishing to read a collection of essays on the topic and wish to manage, teach or learn about the fast expanding field of electronic libraries. However, for me the first choice for a single volume introduction to the topic remains Mike Lesk’s Practical Digital Libraries [3].

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Every time a new type of qualification emerges, its champions inevitably have an uphill task in trying to convince the sceptics of its worth. That has certainly been the case over the last five years for the ILS NVQs. However, there is now evidence to suggest that, in the LIS profession, the NVQ route is becoming an increasingly desirable and effective way of gaining a recognised qualification. This route is based upon a combination of sound learning principles and practical work-based tasks. The principles and practicalities are outlined very clearly in this concise guide.

In the first chapter we are given an overview of what National Vocational Qualifications are all about. Based firmly in the world of work, they are about measurement and standards. They are also about helping individual career progression and transferability of skills. These last points are important, particularly for those who may learn some skills in one library/information sector and who wish to carry these with them into a different sector. The key notion to take out of this chapter is that of competence which is “about doing a real job, in a real working environment, to a standard that is clearly defined and universally applied” (p. 16). Chapter 2 transports the reader into a rather complex, bureaucratic and acronym-rich world. A good indication of the kind of world you are entering is provided by the words contained in the chapter subheadings: QCA and SQA; lead body; awarding bodies; assessment centres; the candidate; the assessor; mentors, advisers and tutors; the verifiers. If you haven’t done so already, it is at this point that you turn – with some relief – to page 89 and the haven of the “jargon-buster”. As with any qualifications system, the infrastructure is likely to be fairly complex but grasping these “essentials” at the outset helps to demystify the subsequent chapters. This second chapter is particularly strong on the roles of the NVQ’s four key players – individual candidate, mentor (i.e. provider of support for the candidate), assessor (i.e. reviewer of evidence of competence) and verifier (basically, the referee). Chapter 3 really represents the heart of this guide – a close look at the published standards and what is expected of an NVQ candidate. The author describes – through the use of one standard as an example – the framework within which competence is achieved: the credit-bearing Unit consists of a number of standards, each of which has a series of performance criteria and “knowledge” requirements (i.e. underpinning theories). I think it is true to say that, up until now, this guide has been describing the processes, procedures...

References


and principles which surround very practical everyday tasks. This changes quite radically with the next two chapters in which you feel as if you're starting to get your hands dirty. Chapter 4 concentrates on the evidence – directly work-related – that has to be presented in order to demonstrate competence. This can be process evidence (the candidate’s assessor observing the candidate at work), product evidence (the candidate’s own direct work output) or supplementary evidence (where the previous two are unavailable). The author rightly provides much helpful detail about types of evidence and its currency, sufficiency and general acceptability. There is a danger that candidates may be unclear about what the evidence requirements are. Brief mention is also made of simulation exercises which may be used when there is no alternative. Focussing even more closely on the practical, the penultimate chapter offers advice on how to plan your portfolio, its possible contents and format. This chapter is very helpful in the way it breaks down the portfolio into three parts Introduction and Background; Planning and Management; Evidence) and gives guidance on each part. The final short chapter makes some suggestions about where to go from here. This includes making contact with an assessment centre, identifying your training needs and gaining the support of your employer.

This revised edition takes into account the recent changes in the national standards for ILS S/NVQs and is an excellent concise guide to the qualification. The book will be of great interest to paraprofessionals and non-professional librarians, as well as others involved in library and information staff training.

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One of the difficulties of teaching management and “professionalism” to students, especially young students, is that all too often it is no more than theoretical because they have nothing in their own experience to which they can relate the ideas and issues. Their motivation to really develop understanding can therefore be limited. Another difficulty has been that there have been very few textbooks written in recent years which encourage the student to consider the wider issues of context and strategic matters. Ritchie’s Modern Library Practice is now sadly out of date. Bryson’s excellent volume Effective library and information centre management, which takes a business view of ILS management, has now re-emerged in a welcome second edition. Other than these, source material is to be found in journal articles and edited collections of conference papers and writings by the great and the good. For the modern student, this represents difficulties. The reality is that pressures upon the modern student are enormous – many have part-time jobs and young family
responsibilities as well – so their need to have most of the information they need in one place is a real need. My academic colleagues would probably frown upon the idea of encouraging the use of one book as a core of the material needed for study, on the grounds that it discourages the development of true research skills. I would only partially agree with this position, but would argue that a good “one stop shop” in the form of a basic text is a springboard for the development of such skills, especially one such as this which contains comprehensive lists of references and suggestions for further reading. This book represents help of the right kind for students.

The book has its origins in modules which were created for the Library Association Route A Chartership Training Programme at Reading University. The authors state in their preface their hope that it will also be useful to “LIS students and lecturers, staff development officers, those returning to the profession after a break and established professionals in search of a fresh perspective”. As an occasional member of the first group in the list I can say that it is what I have been waiting for. Indeed, if someone had said, “go away and turn the management modules of an ILS degree into a book”, then this would be the result. (It rather begs the question, however, of what the authors think is taught in an ILS degree, if this is part of the post-degree training!)

The book is divided into four sections: The Service in Context, Meeting Information Needs, Managing the Organisation, and The Information Professional.

“Information services do not exist in isolation” is the opening sentence. In my professional life in practice it was my goal to try to get library staff to take on board this simple fact. Whilst the situation has improved dramatically in the 20 years of my working life, it is still possible to find library services which are run for the benefit of the people working in them, rather than for the benefit of the users. It is particularly pleasing to see this first section The Service in Context, which encourages the development of a wider view. It covers the analysis of the external environment, using such well established techniques such as PEST analysis and the less well known SEPTEMBER formula (Society, Economics, Politics, Technology, Education, Marketplace, Business, Ethics, Regulations). It invites readers to identify the “stakeholders” of the library, the extent of influence they might be able to exert over the services, and further to consider developments in service in the electronic environment. Vital considerations indeed in this age of accountability.

All of this is the prelude to discussion about the role of strategic management, including planning, objectives setting, managing change and quality management. “Irrespective of whether you opt for or are obliged to have a formal strategic planning process, all information professionals need to acquire a strategic mindset – you need to develop the ability to think (and manage) strategically”. The authors then discuss what they mean by strategic thinking – seeing the big picture, exploring systematically, linking process and output, dealing with many inputs, being creative and so on. This is good stuff. Lecturers repeat themselves many times on such points, without much apparent impact. Students are more likely to believe what the lecturer tells them if then they find it written down.
Section 2, Meeting information Needs, covers some of the “traditional” areas of library management, but with the welcome addition of current concerns: Collections Management (selection and acquisition, cataloguing and processing, weeding) looks familiar, but the section on Information Service Provision (service portfolios, reference services) has sections on value-added services, Service Level Agreements, quality and performance indicators. These last topics are given some importance in ILS management teaching so it is good to see an example of the application of standards, indicators and targets in practice. The last chapter in this section, Information Skills is a useful one in that it addresses some of the concerns of the move in role of the professional from mediator to trainer. As with all the other chapters, it begins with a general discussion of definitions and meaning (of teaching and learning) and professional debate. It goes on to look at delivery methods, programme evaluation (an important but often neglected part of the teaching/training process) and presentation skills.

The final chapter in this section covers the management of Information Systems, including electronic developments, managing IT and migration of systems, convergence and human aspects of IT development. Again, it is good to see all of this gathered together in a way that I have not discovered previously.

Managing the Organisation, (Section 3) contains four chapters, on People Management (how refreshing to see plain English instead of business-speak “Human Resource Management” – although the authors do take the trouble to explain where the term came from), financial management including budgeting and costing, space management and Marketing. This is fairly standard fare. I was pleased to see the section about the difficulties of running devolved budgeting systems – articles on such topics tend to be of the “how-to-do-it” variety, rather than discussing the practicalities and problems that might be faced.

The final section, The Information Professional tackles the responsibilities of the individual regarding their own training and development from both a personal and professional point of view. It contains the usual discussion of terminology, using both the Library Association’s and the Institute of Information Scientists’s perspectives to inform their position:

3.3 Competence

An information professional should attempt to ensure that he or she is competent to undertake all his or her profession duties. This includes a responsibility for his or her own continuing professional development. It also involved developing ongoing knowledge of the purpose and function of the organisation in which he or she works.

It is good to see such direct quotes in print, since I believe such responsibilities are soon forgotten by new professionals in the euphoria of their first post.

In summary, I think this is a sound contribution to the literature which definitely fills a gap, and which I hope will be updated as and when developments require it. It is comprehensive – the only things that are not covered which might have been are
legalities such as the administration of copyright and data protection law, health and safety and such-like.

There are several other reasons for my recommending this book. It is well-organised, with the individual chapters following a general structure of definitions-discussion-issues, with helpful examples, sections for reflection and exercises. All of these help to embed the learning that has taken place.

The book is well-balanced. Clearly there are more things to say in some sections than in others, but I think it is right that discussion of the information professional has a section all to itself. The research that went into this book is impressive – each chapter contains a comprehensive, annotated list of references and readings at the end – students would do well to buy the book for these alone. Also, the index works.

In conclusion, then, this is a book worth buying for both lecturers and students. In fact, it is selling like hot cakes in Manchester! Would it be useful for staff development officers? If they are running Route A programmes, I would think so. Returners would also find this a good summary of current issues and recent developments. As to the last group. “established professionals in need of a fresh perspective” – well, you can lead a horse to water, but can you make it drink?

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Records management as a subject, and career path, distinct from archives on the one hand and information management on the other has only come to prominence in the last decade. In response, the LIS educational community in Britain has provided degree courses in the subject, and specialist modules within wider courses. The number of texts available to support such courses is limited, this new book being an addition to a rather small field.

One of LA Publishing’s new series ‘The Successful LIS Professional’, this is an example of the short and snappy ‘how to’ books which are currently the vogue for LIS publishers; Aslib’s series of ‘Know How Guides’ being another. The series is aimed squarely at the practising LIS worker seeking professional development; though that does not prevent the publisher covering all their bases by including other groups as possible recipients, managers are mentioned, as are students and trainers. However, this reviewer at least had the feeling that students have been added on very much as an afterthought. This book may be many things, but academic is not among them.

Sheila Pantry’s series introduction tells us that these books are ‘very practical . . . recognise that your time is precious . . . written so that they may be easily read and digested . . . include instantly applicable ideas and techniques’. While this comes
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dangerously close to evoking inappropriate analogies with junk food, and with the ‘four minute manager’ syndrome, there is nothing wrong with a practical approach, if it is done thoughtfully; in this case it is. The book is clearly written, in a very informal style, and is well-structured, if rather over-designed with numerous check-lists and boxes of all shapes, sizes and shadings. The author is well qualified to write the authority of experience on these topics, and this comes out in the text.

Judged by these self-declared standards, this book should be counted a success. From the style and content, it seems most appropriate to someone who is asked to carry out, or at least participate in, some kind of records management function, while not having any background in the subject. Starting from the basics of what is and is not a record, the book moves through the ‘standard’ topics of managing records – filing schemes, movement tracking etc. – retention policies, the protection of ‘vital records’, storing, retrieving and destroying records, and the like. Active and inactive records get their own chapters, as do records in the form of e-mail. Specific topics given their own chapters include the management of records through an organisational upheaval, finding out what records an organisation actually has, developing policies and procedures, and running records management services, including such things as publicity and providing advice to users.

There is a short reading list of textbooks, where readers are referred for ‘more detailed information on any of the topics in this book’, a list of useful journals but no articles, and a listing of standards and organisations. Surprisingly, no Internet resources are mentioned. This lack of reference to the wider literature limits its appeal as a text for records management courses.

In a book like this, which is deliberately kept short and punchy, it is easy to criticise omissions and over-simplifications; my own choice would be the lack of attention given to subject access, and the failure to link the ways of identifying records within the organisation with the wider topic of the information audit. It may well be that this could prove a useful emergency primer to someone thrown in at the deep end of records management. It could certainly be recommended to students wanting an insight into what this concept involves in the ‘real world’, as a complement to more theoretical treatments.

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Many books have attractive titles, but are a disappointment on reading. This book, by contrast, is well-written but poorly-titled! The second edition of a book first
published in 1989 under the title Effective Literature Searching for Students, it must count, in terms of present day publishing, as a classic. It is also pleasant to see a book, still, despite the change of title, aimed at a student market, being sold at what is, in terms of the going rate, quite a reasonable price.

The title change is not easy to understand, other than perhaps as an indication of a publisher covering its options, since the author describes the changes that have brought about the second edition in terms of the availability of a considerable variety of digital sources, complementing rather than replacing the existing array of print sources. Valid though this is, it hardly changes a student into a researcher.

And indeed, the book seems very clearly aimed at the student with an assignment to prepare, or a term paper to write. The chapter headings show clearly the logical progression followed through the topic: why search; preparing the search; sources and tools; electronic source 1 – online searching; electronic sources 2 – the Internet; keeping records; obtaining and evaluating the material; writing references; citing references in the text. It is interesting to note how closely this follows the generally accepted formulations for information literacy, as pronounced, for example by the ALA and the SCONUL working group – recognise a need for information; know what sources to go to; find information; access information; evaluate and organise information; use information. Although Gash does not specifically discuss the concept, her extensive experience in academic libraries suggests that she would be well aware of this aspect, and indeed the book might equally well have been entitled Primer for Information Literacy. The advice is sensible and straightforward, and the book could be read with profit by many a student; though whether it will be, in view of the widespread belief among students that everything of importance is easily found on the web, is another matter.

I also have considerable concerns about the author’s statement in the preface that this new book in comparison to the old has ‘retained the same structure and much of the original text, which is still completely valid’. This may be true in a rather ‘traditional’ academic environment, though even here I have considerable doubts; while the nitty-gritty aspects of how to use an index or cite a reference are certainly still valid, the overall structure of the information world has surely changed more than Gash allows for. At best, this gives the book a slightly old-fashioned air; at worst, and certainly in the eyes of some web-oriented students, it will discredit it completely. I also wonder whether the inclusion of information on card files and other non-computerised tools, will give this book any real appeal to most students, sensible though the author’s reasons for avoiding unnecessary computerisation may be.

This book will probably be read more by LIS students than by others, which is a shame, as its tenets are probably required more elsewhere. The obvious comparison is with Elisabeth Orna’s Managing Information for Research, which covers the same ground, though in a very different way, and aimed in fact as well as in title at the researcher. I would tend to prefer Orna for most purposes, as I find her approach...
more through and the topics better integrated. Having said that, Gash’s book is more clearly focused on the needs of the ‘average student’ and considerably cheaper!

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Published surveys of the use of IT in libraries are, arguably, neither commonplace nor regularly updated, with the exception of Batt’s surveys of the public library sector. With considerable enthusiasm, this reviewer approached the 6th edition of Batt’s bible to see how the situation had changed since the previous survey published in 1994.

One is certainly not disappointed. Batt approaches his task with knowledge, understanding and enthusiasm. Batt reports that, for the first time, he failed to achieve a 100% response. Two public library authorities failed to complete his questionnaire. This leaves us with a 99% response rate, which many would still regard with envy! There are five chapters in which he describes and analyses his findings and a conclusions chapter in which he tries to describe the trends.

Chapter 1 covers library management systems, that is, the extent to which his respondents were using circulation, cataloguing (including online catalogues) and acquisitions systems. Chapter 2 is entitled: Librarians in cyberspace: electronic information services, and covers the provision of CD-ROM databases, either for staff only use or public use; the extent of access to, and range of uses (by staff and the public) of the Internet (including email); online searching, use of which appears to be reducing significantly; and use of automation/IT for community information.

Chapter 3 concerns the public library as an IT learning resource. In the context of the National Grid for Learning and the People’s Network, the chapter describes the provision of public access microcomputers and the growing number of telecentres in public libraries, competing with the likes of the cybercafés. Chapter 4 – The price of information: public library charging policies – covers the extent and range of charging policies and practices for the different types of IT provision. Chapter 5 is about systems management and future plans for IT developments, including the development of formal IT strategies.

Chapter 6 attempts to come to some conclusions about the survey data and the trends they indicate. This is always a difficult task. Batt is careful to qualify much of what he says as being his interpretation of the situation, although much of the information presented in the previous sections speaks for itself. A large amount of the data gleaned from the questionnaires is summarised in a set of Appendices which
follow Chapter 6. Indeed, these take up more than half the book. There is also a list of the contacts from each of the library authorities who responded to the survey.

There are a few typographical and proofreading errors. The tables and the commentaries need careful reading, and matching the text with the data in the Appendices is not easy.

There are a few places where it is not clear how the percentage figures have been calculated. It has to be said that, with the inevitable changes in the technology and the advent of the Internet, it is difficult to compare the current situation with the previous edition. There is also the complication of the increased number of library authorities with the introduction of the smaller unitary authorities in April 1997.

All things considered, Batt’s report presents exciting prospects in the field of IT for the public library sector as it faces start of the 21st Century. It is well worth reading by student and practitioner alike.

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