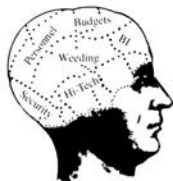


RESEARCH FORUM



The three R's: Reading, writing, and research

How do American academic librarians rate as writers and speakers? Here is the report card on the Contributed Papers presented at the Fourth ACRL National Conference held April 1986 in Baltimore, as indicated by the fifty-eight evaluations received from people who read and heard those papers.

Overall quality. "Papers were good" (7); "some good, some bad" (3); "need to improve" (48).

Virtues. "Better than they used to be" (4); "liked idea briefs" (1); "good range of topics" (1); "delighted with currency of information" (1); "pleased that several papers dealt with nitty gritty cataloging" (1); "enjoyed the discussion" (4).

Faults. "Need to improve the refereeing" (15); "superficial . . . stale . . . rehashed . . . jargon . . . titles don't indicate content . . . etc." (20); "speakers need to improve their presentation skills . . . etc." (16).

The following evaluation seems to deserve a category of its own: "Conference made me ashamed to be a librarian . . . left early."

In all fairness, I must admit that my choice of the evaluation comments and even my mathematics have been designed to prove a point; I have shown the picture as blacker than it probably really is. But not much! When you consider that all of the Contributed Papers were refereed and that the ones actually presented at the Baltimore conference were considered to be the best of the lot, it is clear that American academic librarians have a great deal to learn about writing and speaking.

Harsh as it is, this verdict upon ourselves is quite acceptable, because our failings are relatively easily remedied. Good writing and speaking (academic style) are much more the result of acquired skills than they are of native talent. Having something worth saying may depend mostly on the brains we were born with, but expressing that idea effectively is a craft we can all quite readily learn to master.

A very good way to start gaining that mastery is to take a course specifically designed to help aca-

demic librarians produce better papers. ACRL is offering this course (CE 506) as part of its continuing education program in June prior to the 1987 ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco. The instructor is Suzanne Dodson, who is not only herself a widely experienced author and lecturer but who also can draw on the special knowledge she gained as the person responsible for the contributed papers program at ACRL's Third National Conference in Seattle in 1984. Having examined the 166 papers submitted for possible inclusion at that conference, Dodson has learned—the very hard way—just what most American academic librarians really need to know in order to write and speak better.

A written paper and its presented version should—except for the basic message they convey—be two quite different things. This course examines each in turn, tackling the written paper first and talking about its presentation second.

It begins with a look at writing in general, including spelling, punctuation, grammar, and jargon, and goes on to consider the various elements which make up a paper—organization, title, abstract, illustrations, and bibliography, to name a few.

The art of presenting a paper follows, where the discussion covers such topics as methods of delivering a paper, handling the question period, and avoiding common sins committed by speakers everywhere—novice and experienced alike. In fact, seasoned speakers are so often guilty of these sins that few people can afford to be smug about their prowess. A refresher course never hurt anyone!

The aim of this course is to make the process of writing and presenting a paper a treat instead of a trial—for author and audience alike. See the information in this issue on registration for ACRL continuing education courses. Try it—you just might need it!—*Samuel Rothstein, School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia.* ■■