

***Information Literacy in Music: An Instructor's Companion*, edited by Beth Christensen, Erin Conor, and Marian Ritter. Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-89579-856-5, xvi + 254 pp. \$125.**

Last fall I presented a conundrum to the freshmen in my introduction to music studies class. Handing them three different printed versions of the same piece of music, I asked them which was best. They stared at the scores for a few minutes before one finally asked, “Dr. Granade, what do you mean by ‘best?’” That student’s innocent and perfectly reasonable question sparked a long discussion on information literacy among the students and is the animating question behind A-R Editions newest volume in the Music Library Association Technical Reports Series. Titled *Information Literacy in Music: An Instructor's Companion* and edited by three music librarians (Beth Christensen, Erin Conor, and Marian Ritter) this volume attempts to be, as its back cover proudly proclaims, “a practical guide to information literacy instruction for busy librarians and music faculty.” In the lines that follow, I want to dig into two claims in that short sentence and see if they accurately describe the finished product: that this is a “practical guide” and that it is geared for “busy librarians and music faculty.” Following that discussion, I’ll provide a few practical concluding thoughts of my own on how you might incorporate this resource into your own teaching.

### A Practical Guide

When I first received the request to review *Information Literacy in Music*, I expected the book to be something along the lines of either Laurie Sampsel’s excellent *Music Research: A Handbook*, which we use at UMKC in our graduate bibliography courses as an introduction to a constellation of music resources, or Gregg Geary, Laura Snyder, Kathleen Abromeit, and Deborah Ann Campana’s *Music Library Instruction*, which covers the main issues in training modern

music students in resource management.<sup>1</sup> What I found instead was a collection of assignments currently in use at a range of North American institutions of higher education.<sup>2</sup> The subtitle “Companion” here is apt, as this book is not meant to be used in a classroom setting for training future pedagogues; instead, it is intended as a shelf reference for new and seasoned teachers, from which they can grab a new idea for infusing information literacy concepts into their classes. As the editors note in their introduction: “This book can be used by librarians and music faculty seeking quick, clear answers to the many obstacles their students may encounter in locating, evaluating, and using information.” In other words, don’t bother trying to read this book cover to cover as the dizzying array of approaches and topics will leave you unable to assimilate the treasures that lie within.

In order for a collection of assignments to be effective, useful, or even “practical,” a teacher must be able quickly to find the solution to those obstacles their students are encountering. To solve that issue, the editors provide three avenues into the collection:

1. **The Table of Contents:** The first thing a reader encounters upon opening up the book is the table of contents, here roughly grouped according to the primary music teaching areas found in North American institutions. The thirteen areas are Applied Music, Ethnomusicology, Interdisciplinary, Introduction to Research and Writing, Jazz, Music Business, Music History, Music Education, Music Therapy, Music Theory and Composition, Popular Music, Special Collections and Sheet Music, and Studying Music Abroad. The number of assignments detailed in each section betrays the focus of the book’s editors and authors. Music History receives the most examples by far, with eleven of the book’s thirty-nine assignments falling into this category, almost one-third of the book’s contents. Applied Music is second in the list, with six assignments devoted to its area. Jazz, Music Business, Music Education, and Music Theory and Composition each feature only one assignment in their area, and the others all contain between two and four assignments each.
2. **Assignments Categorized by Learning Outcome:** After the acknowledgments and the introduction comes a page that lists twenty of the thirty-nine assignments according to the learning outcome associated with them. Those outcomes are “Develop a Research Question,” “Develop Metacognitive Abilities,” “Engage with Sources,” “Evaluate Score Editions,” “Evaluate Sources,” and “Search Strategically.” “Engaging with Sources” contains the most assignments at four, while “Develop Metacognitive Abilities” features only one. The remaining outcomes contain two or three assignments.

1. Laurie Sampsel, *Music Research: A Handbook*, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) and Gregg Geary, Laura Snyder, Kathleen Abromeit, and Deborah Ann Campana, eds., *Music Library Instruction* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2004).

2. All of the institutions represented are in the United States and Canada but for one: Doshisha University in Kyoto City, Japan.

3. Assignments Categorized by Instruction Scenario: The final indexing of *Information Literacy in Music*'s contents divides thirty of the thirty-nine assignments according to the teaching strategies each employs. Those strategies include "Active Learning," "Peer Learning," "Scaffolded Assignments," "Teaching with Wikipedia," "Working with Music Reference Sources," and "Working with Primary Sources." "Active Learning" features thirteen of the assignments, the largest grouping of any of these categories at almost half of the indexed assignments, while "Teaching with Wikipedia conWikipedia" contains the fewest, with only two examples.

Unfortunately, even though the editors claim that this system is a "simple, easy-to-navigate format," it does present difficulties to the reader wanting to quickly dip into the book's shallow end and find a solution to a vexing classroom problem in information literacy. The two tools that categorize assignments by learning outcome and teaching strategy leave out nineteen and nine assignments respectively. As a result, you must use all three tools if you want to find the full range of assignments available. The editors are also not transparent in how they decided upon the learning outcomes and teaching strategies represented and how they grouped the assignments under these titles.

For an example of the practical difficulties a reader might encounter, consider Patricia Puckett Sasser's useful and insightful assignment "Envisioning Research: Information Literacy for Study Away." Sasser is addressing the difficulties of teaching information literacy to a group of students studying for a semester in Arezzo, Italy, who will be physically away from the resources available at their home institution of Furman University. The assignment presents a scaffolded process to pick a topic, develop a thesis, and find resources leading to writing a music history research paper. In the table of contents Sasser's assignment is located under the "Studying Music Abroad" section, but this is an assignment for a music history classroom and could be useful to faculty teaching an early music history course. Unfortunately, faculty only perusing the "Music History" section will miss it completely. Similarly, the assignment appears under the "Develop a Research Question" outcome but is missing from the teaching strategy list even though it is a scaffolded assignment. There are many opportunities to miss Sasser's wisdom since it is tucked away as the penultimate assignment in the book, and the tools available do not equally index all the available assignments.

### **Busy Librarians and Music Faculty**

Once a reader finds an assignment, the second claim, that Information Literacy in Music is tailor-made for "busy librarians and music faculty,"

becomes a relevant question. Thankfully, as an answer to this question I can give an unequivocal and resounding “yes!” Unlike James A. Davis’s collection *The Music History Classroom* and C. Matthew Balensuela’s edited volume *The Norton Guide to Teaching Music History*, this companion does not offer ruminations on how and why we teach.<sup>3</sup> Those two recent collections feature longer essays with overarching principles that take time to digest and then apply to your own teaching. *Information Literacy in Music*, on the other hand, offers little on the “why” of an assignment and focuses instead on the “how.” Let’s look at one example of an assignment I am planning on adapting for my own teaching.

Kathleen DeLaurenti’s “Critical Approaches to Information Literacy and Authentic Assessment Using Wikipedia” addresses head-on the propensity of students to Google a topic and focus their energy on the first hit, usually an article from Wikipedia. In an interdisciplinary course called “Pink Noise: Women Making Electronic Music,” librarian DeLaurenti partnered with instructor Christopher DeLaurenti to craft an assignment where the students created or edited a Wikipedia article about a female electronic music composer. She presents the assignment’s learning outcomes, describes the assessment procedures, details a few of the hiccups and triumphs during its implementation, and then provides the full text of the assignment through a weblink and an overview of what the students accomplished week-by-week. Over the span of six pages DeLaurenti presents a fully realized assignment ready to import into another class, complete with milestones for the students and syllabus language for the teacher. Her particular assignment is much larger than the one I wish to make but is already serving as a guide to my own version. For a busy faculty member attempting to manage several courses each semester, this kind of no-nonsense advice is a lifesaver, particularly in the area of information literacy, where many readers of this *Journal*, like myself, might feel a desperate need for assignments but a hesitation as to how to go about designing one.

Want to help your students learn how to evaluate printed scores of music? Or create an effective annotated bibliography? Or use primary sources in a local archive? Or research an opera role? Those and thirty-five other scenarios are detailed in *Information Literacy in Music: An Instructor's Companion*. While there are some issues in finding the exact assignment you need, once you arrive at its place in the collection, you will discover a practical guide to incorporating information literacy into your busy course schedule. Christensen, Conor, and

3. James A. Davis, ed., *The Music History Classroom* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012) and C. Matthew Balensuela, ed., *The Norton Guide to Teaching Music History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019). Both of these excellent volumes feature articles by many of the contributors to *Information Literacy in Music*.

Ritter's book is truly a companion to music faculty, and it has already found a place on my personal reference shelf.

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