

Learning how to teach unfamiliar subjects: a case study of the academic writing courses at the University of Cambridge Medical Library

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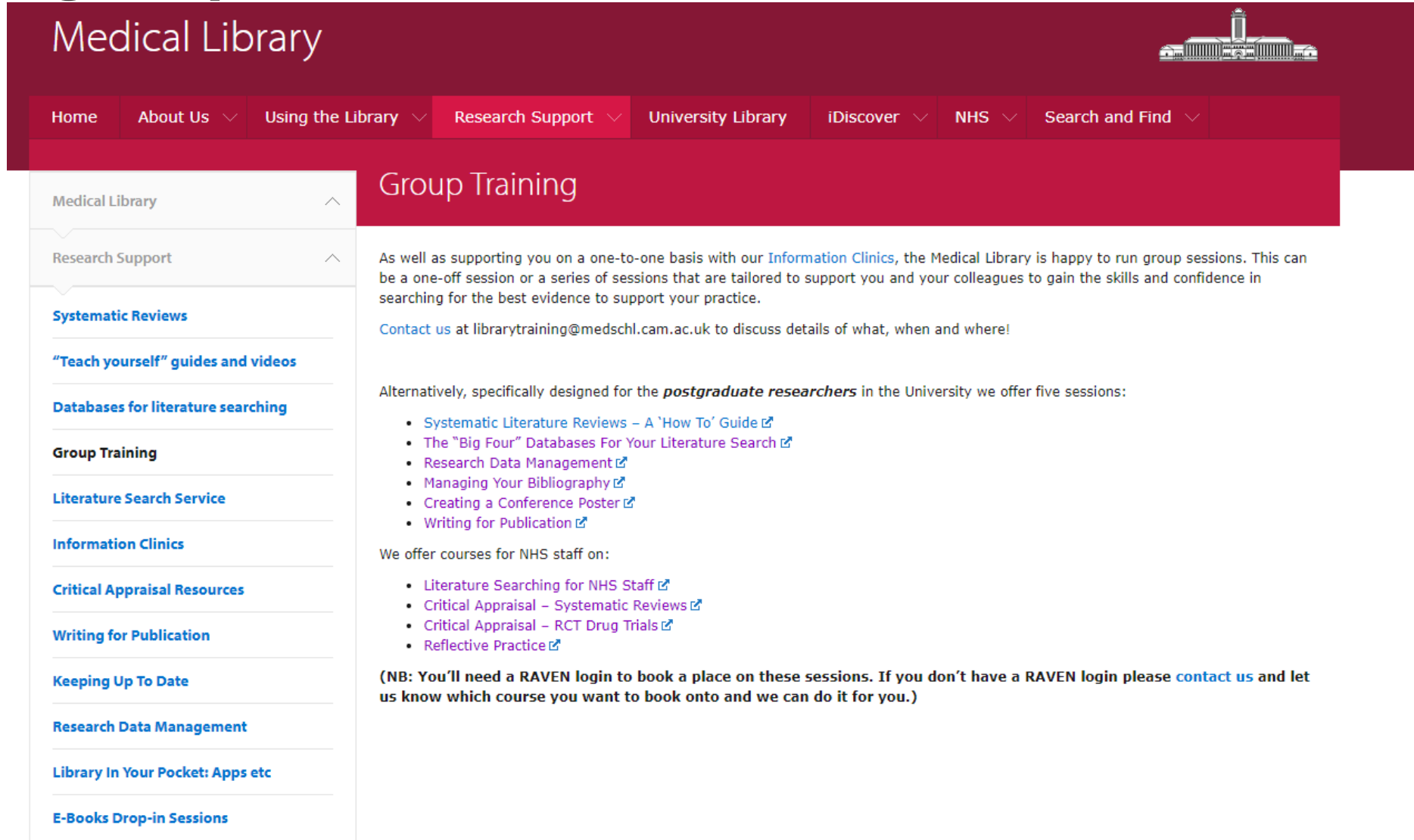
Assistant Librarians (Research Support, Teaching and Learning),
University of Cambridge Medical Library

Introduction

- Eleanor – traditionally qualified librarian, has worked in academic or health libraries for entire professional life
- Veronica – no library/information science degree, came to librarianship as career change after doing a PhD in the humanities
- Medical Library – serves the University of Cambridge and the NHS in the East of England
- We are responsible for the training and research support provided by the library



Training we provide



The screenshot shows the Medical Library website with a dark red header. The navigation menu includes: Home, About Us, Using the Library, Research Support (highlighted), University Library, iDiscover, NHS, and Search and Find. A logo of a building is in the top right. A sidebar on the left lists various services, with 'Group Training' selected. The main content area is titled 'Group Training' and contains text about one-to-one and group sessions, contact information, and a list of five sessions for postgraduate researchers. It also lists courses for NHS staff and includes a note about the RAVEN login requirement.

Medical Library

Home About Us Using the Library **Research Support** University Library iDiscover NHS Search and Find

Group Training

As well as supporting you on a one-to-one basis with our [Information Clinics](#), the Medical Library is happy to run group sessions. This can be a one-off session or a series of sessions that are tailored to support you and your colleagues to gain the skills and confidence in searching for the best evidence to support your practice.

Contact us at librarytraining@medschl.cam.ac.uk to discuss details of what, when and where!

Alternatively, specifically designed for the *postgraduate researchers* in the University we offer five sessions:

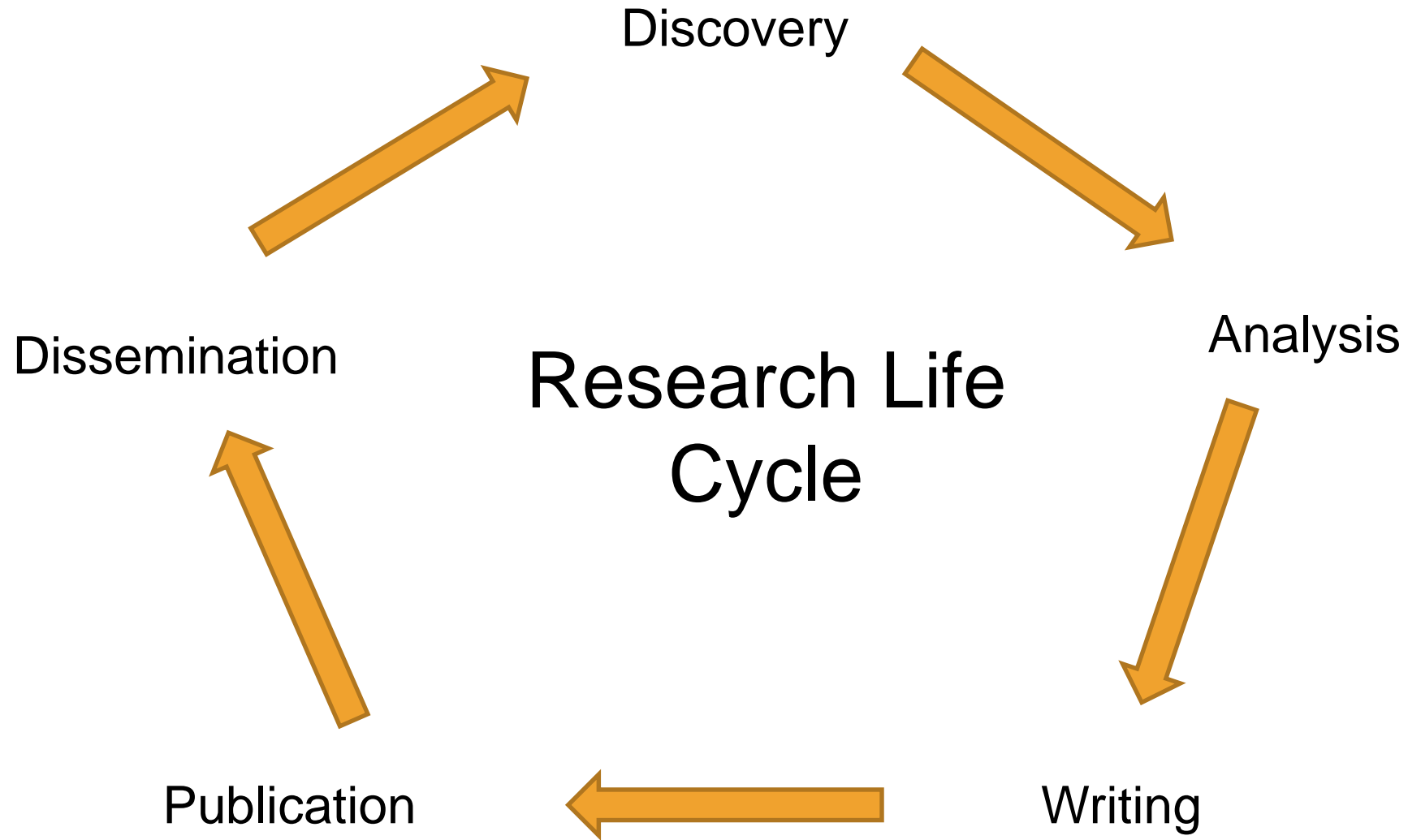
- [Systematic Literature Reviews – A 'How To' Guide](#)
- [The "Big Four" Databases For Your Literature Search](#)
- [Research Data Management](#)
- [Managing Your Bibliography](#)
- [Creating a Conference Poster](#)
- [Writing for Publication](#)

We offer courses for NHS staff on:

- [Literature Searching for NHS Staff](#)
- [Critical Appraisal – Systematic Reviews](#)
- [Critical Appraisal – RCT Drug Trials](#)
- [Reflective Practice](#)

(NB: You'll need a RAVEN login to book a place on these sessions. If you don't have a RAVEN login please [contact us](#) and let us know which course you want to book onto and we can do it for you.)





Other libraries

- Situation in Cambridge – to our knowledge only one other library teaches writing with a publication focus
- Aspects of the publication process taught elsewhere (e.g. scholarly communication department, to graduate students within individual faculties)
- Situation in UK – 38% of university libraries that deliver training offer writing training. 33% don't, 29% have unclear details as to the type of training they offer.
- Of those offering writing training, 71% offer solely assignment help (essays, undergrad dissertations, presentations).

Why writing courses?

- Saw there was a gap
- Users were asking for them at other training sessions
- For the convenience and comfort of our users
- Meant our training filled the whole research life cycle – we were with researchers at every stage

What did we do?

Skills and techniques



Draw on own experience

- Reflective practice and writing fundamental to professional development as librarians – already familiar with it in another context
- Eleanor has a science degree so had familiarity with structure of science publications
- Veronica has experience of publishing academically, although in a completely different field to that of our library users
- Both also understood requirements of medical publications via teaching critical appraisal courses

Learning from others

- Who was already teaching writing for publication, and what could we borrow?
- This is a continuous process – we still attend presentations/workshops on aspects of writing and publication
- We also adapt our existing courses in response to questions and comments from past attendees

Met with colleagues

- When developing new courses, we always try to reach out to people teaching similar material locally
- Where possible, we adapt their existing content
- This helps pick up useful tips, resources to include – and what to avoid

Own research

- Maintain current awareness in developments in education/library research on teaching academic writing
- Keep up to date with the publication experiences of users who have come to us for training
- Keep an eye out for useful writing tools and resources to highlight in our teaching

Reflecting

- Our courses are not static – we adapt and change them based on user feedback, questions that come up in sessions, and our own reflections

What did we learn?



Impact

- Courses are among our most popular – frequently fully booked
- Encourages interest in our other library training courses
- Increases visibility of Medical Library – attendees often come from other faculties
- Facilitates networking among attendees – even opportunities for them to co-author papers

Next steps

- Evaluate provision and content – make sure we're meeting needs
- New opportunities – are we covering the full range of academic writing?
- Now teaching a course on how to write a protocol

Conclusions

- Don't be daunted with the unfamiliar
- Be realistic and upfront about journal rejection rates and how difficult it is to get published
- Teach training sessions in an interconnected way – highlight how everything fits together
- Ask for help

Any questions?

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