Diary of an early career librarian: 
Bullet journaling and the mediation of past, present, and future

What do I need to do in the next 30 minutes? That’s a nice idea, but it’ll take years of relationship building to realize it. How do I pace myself to teach a three hour Foundations class? What was that thing Acquisitions said about DDA six months ago? They’re replacing the furniture on that floor now, maybe in two years I can get new chairs… I should write that down, I don’t want to forget it in the next hour/month/year/5 years.

This constant sense of juggling multiple timelines, of acting and reacting in the present, trying to plan while accepting an unpredictable future, considering the implications of the past organizationally and personally...that is the kernel of transitioning from “student” to “professional”.

When I graduated from library school in 2017, I finished my last semester of part time student work and supplemented my income with on-call and part time "official" librarian work. And I felt lucky—I was lucky, in fact, to get great experience, to take something abstract like time, and to then construct some of kind of organization system in a tangible space. Not the physical and intellectual distinction between a yellow legal pad to a bullet journal. Because bullet journaling requires you to

Well, this evolution from precarious to permanent, from chronos to kairos, from student to new professional—it lies in the physical and intellectual distinction between a yellow legal pad to a bullet journal. Because bullet journaling requires you to take something abstract like time, and to then construct some kind of organization system in a tangible space. Not the arbitrary way of organizing time that a pre-designed planner foists upon you, but a way that requires thought, reflection, and creativity. And that’s a good place to start.

And unlike most things I write on twitter, I actually gave the second part of this some thought. Because it’s true, there had been a lot of milestones (and pages) I needed for different responsibilities, what kinds of sections I would need to refer to in the future, and how the organization of the journal would reflect my own priorities.

I've continued using these, but I've also realized that what this lacks is a year-organizational and personal—what kind of sections I needed for different responsibilities, what kinds of sections I would need to refer to in the future, and how the organization of the journal would reflect my own priorities.

So what does this have to do with bullet journaling?

Reflect and respond! Use the prompts to the left and pin them below.
ABOUT THIS ZINE

It was made to compliment the poster "Diary of an early career librarian: Bullet journaling and the mediation of past, present, and future" presented at the ARLIS/NA annual conference in Salt Lake City, UT in March 2019.
WHAT'S IN THIS ZINE?

WHY BULLET JOURNAL?

WHAT GEAR DO I NEED?

GETTING STARTED

SUGGESTED SECTIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

KEEP IT PERSONAL
The creator of the bullet journaling system, Ryder Carroll, describes the process as "a mindfulness practice disguised as a productivity system"*, and in practice its entire methodology is premised on intentionality as well as productivity. Part of this practice is what Carroll calls "migration", which is essentially transferring ongoing or unfinished tasks to new pages or sections. Rewriting these things or moving them around in your bullet journal is where the mediation of time comes in, and where you have space to reflect on what you're doing and how you're doing it. The act of assessing the effectiveness of your bullet journal, in my experience, can be a reflective act.

It's also designed to be modular, so you can use the templates you like, ignore the ones you don't, and develop ones for your unique needs.

Oh, and because you can decorate it to your heart's content, it's like adult coloring...but actually useful.

*https://bulletjournal.com/pages/about
WHY BULLET JOURNAL (FOR LIBRARIANS)?

Because our work is sometimes a tightly structured set of workflows and processes...and sometimes it’s a will o’ the wisp-style moving target that requires us to wear many hats, put out fires, and wonder, “Is this in my job description?” or, “Why I am using so many metaphors, I never wear hats!?”

And because of this, typical store-bought planners that assume a one-size-fits all approach to organizing time means that some pages are too small, some get wasted, and most of them force us into organizing many strands of time into something that's linear.

Also, those pre-designed planners don’t allow us to understand our time holistically—we can schedule our professional selves, but doesn’t include spaces for us to care for our personal selves. And as we all know, those don’t cease to exist when we enter the library.
WHAT GEAR DO I NEED?

The internet (also known as "the web") is full of guides for beginning a bullet journal that start with a list of stuff you need to buy (stuff that they are probably trying to sell you, more often). And hey, if you like buying stuff, go for it! But honestly? Don’t let that stop you from beginning your journal right here, right now, with some stuff you might already have on hand.

Seriously. That’s it. The goal of this is to make something you’ll use all the time, everywhere. Creating a bullet journal that’s too precious or that requires too many supplies might actually be too much of a burden to use it in situ. For example, rather than relying on a color-coded system for organizing your to do list, how about using a set of symbols or checkmarks that can be done with whatever writing instrument you have on hand?
* Lined, unlined, grid, whatever your preference. If you have a couple hours to spare and some bookbinding supplies on hand, take this DIY a step further and make your own journal!

**Use for your table of contents and other stuff that might change/is tentative/in draft form

Should’ve known better than to bullet journal with stone tablets. Pencil next time!
NO, REALLY, WHAT GEAR DO I NEED?

Okay, so maybe you want to make the preset pages in your bullet journal a little more decorative, or you have a lot of time you’d like to devote toward making your bullet journal really personal. That’s great! Just try to avoid over complicating the types of supplies you’ll need to use your bullet journal day in, day out.

When setting up my bullet journal, I like to use:

MULTIPENS . HIGHLIGHTERS . WASHI TAPE . PAPER SLICERS WITH SAFETY TIPS . A RULER

The great thing is that if you love to watercolor, for instance, you can totally go for it when you set up your title pages, headers, etc. Just remember that getting too involved might make it harder to adjust the organization of your bullet journal as your priorities or context inevitably shifts.
GETTING STARTED

First thing’s first, it’s time to put together your table of contents—easily the most important part of your bullet journal, and what makes it different from a standard notebook. This is where you’ll be able to refer to sections and quickly find the information you’re looking for. Since these are tips for librarians, we don’t need to belabor the importance of search and retrieval!

To get started, you’ll need to take some time to sit down and brainstorm. What have you been working on lately—for the last several months or years? What are some major areas of your work that can maybe be grouped together? What are some areas that might change in the next year (for example, committees you’re serving on)? How much writing do you expect you’ll need to do?

The suggested sections in the following pages are a place to start, but are by no means exhaustive.
1. Start numbering your pages (if you don’t already have a numbered journal, that is) by marking only front of every page with odd numbers.

2. Now that you know how many pages you are dealing with, it’s time to work backwards to figure out what page each section should start on. I know I need a lot of room for general to do lists, so I start by assigning that section the last third of the pages.

3. Keep a rough draft of your table of contents while you’re working on this!

4. When you’re ready to write in your table of contents, leave yourself extra lines in the more general sections or sections you anticipate might expand.

5. Once more, with feeling...USE PENCIL!
WHAT ABOUT DECOR?

As mentioned earlier, if you’re got the time, inclination, and supplies to gussy up your bullet journal, now is a good time to do it. If you think you’d like to decorate some pages but you haven’t found that perfect washi tape yet, you can also leave space for your decor.

When it comes to decorating, the sky is totally the limit, and that’s one of the best things about bullet journaling. Keeping the functional pages simple is good for everyday use, but some of your more stable pages—like calendars, title pages, and others—are a perfect place to express yourself, show off your artistic ability, or just create pages that suit your design sensibility.
ODE TO WASHI TAPE

Washi tape makes a particularly great decorative element for bullet journals because it can be easily removed in the event that you need you shift around pages. A page full of washi tape (or even stickers) can give the paper some extra heft that is helpful in signaling title pages or pages where new sections begin.

But really though, if this zine is any indication, where my skill with pen, ink, paint, etc., ends...well, my washi tape collection begins.
Unsurprisingly, the sections you go with will have a lot to do with your job duties! Some of these sections will reflect that I’m an art librarian at an academic institution, so a lot of my work is focused on collections and spaces, outreach and liaison work, etc. But the idea is that you take your responsibilities, maybe existing planners, journals, or post its, and look for common themes or things that would benefit by being co-located.

**Calendar Pages**

*Year at a glance* (with color coded calendars for tracking vacations, conferences, classes, and personal appointments)

*Monthly pages* (can be referred to at the start of every month to make sure enough time is allocated to reach all deadlines; I prefer to include important personal reminders too)

*Annual goals* (your own goals or if you do performance evaluation; also good for keeping track of what you’ve done all year!)

*Monthly meeting notes* – with supervisor and supervisees (each month has side by side agenda and minutes)
Table of Contents

Year at a glance  
Monthly pages  
Habit tracker  
2019 goals  
2019 monthly meeting notes  
Supervisor  
Department  
Collection ideas  
Instruction ideas  
Writing/conference ideas  
BT ideas  
Exhibit ideas  
Artwork ideas  
Committee notes  
Biographies  
AFSU information  
Viscum phases
SUGGESTED SECTIONS FOR LIBRARIANS CONTINUED

Reference pages (for use in future project planning and goal setting):

- Collections ideas
- Instruction ideas
- Writing/conference ideas
- Other projects – Digital humanities/art history, displays/exhibits, programming

Etc.

Institutional committees and working groups (leave room for expansion as needed)

Professional organizations, working groups, committees (leave room for expansion as needed)

To do notes (consider organizing these pages by the type, length, or difficulty of task)
4th floor exhibit cases

24" D
14" H
18" W

21" D
19" W

22" D
22" W

Matthew Tedder
Courtney Kessel

10-5
Thurs & Fridays

Set weekly meetings
Meeting with Kelly
Draft email and send notes to
Shirri

ATT planning
Talk to Kennedy
Regional artists
Parth's
Student workers
NFV
Make

Talk to Kelly

Carla, George, Pete

Majik.

Kim (Little)
Parke

Wes
Bill

Welcome email

Heaven, Joey, Jacob
KEEP IT PERSONAL

The last tip that this zine has to offer is this: KEEP IT PERSONAL. So much of the messaging around planners and organizers and project management is increasing productivity, but we all know that when mental and physical wellbeing is sacrificed in the name of productivity, everything suffers.

There are a lot of ways to take care of yourself, and everyone's preference is different. I, for example, can quickly let myself slide into only getting up from my desk to buy more coffee, but I know that by 3pm I will bear a streaking resemblance to a blobfish. So my activity tracker gives me the satisfaction of checking off every time I walk to work, go to the gym, get a refill on my water, fill up my thermos in the morning, etc..

What works for you? Are you a journaler? A doodler? A recipe brainstormer? No matter what it is, giving yourself room in your bullet journal is a positive step towards making room in your routine.
SELF PORTRAIT AS BLOBFISH