

LAS LEARNING ALERTS

Library Association of Singapore



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The LAS Learning Alerts, an initiative by the Training and Development Committee, aims to keep librarians informed about the latest trends and updates within our library network.

Please contact us at training@las.org.sg if you wish to contribute materials for LAS Learning Alerts.

Digital Skills for Librarians

This issue features two librarians whose teams are reshaping the way library staff work with AI. At NTU Library, Vincent's team adopts a "start small" approach, using concise awareness sessions and hands-on projects to build confidence with new tools. At NIE Library, Jessie demonstrates how a problem-first mindset can transform AI from an unreliable chatbot into a dependable collaborator that streamlines hours of repetitive work. Together, their experiences offer a practical and encouraging reference for librarians beginning their own AI journey.



Jessie Tang

Librarian

Scholarly Communications

NIE Library

Could you briefly introduce yourself and your current role:

I am Jessie Tang, a Librarian in the Scholarly Communications Unit at NIE Library. My work falls into three areas: research impact analysis (like bibliometric and citation reports), training and outreach (like webinars on research impact), and repository management (archiving in the NIE Digital Repository and NIE Data Repository).

What sparked your interest in digital skills development, especially regarding librarians' AI upskilling?

I have always had an interest in new tools that can help me complete my work more efficiently and effectively. When everyone

first started using ChatGPT, I was not at all enthusiastic about it. Mainly because ChatGPT gives different answers every time, even to the same question. My role actually demands a lot of accuracy—a single incorrect citation or metric can affect the credibility of my unit, so there's no room for guesswork. I wasn't quite able to use AI directly, or if I did use AI, I would still need to check and verify every output which was even more time consuming.

The spark ignited when I started to realize I could use AI not just as a chatbot, but as a collaborator to help me create solutions that produce the accuracy I needed for my role. The real shift happened when I stopped asking 'Can AI give me the right answer?' and started asking 'Can AI help me build a process that gets me the right answer every time?' It felt like learning to delegate to a very smart but inexperienced assistant—great at generating ideas but needs clear guardrails.

Can you share a specific example where applying AI skills made a meaningful impact on your work or library services?

Let me give you a concrete example using the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR)—a common metric for journal influence. Before AI, obtaining category ranks for a batch of journals can take hours. Now it takes under a minute.

In NIE, when we reference SJR, we not only look at the quartiles (whether a journal is in the top 25%, second 25%, etc.), but we also look at the exact rank and percentile within its category. To make things more complex, a single journal can belong to multiple subject categories, and each category has its own rank and percentile. This information cannot be obtained by simply searching for the journal title or ISSN. SCImago organizes journals by subject categories like 'Education' or 'Library Science.' To find a journal's rank for each category, we had to download each category's ranking as a separate file, search for the journal inside that file, and manually calculate the percentile ($\text{rank} \div \text{total journals} \times 100\%$). Each Journal could have multiple categories.

One day I decided to bring this time-consuming problem to AI (I was testing Google AI Studio). I uploaded an example file downloaded from <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php> that had about 10 journals (to keep the token count low) and told AI what I wanted. It gave me a Python script. There was a lot of initial setup because I wasn't a programmer, so I had to install Python and some extra code packages the script required before I could even test whether it worked. Of course, my first few attempts did not work. The script could find the quartile, but it couldn't figure out which subject category's ranking I needed—it kept pulling the wrong one.

This frustration with failure led me to further investigate the actual structure of the SJR file. I learned that my own frustration was the best teacher—when the script failed, I was forced to understand the data structure at a much deeper level than if I'd done everything manually. Once I understood the data structure, I was better at explaining to the AI what I wanted, and it was able to give me the results I wanted. I remember staring at the correct output and thinking—I just saved myself hundreds of hours going forward. Like all collaboration, there is a bit of friction at the start, but once we get to know each other, we can work much better.

What used to take me a full afternoon for a batch of 50 journals now runs in under a minute. That script worked so well that I turned it into a Chrome extension. Now, instead of running a Python script manually, anyone can install the extension, load the SJR file downloaded, go to a Google Scholar profile, and click a button. The extension automatically pulls each journal's category, rank, and percentile—no coding required. From then on, I used AI to ideate, problem-solve, and create solutions.

What approaches have been most effective in library training staff in AI skills?

I think that NIE Library has provided its staff with lots of training opportunities. We had external facilitators as well as NIE's own IT Department conducting lessons. I personally also attended some online certification courses from Google and Anthropic (the company behind Claude). But the most effective method, in my opinion, is to have a project in mind and learn by doing your own project. All of my colleagues definitely use AI in some way or another—I see new initiatives and approaches during every meeting. Those sharing moments are invaluable because you get to see how AI can be applied in completely different scenarios, often sparking ideas you wouldn't have come to on your own.

If you could give one piece of advice to librarians starting their AI journey, what would it be?

Start using AI on something small, something repetitive, or something you don't enjoy doing, and see if AI can help you change that.

I personally think that we need a mindset shift from treating AI as a tool, a software, or an app, to seeing AI as a collaborator—a colleague you can bounce ideas off or check in with.

Could you briefly introduce yourself and your team's role in digital skills development for Library staff?

My name is Vincent, and I am currently a Senior Librarian with the Digital Innovations team in NTU Library. Our team works on various initiatives involving emerging digital platforms and technologies, including, of course, generative A.I. tools.

Over the past twelve months, we have dedicated our efforts to equipping colleagues with the foundational competencies and digital skills required to implement automation and AI tools effectively within their daily operational workflows.

What sparked your team's interest in supporting librarians' AI upskilling and digital skills development?

Our team was originally exploring ways to leverage the new technologies and tools that were emerging in the aftermath of the proliferation of generative A.I. chatbots.

We were looking for ways to automate tedious, repetitive work, and we recognized an opportunity to go beyond project-specific solutions. By sharing what we learned internally, we could empower our staff to independently utilize these tools, thereby driving a more organic digital transformation across the library.



Vincent Wong
Senior Librarian
Digital Innovations
NTU Library

What approaches have been most effective in training library staff in AI skills?

Our team has found that it is effective to start small. Instead of trying to initiate large projects across teams that may generate apprehension right at first, we implemented a series of bite-sized, 15-to-20-minute awareness sessions distributed throughout the year. These sessions focused on demonstrating specific tools within the context of familiar, daily tasks, effectively grounding complex and perhaps daunting new tools and technologies through practical application.

These sessions provide concrete demonstrations that show the value of such tools in simple operational tasks. Based on the feedback we received from these sessions, our approach made it easier for our colleagues to want to give it a try – over 90% of respondents indicated that they felt comfortable trying these tools on their own after the sessions.

From there, our team worked on using this foundation as a stepping stone to encourage colleagues to think about applying these tools to operations in their own teams, encouraging staff to scale these applications toward larger, team-based automation projects and workflow redesigns.

We followed up these smaller, bite-sized sessions with standard workshops that were organised and conducted for not just the Library, but also for other colleagues in the University, to impart skills that could be translated into actual projects and implementations, turning theoretical learning into practical application.

Can you share a specific example where applying AI skills made a meaningful impact on your work or library services?

One notable success involved a Library colleague who, after attending one of our sessions, re-evaluated a routine but essential workflow to create posters that recognize the recipients of monthly service excellence awards. By collaborating with various teams, she was able to automate the process to routinely generate high-quality posters every month in a fraction of the time previously required.

More importantly, she shared that she started thinking about ways in which other processes may be similarly improved, and that the endeavour encouraged her to proactively identify other processes that may benefit from optimization.

If you could give one piece of advice to librarians starting their AI journey, what would it be?

For library professionals beginning their journey with AI, my primary recommendation is to prioritize small, concrete applications. By focusing on immediate, tangible value-adds rather than trying to master the entire technological landscape at once, you can better navigate the rapid pace of development while ensuring that your learning efforts translate directly into operational success.

Learning Resources:

AI Fundamentals by AI Singapore

<https://aifundamentals.aisingapore.org/>

Focus: Free AI Training Programme (General)

Distributed AI Research Institute Publications

<https://dair-institute.org/publications/>

Focus: Articles, Research, and Books about AI Impact

Trustworthy and Democratic AI Courses by OpenLearn Create

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=2051>

Focus: Online courses about AI fundamentals, awareness, and development

The Alan Turing Institute Learning Platform

<https://www.turing.ac.uk/skills/learn-and-apply>

Focus: Comprehensive Learning Platform with a focus on IT and AI related skills

IFLA 23 Resources to get up to speed on AI in 2023

<https://www.ifla.org/g/ai/23-resources-to-get-up-to-speed-on-ai-in-2023/>

Focus: Variety of information about AI for Librarians

Libraries Connected: Key Digital Skills Resources

<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/key-digital-skills-resources-and-links>

Focus: Variety of resources on Digital Skills for Public Librarians

Digital Skills Library

<https://digitalskillslibrary.org/>

Focus: General Online Courses and Resources for Digital Skills (General)

LIBER Europe's Resources for Librarians

<https://libereurope.eu/selected-resources/>

Focus: Webinars, explainers, video archives of various Library topics

Upcoming webinars and conferences:

United for Libraries Virtual 2026

https://www.ala.org/united/events_conferences/virtual

28 – 30 July 2026
Online

ALA United Virtual delivers an engaging online learning experience for library trustees, Friends groups, foundations, and staff. Participate in expert-led sessions, interactive discussions, and practical workshops focused on strengthening library leadership, advocacy, governance, and community engagement.

IFLA WLIC 2026

<https://2026.ifla.org/>

10 – 13 August 2026
Busan Exhibition and Convention Center
Busan, South Korea

IFLA WLIC 2026 in Busan brings together library and information professionals worldwide to exchange ideas, explore emerging trends, and advance the future of libraries through diverse programmes, presentations, and networking opportunities.

International Conference on Libraries, Information Society 2026 (ICoLIS 2026)

<https://umevent.um.edu.my/ICOLIS2026>

21 – 23 October 2026
Resorts World Langkawi
Langkawi, Malaysia

ICoLIS 2026 provides a collaborative platform for library and information professionals, researchers, and students to exchange ideas, share best practices, and explore emerging issues shaping libraries, information, and society.

Upcoming webinars and conferences:

*International
Association of
University Libraries
Conference (IATUL)*
<https://iatul2026.uj.ac.za/>

15 – 19 November 2026
University of Johannesburg
South Africa

IATUL 2026 provides a global forum for academic library leaders and professionals to examine technological, financial, and workforce transformations, while exploring innovative strategies to strengthen the future impact of university libraries.