Privacy, a concept that provides individuals with the right to control how their personal information is used, is one of the core values of librarianship. This is so because the practice of librarianship is a patron-driven discipline closely allied with modern democratic values such as freedom of access to information as well as freedom from external powers—governmental, corporate, administrative, or what have you—attempting to limit such freedom of access. Privacy is also a core value of librarianship because librarianship in our time is one of a larger set of disciplines associated with information management and digital security. As librarians, we are entrusted with the privacy and confidentiality of our patrons’ and staff’s information and our patrons and staff, in turn, have a right to expect us to protect that information. Furthermore, in addition to keeping information private, librarians should also be able to explain which information should be kept private and also why any specific pieces of information fall under privacy constraints, if for no other reason than in order to justify the high estimation librarians have of privacy.

It is crucial to bear in mind that privacy encompasses various distinct topics, including safeguarding free speech and protecting health information, rather than being a singular concept. Consequently, privacy and its various constituent aspects can be a difficult concept to understand in the digital age as well as a complicated concept, due to its quite varied aspects. Yet, by learning the basics of information science, digital security, and the principles associated with the value of privacy, librarians can better understand their rights and responsibilities when it comes to protecting online privacy and undertake better practices regarding privacy.

The Ultimate Privacy Field Guide: A Workbook of Best Practices, a publication of the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, is intended to be used as part of an ongoing effort to improve the privacy practices of libraries and, given its comprehensive treatment of the issues, could in principle aid other organizations as well. The book covers a number of central topics, from the basics of digital security to practices and policies surrounding user data and how to talk about privacy with others, how our language affects the way we use technology, as well as how to address issues outside of technology being just some examples of what the book provides. It also offers guidance on conducting privacy audits, negotiating contracts and licensing agreements, writing privacy policies, and addressing privacy with vendors. It is, as the title suggests, a “field guide,” comprehensive enough to give the reader an overview of the entire field and succinct enough to give easy access to the essential information in the field. While by no means covering (or intended to cover) every issue associated with privacy in library settings, it is a valuable resource for libraries. By providing a broad understanding of the essentials concerning policies, procedures, technology, and best practices, the book is crucial for being a librarian in the digital age while also offering the important foundations for further knowledge and study in this area.

Besides being an excellent informational handbook—designed for use in school, public, and academic settings of all types and sizes—the book is also an easy-to-use workbook, packed with practical, hands-on exercises to guide librarians toward creating a more privacy-focused library. Both the book’s style and relatively low price make it an outstanding source for teaching courses on the ins and outs of privacy to librarians, library staff, and library administrators. The book is not only a valuable resource of information, it also aids the reader through its exercises to develop the skills necessary for reflecting on privacy issues as well as how best to manage them. The exercises in chapter 7, “Vendors and Privacy,” were especially helpful in creating a check list in what to add for contract negotiations regarding privacy. The “creating
persuasive arguments" section in chapter 2, “How to Talk About Privacy,” was also quite valuable in helping to create a communication plan on the importance of privacy in libraries.

The book is well organized, easy to read, and very practical. The sections are presented in logical order, beginning with the basics and progressing to more complex topics. There are clear headings, allowing readers to locate relevant information quickly. While not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of privacy in libraries, the authors hope that this guide will help library staff become more aware of the importance of protecting patron privacy, both in regard to their own actions and also with respect to the actions of others.—Kristy White (whitek9@duq.edu), Duquesne University