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Testing and Templates: Building Effective Research Guides

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Testing and Templates

Building Effective Research Guides

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Our Environment

The Savannah College of Art and Design

- 12,000 students and 670 faculty across 5 locations
- 40 Majors
- Over 2000 classes offered per quarter
- Access to 200k books, 1800 physical serial titles, 90 databases
- 215 existing guides, 14 current guide authors
  - 45 subject-specific guides
  - 97 course-specific guides
  - 28 other published guides
Opportunity

We wanted to do this because...

- Transition to LibGuides 2.0
- Staffing changes
- Growing student population and course offerings

Can we develop a template that can be applied across course and subject guides?
Planning: Literature Review

● What did we look at?
  ○ Steve Krug’s *Rocket Surgery Made Easy* and *Don’t Make Me Think*, related website
  ○ Articles from librarians at University of Washington libraries and Metropolitan State University that conducted usability tests on LibGuides
  ○ Articles on teaching with LibGuides
  ○ Recent blog & social media discussions on critical pedagogy and research guides

● What outcomes did other usability tests see?
  ○ LibGuides are built for librarians rather than students
  ○ Too much content, too much jargon, too confusing
Procedure: Planning

- Permissions
  - No IRB, but did require leadership approval

- Resource requirements
  - Minimal budget for student incentives
  - Used existing equipment for audio & visual recording

- Call for participants

- Writing the script
  - Modified from Steve Krug’s “Don’t Make Me Think” script

- Writing the questions
  - Specific to common tasks and processes
  - Consider question order - it can have an impact!
Procedure: Testing

● **Student disclosure & agreement**
  ○ Usability.gov

● **Technology setup**
  ○ Capturing student’s screen and audio via Adobe Connect
  ○ Projected screen overhead for librarians to observe student’s navigation (without hanging over their shoulder)

● **Asking the questions, taking notes**
  ○ Had at least 2 librarians in the room for all test sessions
  ○ Note-taker observed student’s navigation and verbal/facial reactions to the questions and guide experience
Procedure: Testing Breakdown

- Tested 10 students in total
  - 5 graduate, 5 undergrad
  - 9 majors
  - 3 male, 7 female
  - 5 international
- Average test length: ~28 minutes
- Shortest test: 19 minutes
- Longest test: 45 minutes

Note: After first round of 6 students, we revised one question and altered the question order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Class Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Design</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Management</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Design</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Task List

Course guide-specific
1. For your Art History (or "20th Century Art History") class, you are writing a paper about Gerhard Richter, a contemporary German painter. Your professor wants you to use scholarly, academic articles. Find one article about Richter for your paper that meets these criteria using the library guides.

Subject based (open-ended)
2. For a design history class, you need to find an image of a chair designed by Charles Eames. You'll be printing it and using it in a PowerPoint presentation to your class, so it needs to be good quality. Locate one image or resource you can use to find an appropriate image.

3. You're taking a class on scriptwriting for an animation class. You've read parts of your textbook but want to learn more about storytelling for animation/animated films in general. Find a resource you can use in your paper using the research guides.

4. You're taking a course in your discipline and want to learn what current professionals in your field/industry are writing about or working on. Locate a resource on your topic, published within the last 3 years.

5. You are taking a course in your discipline and need to learn more about the materials you'll be using for your final design. Your professor wants you to use books or databases for this. Find a resource that meets these criteria using the guides.

Pre and Post-Test Questions

Considerations for Observers

Pre-test Questions:
What is your name?
What is your year?
What is your major?
Have you ever seen a research guide before?
Have you, with a class, had a library introduction/orientation?
If yes, which class/es?
How often do you use the library?
How often do you use the library website?

General questions to consider for the OBSERVER:
Were any prompting or assistance necessary other than clarifying the question/task?
Did the student complete the task?
Did they read the descriptions by the search boxes or database choices?
Did they go back and repeat a search or move forward?
Did they have problems with the navigation (not noticing tabs/dropdowns/multiple links under subject guide headings)
Were they confused by the descriptions or lack of descriptions?

General questions to ask the STUDENT:
What terms did you scan for when trying to find the appropriate subject guide, database, or resource on the guides?
What might someone find confusing about these guides?
How likely would you be to use these guides in the future?
What might someone find to be useful in the guide?
Rate your level of ease in using this guide (1 – not at all easy ⇒ 10; very easy, everything worked the way I expect it to)
Do the tabs make sense?
What does (potentially jargon-y term) mean to you?
How many places do you generally search for resources/information?
What have you done in the past when you can’t find a useful resource?
What made you choose one resource over another?
Did you read the descriptions by search boxes or databases?
Did you get the results you expected after running a search?
What kinds of results did you expect from running this search?
What do you do if you’re lost or confused/Where do you look for help? (On the website/guide)
Procedure: Wrap Up

- Review recordings and write transcripts
- Discuss: what factors determine if the student successfully completed the tasks?
- Look for common elements and themes
  - Note outliers and unusual outcomes
Results

Here’s what the students had to say...
Our guides are useful!
“Definitely, yes! **This makes life much easier** knowing that I can use it online. Because so often you don’t have time to come down to the library, and you want stuff immediately, so you can find stuff here.”

“Yeah... I know some resources such as the books and magazines that I always go to, **but I’ll come back to this one.**”

“Were the guides useful? Would you come back to use them again?”
...sometimes.
“Honestly, it’s a bit confusing for me [...] there are so many tabs and so many buttons on it.”

“The website, is really... it has lots of resources for sure, but it requires a lot of work, to read stuff. [...] A lot of stuff is on one page, and [students] are too impatient to look at all that stuff.”
“I just think there’s like a lot of noise... you know, when you try to find one thing, and there’s, like, different things and you’re just like ‘whoa!’ [...] so you’re quickly trying to push what’s needed and what’s not out.”
When the guides fail or overwhelm, students are just as likely to abandon them for safe, familiar harbors.

When students understand the purpose of the guides, they’re more likely to return and use them.
Conclusions

● Simple changes
  ○ Add links/hyperlinks
  ○ Reduce size of images
  ○ Embed search boxes
  ○ Descriptive information - always have it, but keep it short and sweet

● Long-term considerations and changes:
  ○ How is the information arranged and presented?
    ■ Locked into one of two LibGuides formats, but can adapt from there
  ○ How is information presented in other forms of media?
  ○ Can arrangement aid in instruction?
Recommendation 1

Eliminate Libguides Search Box (site map search)

All 10 users assumed this was the Catalog Plus (discovery tool) search and used it repeatedly throughout testing.

Librarian: “So what do you think that search box searched?”

Student1: “Uh, not really anything.”

Librarian: “So what do you notice about the results that come up? What do you think this search box searched?”

Student2: “Nothing.”
Recommendation 2

Link all Journal Titles lists and Book lists

Lead users back to the Catalog to find more sources.

(looks at list of Journal titles)

Student: “Uh, how do I read these?”

(looks at list of books)

Student: “Is this all you have?”
Recommendation 3

Revise Labeling

Ensure guide tabs do not include jargon. Rather than naming a tab with the library’s search tool (“Catalog Plus”), name it plainly (“Find Journal Articles”)

When asked why they clicked on, then navigated away from “Catalog Plus” tab:

“I thought that it was just for the books, I mean like... if I’m looking for scholarly articles, [...] I was looking for language that would be specific to ‘scholarly articles’.”

Database descriptions should be concise, in plain language, and tailored to the guide.
Recommendation 4

Embed More Search Boxes

Rather than instructions to “search in the library catalog” with no link or directions, embed the library catalog search box across the guide, not just on homepage or “book search” boxes.

When needed, use tailored search boxes (by discipline, resource type, etc).
Recommendation 5

Use images sparingly

When images are meant to be instructive, include enough descriptive text - otherwise, it’s just more clutter.

“It’s a bit confusing for me [...] the information is more like descriptions rather than more images.”
**Recommendation 6**

**Busy tabs and pages need better hierarchy, maybe an index**

Reduce visual noise: too many boxes without hierarchy or arrangement, quickly becomes overwhelming.

Consider using alternative LibGuides v2 template, moving away from “tabs” arrangement to “menu” arrangement:

- Not possible, or don’t want to confuse users too much? Build your own menu into the guide with simple links.
Illustration: Illustration Styles

Search Tips

Use these call numbers and keywords to browse for books on these subjects in the library and the library catalog:

NC065
Children's Book Illustration

NC997-1003
Commercial Art, Advertising Art

NC1800-1850
Posters

QH46.5
Natural History Illustration

QK08.15-08.18
Botanical Illustration

QL46.5
Animal Illustration

QL674.4
Bird Illustration

RB36
Medical Illustration

TT 509
Fashion Drawing

Other Keywords
figure drawing, concept art, fashion illustration, fashion sketching, commercial art, graphic art

Advertising

Pro Illustration
Call Number: NC960.B57 1997
Nine top Society of Illustrators artists tackle the same advertising project from concept to finished artwork in this imaginative, instructive book.

Editorial

Pro Illustration, editorial: a guide to professional techniques
Call Number: NC 950.B67 1995

Scientific

The Guild Handbook of Scientific Illustration
Call Number: QA222.G5 2003

Children's Book

Illustrating Children's Picture Books
Call Number: NC965.W96 2009

Concept Art

Concept Art
Call Number: T 385.J66 2006
Through a series of master class tutorials the book guides readers through processes employed to create environments, characters and machinery for film, TV, and games.
Not quite sure what you're looking for? Skip the catalog and go right to browsing the shelves!

HP5801-6182 - Advertising
NC845-915 - Graphic art materials
NC397-1003 - Commercial art; Advertising art
NC1800-1850 - Posters
NC1860-1896 - Greeting cards, postcards, invitations, book jackets, etc.
QA75 - Computer Software; HTML, Interactive Media
T201-342 - Patents, Trademarks
Z116.659 - Book industries and trade, Printing, Typography
Illustration - usability updates: Illustration Techniques

Search: I need to find something that will teach me how to use different materials, media, or software:

- Search for the medium name or materials with the word "technique" e.g., "drawing technique" or "oil painting technique"
- By synonyms or specific media type e.g., acrylic, watercolor, printmaking, acrylic, gouache

Search: I need to find examples or artwork from artists who worked in a specific medium:

- Search for the artists name (full name or just last) and the medium or style e.g., "Rembrandt drawings", "Thomas Nast cartoons"

Search: I need to learn more about a specific topic:

- Search for the topic name and additional keywords e.g., "Illustration" or "Design"

Recommended - General Illustration Techniques & Resources

- *Encyclopedia of Illustration Techniques* Call Number: NC 960.352 1997

- *Satari Books Online* Need technical info on programs like Illustrator or Photoshop? Satari includes e-books and videos covering all areas of technology including digital media and software.

- *Digital Design and Applied Arts Index* Abstracts of scholarly and professional articles on design and craft including graphic design, industrial design, furniture design, metals and jewelry, illustration and textile design.

- *Drawing* Sketching from the Imagination
  - Publication Date: 2013
  - Concepts are where all great ideas begin. Packed full with useful tips, "Sketching from the Imagination" is an excellent resource for concept design to inspire artists of all abilities.

- *View more Drawing Technique books...*

- *See Drawing Technique magazines & journals in SCAD Libraries*

- *Digital* Complete Digital Illustration
  - Call Number: NC196.4.Z43 2010

- 500 Digital Illustration Hints, Tips, and Techniques
  - Call Number: T365.A18 2009

- *Satari Books Online* eBooks and videos covering all areas of technology including digital media, software, programming, web applications, and business and professional development.

- *Painting* Acrylic Fusion
  - Call Number: ebook
  - Experimenting with alternative methods for painting, collage, and mixed media

- *Water Paper Paint* Call Number: ebook
Welcome

This guide provides recommended resources for your ARTH 100/110 research assignments.

Getting Started: What do you need to do?

What do you need to do?

Learn the basics about an artist or art movement
Find background information in encyclopedias or reference sources - your next stop after Wikipedia.

Learn more about my artist or art period / get a broader view of my topic
Find books, look at exhibition catalogs.

Find expert analysis, opinions, or very in-depth information on my topic
Search for scholarly articles on a specific topic, exhibition reviews, or news articles.

Find Images
Locate high-quality images in the library or online.

Required and Recommended Readings

These books are located behind the library front desk, and may be used for up to 2 hours. Provide the call number to desk staff and they will retrieve it for you.

Janson's History of Art: The Western Tradition by H. W. Janson, et al.
Call Number: N548.3 J3 2011
ISBN: 9780205660517
Publication Date: 2011 (8th Edition)

A Short Guide to Writing about Art by Sylvan Barnet
Call Number: N7476 .B37 2011
ISBN: 9780321739253
Publication Date: 2011 (10th edition)

A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations by Kate L. Turabian, et al.
Call Number: QA3.3 .B45 2009
ISBN: 9780226839470
Publication Date: 2009 (7th edition)

Related Research Guides

- Introduction to the Research Process
  by Stephanie Green
  Last Updated Sep 23, 2016
  1524 views 7th year

- Finding and Using Images
  by Heather Kosman
  Last Updated Sep 23, 2015
  1830 views this year
Broader Recommendations & Discussions

- Consider the student’s studio/research processes and ways of thinking vs. librarian/faculty-endorsed list of resources
  - Prioritize **process** over **format**, or offer varying paths to information

- Do we need to change or clarify the way we think about Libguides?
  - Are these a list of resources and “authorized” links, or will these be more instructive and contextual?
  - Consider how the new frameworks can inform the modifications
    - How do ideas of “research as inquiry,” “searching as strategic exploration,” or “authority is contextual” potentially aid or hinder good guide practices?
Ongoing Steps

- Iterative testing
  - Work with one or two courses to rework their guides and monitor guide use
  - Informal testing with students on-site
- Input from student groups & faculty
  - Avoid “design by committee” by focusing on their bigger needs and issues
“Okay, but how does this apply to my school?”

Caveats:

- SCAD is a student-centric institution, not a research university
- Findings may seem more applicable to career-focused programs (business, technical, law)

However:

- “Bigger picture” issues can be relevant to any institution!
- Focus on processes and addressing student needs, vs. prescriptive list of “librarian-approved resources” to make it meaningful to them.
“Why should we test our guides?”

- Can reveal valuable information about your students’ information-seeking behaviors
  - Are they talking to their peers and professors? Where do they start their research? Where do they end it? How persistent are they when it comes to quality/appropriate sources vs. convenience and “just getting it done”?
- Opportunity for librarians and other guide producers/stakeholders to critically evaluate their content
- Conversation starter about the actual usage of guides
Bibliography


