

LOSE THE LISTS! ELEVATING YOUR LIBGUIDES TO A NEW LEVEL

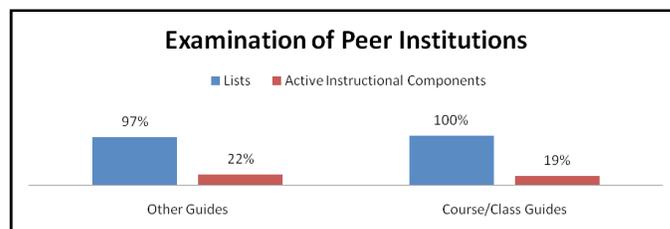
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Do your LibGuides incorporate just about everything students need to know about your library? Is this information displayed in written form using lists, many of which are painstakingly annotated? If this sounds familiar, you are not alone. Many librarians have fallen into the trap of creating text-heavy, list-filled LibGuides that do very little to pique students' interest. The form in which information is presented on your LibGuides illustrates your LibGuides philosophy—why and how you use LibGuides. Unfortunately, outside of the classroom, instruction librarians are too often becoming passive circulators of information. LibGuides are not being used as instructional platforms and fail to engage students with educational opportunities.

In order to support these claims, we examined LibGuides created by eight peer institutions. (Peers were determined by the National Center for Educational Management Systems.) Knowing that it is fairly common for libraries to have LibGuides for a variety of areas and target populations as well as particular classes/courses, we examined guides in both categories, which will be referred to as “Other Guides” and “Class/Course Guides” respectively. We wanted to see if lists—bulleted and/or annotated text that may have included links—were used. We also wanted to determine whether the guides included “active instructional components.” An active instructional component is defined as any component that engages a learner through use of an active learning object. Examples might include videos or interactive mind maps (i.e., not simply written instructions).

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Figure 1



We examined four guides from both categories from each institution totaling 64 guides (see Figure 1 above). Note that the sum of the percentages is over 100 because some guides contained both lists and active instructional components. Overall, 97% of the “Other Guides” incorporated lists. Most commonly there were lists of resources, such as recommended reference books and databases, call number ranges and material locations. Only 22% of the “Other Guides” included active instructional components. One might think that there would be an increase in the number of active instructional components in the “Course/Class Guides” because students often need to use the guides to complete assignments, but in fact, 100% included lists, and only 19% included active instructional components. Without a doubt, an examination of these peer institutions have demonstrated that LibGuides are being used to *inform* students; however, LibGuides should be used as a platform for *teaching* students.

Consider the lack of progress in terms of using technology to create learning opportunities in higher education. Paper materials were mailed via “snail mail” to students in correspondence courses until learning management systems, such as Blackboard, were developed. Then correspondence course materials were simply posted online as PDFs. Even though the new technology allowed for advancement in

instructional methods, it took educators a long time to begin embracing those possibilities. In the library profession, we have made similar progress. We took print guides and posted them online as PDFs (and some of us are still doing that). When LibGuides were developed there was a lot of excitement, yet many of us simply posted the same textual information into LibGuides. Unfortunately, we are not always using the LibGuides platform to its utmost potential; instead we have simply used a new technology to make a lateral shift.

One means of making a significant shift in terms of advancing instructional methods is to embrace online video, which continues to grow in popularity. In April 2011, Patrick Hourihan, Head of UK Trade Research at Yahoo! stated that “short form content - clips under 5 minutes - are being consumed by more than 25 million users every month” (O’Reilly, 2011). Hourihan claims that the internet user is evolving into the “internet viewer” (O’Reilly, 2011). Similarly, data from eMarketer.com indicates that video viewership by college-aged students rose from 80.1% in 2008 to 86% in 2009 (eMarketer, 2010). Moreover, a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project shows that views of educational videos increased from 22% in 2007 to 38% in 2009 (Purcell, 2010). The study also shows that 49% of college-aged students are viewing educational videos online (Purcell, 2010). The demand for online videos will not diminish any time soon, as it is projected that by 2014, 95% of college-aged students will be viewing videos online (eMarketer, 2010). This data demonstrates that consumers of information are drawn to online video, and librarians should aim to deliver content in this format, especially because students are not forced to use the information posted on LibGuides.

While research clearly demonstrates that online videos are growing in popularity, the support regarding the effectiveness of video-based instruction is on the rise within scholarly literature, especially in disciplines like education and medicine. When it comes to student learning, Choi and Johnson (2005) found that “video-based instruction was more effective than the text-based instruction in regards to remembering the content” (p. 222). Similarly, a 2007 study shows that video was more effective for both student comprehension and student retention than the use of text (Choi & Johnson). Yeung, Justice, and Pasic (2009) compared the use of text to video for laparoscopic training and found that video was “superior to text in achieving superior conceptual understanding” (p. 411). With regards to teaching practical skills, Donkor (2010) supports the use of video in terms of overall effectiveness over text-based instruction, which is particularly relevant as one may argue that library research skills are practical. In addition to student learning, some research measured student satisfaction and motivation. Research by Choi and Johnson (2007) indicates that video-based instruction is better than text-based in achieving student satisfaction, as students felt “more positive toward video-based...instruction” (p. 891). Choi and Johnson (2005) determined that video instruction better motivates students “by attracting their attention” (p. 225).

Librarians are progressing when it comes to using online videos for instruction. A search on YouTube for library

skills shows that librarians are engaged in creating online videos. For example, a search for “finding articles” conducted in April 2011, resulted in over 19,000 YouTube videos. While many librarians are creating and posting videos on YouTube, these active instructional components are not appearing on LibGuides.

Simply incorporating active instructional components, such as videos, in LibGuides would be an improvement; however, we need to consider another important element—student learning styles or preferences. For our purposes the focus will be on visual, auditory and kinesthetic even though there are a variety of learning styles. A brief review of these three learning styles is significant to understanding the potential revision of your LibGuides philosophy, and consequently, how future information will be presented on LibGuides. According to Sarasin (1999), descriptions of each style are as follows:

- **Visual Learners:** As implied, visual learners learn by seeing and more importantly observing. These learners find videos and other multi-media, visual cues, colored graphs, charts and images appealing.
- **Auditory Learners:** Auditory learners prefer to listen to verbal directions and discussions. They truly benefit from oral repetition of important concepts.
- **Kinesthetic Learners:** Kinesthetic learners learn by performing tasks hands-on. They like to actively explore open environments, try out tasks and recall what they perform.

With these descriptions in mind, think about your own LibGuides. If the guides are text-heavy, they are geared towards visual learners, but only at a base level. Remember that visual learners like to observe, so incorporating multi-media, pictures, charts, etc. in the guides would provide visual learners with a greater learning experience.

In order to better understand the correlation between learning styles and the presentation of information on LibGuides, we conducted a pilot study at our institution. (While the basics of the study are revealed below, more information, including the sample LibGuides can be found at <http://libguides.unco.edu/lss>.)

PART I OF THE PILOT STUDY

In the first part of the study, participants completed the Barsch Learning Style Inventory (http://medicine.utah.edu/learningresources/tools/styles/barsch_inventory.pdf). The Inventory includes 24 behavioral statements that are scored to determine a participant’s primary learning style (visual, auditory or kinesthetic). The results revealed that of the 21 participants, including undergraduate and graduate students, most (74%) were visual learners, 25% were auditory learners, and a mere 1% was kinesthetic.

PART II OF THE PILOT STUDY

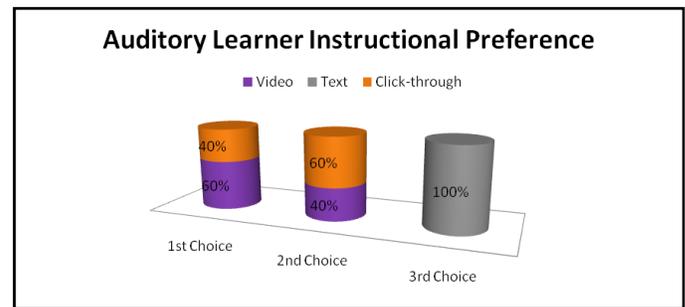
The second part of the study asked participants to look at two LibGuides presenting information on finding books at the University of Northern Colorado Libraries. “Guide A” included instructional videos showing students how to search with the inclusion of minimal text. “Guide B” presented the same concept using written instructions and annotated links. In this part of the study we were simply concerned with which guide participants found more aesthetically pleasing and asked them to explain their choices. Among the participants there was a clear favorite as 76% preferred the guide with instructional videos (“Guide A”). There was positive written feedback about the video-based guide, such as “Guide A was of better help because of the visual elements of the tutorial” and “I prefer A because the verbal instructions come with visuals.” Participants also criticized the guide using written instructions and annotated links, saying “Guide B is too cluttered” and “Guide B just looks like an article but the other is more inviting.” These results support our belief that there must be a change in how information is presented on LibGuides if we want students to see them as appealing and usable resources.

PART III OF THE PILOT STUDY

The third part of the study explored the idea of making LibGuides a tool for instruction—changing from a passive presentation of content to an active one. For this part of the study participants were presented with three instructional LibGuides that explained how to conduct a journal title search. One option included a video in conjunction with audio demonstrating the steps, another option included written step-by-step instructions, and the final option included a video with audio requiring user participation in terms of clicking appropriate links and typing text in order to proceed. (Throughout the rest of this paper these options are referred to as “Video,” “Text” and “Click-through” respectively.) Participants were asked to rank the options in order of preference and explain their choices. Not surprisingly, 57% of participants preferred “Video” when learning how to conduct a journal title search. The second choice, at 29%, was “Click-through,” and “Text” was the least preferred of the three instructional options.

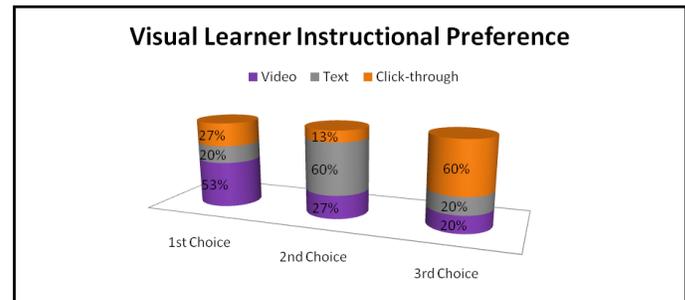
Additionally, the ranked instructional options were correlated by learning style, and the instructional preferences of the auditory learners are shown in Figure 2 below. “Video” was preferred by over half of auditory learners (60%), and “Click-through” was the second choice. Not surprisingly, 100% of auditory learners chose “Text” as the least preferred instructional option.

Figure 2



Similar results emerged with regards to the first choice by visual learners (see Figure 3 below). The majority (53%) of visual learners preferred “Video.” Different results emerged as visual learners chose “Text” as their second choice. Visual learners learn by reading, so the selection of “Text” as their second choice is logical; however, reading engages the visual learner only in the simplest of ways.

Figure 3



A limitation of this pilot study is that only one kinesthetic learner was represented. As in the case of the auditory and visual learners, the kinesthetic learner also chose “Video” as the most preferred instructional option; however, “Click-through” was the second choice. The kinesthetic learner’s written feedback was noteworthy: “Option C is way too complicated...and most people are not going to want to do it.” This participant clearly disliked the “Click-through” option; however, it was preferred over “Text.”

Two significant conclusions resulted from the pilot study with respect to presenting instructional material on LibGuides: 1) students do not find lists aesthetically appealing, and 2) students prefer viewing videos rather than reading text. As a result of the aforementioned conclusions, we investigated various technologies with the hopes of engaging students while accommodating various learning styles. The following are only a sampling of free technologies available: Animoto, .docstoc, Feed43, Jing, Poll Everywhere, Prezi, Rollyo, Spicy Nodes, Twitter and XtraNormal. (The websites and descriptions for these tools can be found by conducting a search on the Web.) Pairing these tools with concepts commonly found on LibGuides, such as catalog searching and evaluating sources, will create active instructional components. (Sample pairings can be found at <http://libguides.unco.edu/lss>.)

Hopefully you have been thinking about your LibGuides philosophy while reading about this pilot study and the need to lose the lists! There is no denying that students, regardless of learning style, prefer the inclusion of active instructional components, such as videos, when learning about library information and developing research skills. We strongly believe that moving toward an active presentation of information and using engaging technologies on LibGuides will enhance the student learning experience.

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