

RETHINKING THE INSTRUCTION

SESSION HANDOUT

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Handouts are unique resources created for a specific library instruction session, not just copies of PowerPoint slides printed in handout mode. In comparison to creating online content and reaching out to students via social networks and course management systems, creating paper handouts may appear low tech. However, handouts can appeal to visual and kinesthetic learners. Handouts can also serve as a useful link to the resources hidden within the library's website.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HANDOUTS

For this interactive session at LOEX, a handout was defined as a unique resource created for a specific library instruction session that can include characteristics of both handouts and worksheets as defined by Veldof. In *Creating the One-Shot Library Workshop: A Step-by-Step Guide*, Veldof (2006) made a distinction between a handout and a worksheet. Handouts can include session objectives, presentation materials, and room for note-taking while worksheets can include directions, a step by step breakdown of the task with space for notes, and fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice or open ended questions. According to Veldof (2006), worksheets can engage uninterested students with the "recognition that their work will be looked at" (p. 124). Elements of handouts and worksheets can be combined to meet the session's learning objectives.

During the interactive session, first, the group discussed why attendees still create paper handouts. Most attendees at the session create handouts for their instruction sessions and think

that handouts are useful for students to have something tangible to refer to during and after an instruction session. Some attendees felt that handouts encourage the use of note-taking, and at one institution handouts are considered "historical documents."

Disadvantages to creating handouts include preparation time, printing costs, and ease of disposal by students, and attendees discussed the option of letting students print the handout on their own. Research, however, has shown benefits to using handouts. According to Sousa (2006), "adding the kinesthetic exercise of writing furthers retention" (p. 119). One study described in Marsh and Sink (2010) demonstrated that when handouts were not given, subjects wrote down twice as many words as they did when they had a handout. Instruction session handouts can contain information to relieve students from the burden of copying. Studies have also found value in having notes to review later (Armbruster, 2009).

PROJECT AT UHCL

Librarians at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) believe that students benefit from having something tangible, like a handout, during instruction sessions and explored ways to make the handouts more useful to students. UHCL instruction librarians usually create a unique handout for each one-shot instruction session. Due to time constraints, many of the handouts only get minor changes each semester and still include lists of relevant hardcopy reference books. During the summer and fall of 2010, instruction librarians at UHCL experimented with ways to better utilize instruction sessions handouts to continue to include the most critical information while incorporating active learning activities and graphics as well as promoting online resources.

When designing their handouts, UHCL librarians

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consider the key learning outcomes, concepts that need additional explanation, factual information, like the URL for the library-created course webpage or reference desk phone number, and supplemental information not covered in the session. To meet their objectives, UHCL librarians have started to include search tips, database comparison charts (see Figure 1), links to mobile websites and subject-specific federated search, fill-in charts (see Figure 2), fill-in-the-blank instructions (see Figure 3), ice breaker games (see Figure 4), search screenshots, and search terms activities.

Before seeing sample portions from redesigned UHCL handouts, attendees broke into small groups and were asked to think about: What information do you find most useful on handouts when you are in workshop or conference? Are you giving students the same things you like? If not, what would you do differently? The groups reported that they like to know the purpose of the handout up front and like the handout as a physical reminder to take notes.

After seeing sample portions, attendees evaluated before and after versions of a handout used at UHCL in order to generate more discussion about handout content and to see some of the examples close up. Attendees liked the database comparison chart, and one suggestion was to add a blank line to the chart to let students enter their own database information. Another proposed activity was to let students find their own subject headings. Participants embraced the idea of having space on the handout for notes, and one way to create additional space was to use bullet points for text. Attendees also wanted to make the contact information and course page URL more prominent. Another recurring idea from attendees was to add more visuals; for example, using a screenshot for finding books rather than a text explanation. Attendees also noted that goals for the worksheet needed to be prioritized.

In addition to the UHCL handout, the Unravel Workbook example used in Veldof (2006) and the Minimalist Documentation PDF from Grassian and Kaplowitz (2009) also were discussed. The Unravel Workbook uses a hybrid handout/worksheet approach and allows students to follow along during the session. One tip on developing materials from Veldof (2006) was to include “nice-to-knows” for more advanced learners. The Minimalist Documentation illustrates the use of the problem-solving minimalist approach to instructional materials, which includes simple language, active commands, and questions.

Other ways to present information on a handout could be effective, such as using QR codes. For example, in her *American Libraries Magazine* column Farkas (2010) states “imagine if students could simply scan a barcode at the bottom of your handout with their cell phones and be taken to a website or tutorial you’d created” (p. 26). Flow charts could be helpful, although an attendee offered a word of caution because her library tried using a flow chart and discovered just how complicated finding a book could be.

Bookmarks were also discussed as an alternative to a full page handout. An attendee described how she uses bookmarks with librarian contact information and focuses on

the top three things for students to get out of the session. Other attendees described using bookmarks at the reference desk with room for students to write keywords and for the librarian on duty to give their contact information.

HANDOUTS AND TECHNOLOGY

The purpose of handouts has not changed, but technology has. As a group, attendees considered “How can handouts complement LibGuides, online videos, and mobile technology?” One idea was to use the handout for an active learning activity and put the lists of resources on the LibGuide, although there is a risk that the student will never look at the LibGuide. Some libraries have printed the LibGuide using the printer-friendly version and given it to students as a handout. Another attendee pointed out that there are still some populations who do not have smartphones or internet access from their homes. Overall, there was no clear cut, best answer.

HANDOUT BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY

In small groups participants discussed the most important information for students to take away from one of the five instruction session scenarios below and brainstormed various ways to present this information using a handout. The ideas shared by each group are described beneath each of the scenarios.

To begin brainstorming, attendees were asked to consider:

- What are your learning objectives for the session?
- How can the information be represented on a handout?
- Is there a way to present the information differently than you have done in the past?
- How can the handout be used during the session?
- What would be helpful for students to refer to after the session?

Scenario 1: Freshman orientation session; required 45-minute session during summer orientation.

This session would not give too much information to the students. It would focus on letting students know that there are librarians, why they should use the library rather than Google, and compare Google Scholar and a database. The handout would have contact information for the library and librarians.

Scenario 2: Freshman composition class; the assignment is to write a 5-page research paper on a topic related to their major using the preferred citation style of their major and scholarly journal articles.

The goal of this session is to have students walk away with one source. Topics covered during the session would

include popular versus scholarly sources, Boolean searching, and the way the library is arranged. The handout would include basic contact information and an activity for coming up with search terms.

Scenario 3: New faculty orientation; an hour-long session to introduce new faculty to library resources and services.

The session would cover what the library does for faculty and their students and might be broad if a mix of faculty from different disciplines were in attendance. This group discussed using a clean, simple bookmark to cover basic information like contact information and library liaisons in addition to database comparison charts since the resources at this institution might be different than the resources at their old institution.

Scenario 4: Undergraduate business class; assignments throughout the semester will require students to find information about various companies, including SWOT analyses, annual reports, SEC filings, and recent news articles.

The handout for this session would include finding SWOT analyses, the LibGuide address, the databases to use for finding particular information, how to search for news articles, a database comparison chart, and space for notes. Separate handouts might be used for each resource or type of information.

Scenario 5: Undergraduate history class; the assignment is to write a research paper on a topic related to America's involvement in World War II using a mix of primary and secondary sources.

This group would use the handout as the starting point. The handout would include session objectives, the differences between primary and secondary sources, contact people/librarians, search strategies with screenshots, locating books and documents, evaluating resources, and citing sources. The sample search terms would be "world war 2" and "air lift."

CONCLUSION

Handouts are still relevant and useful even with advances in technology. Handouts can continue to be improved by examining them critically every semester to make sure they meet the session's learning objectives and by trying new or different approaches.

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Figure 1: Database comparison chart. Chart comparing computer science databases.

✓ Available in Database	Majority Full-text	Journal Articles	Conference Proceedings	INSPEC Subject Terms
ACM Digital Library	✓	✓	✓	
IEEE/IET Electronic Library	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inspec		✓	✓	✓
Applied Science Full Text	✓	✓	✓	
Web of Science		✓		
Computer Science Index		✓	✓	

Figure 2: Fill-in chart. Activity for an environmental law session illustrating that the resources are available in multiple databases.

Use the chart below to mark the resources available in each database.

	LexisNexis Academic	Westlaw	FDsys
United States Code			
Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)			
Federal Register (FR)			
State Statutes			
State Administrative Code			
Federal Court Cases			
State Court Cases			
Law Reviews			
Black's Law Dictionary			

Figure 3: Fill-in-the-blank instructions. Activity used in graduate classes to explain the steps for finding a journal article from a citation.

Finding a Journal Article from a Citation

1. Search the name of the journal, magazine, or newspaper in the _____ to find out if the library has full text in a subscription research database or directly from the publisher.
2. Search the _____ (or use related links in the Journals List) to see whether the library has a journal in paper or microform.
3. If you can't locate the item you need, complete and submit an online _____ form.

For more information, see [Locating Full Text and Journals \(PDF\)](#) or [Is an Article Available Online?](#) (video; see [library research tutorials](#)).

Figure 4: Ice breaker. Matching activity used in an industrial hygiene session to generate discussion.

Match Game

Think about where you might expect to start searching for information for your class assignment. Match the item you are looking for in Column A with the resource you can use to find it in Column B. Use each item in Column B once.

Column A	Column B
Scholarly Journal Article	OSHA website
ISO Standard	ScienceDirect
Statistics	Library Catalog
Book	Neumann Library's INDH Course Page