

# LibGuides Usability Testing

---

## *Customizing a Product to Work for Your Users*

Rachel Hungerford, Lauren Ray, Christine Tawatao, Jennifer Ward  
University of Washington Libraries – Seattle, Washington USA  
libuse@uw.edu

### **Abstract**

After moving subject and class research guides from static html pages to Springshare's LibGuides system, the University of Washington Libraries investigated how these guides and their built-in features were being understood and used our by students. This paper will describe usability testing that was conducted on our LibGuides subject guides in the fall of 2009 and how we used test findings to develop a new set of guidelines for guide authors to use in developing guides. We will cover the usability testing process, methodology and findings, as well as how data was remodeled into new recommendations for library staff authoring our LibGuides in order to make them more consistent and usable. We present how usability can improve a library's own understanding of students' search and navigation process, as well as how an outside vendor's system can be customized to create an improved user experience overall.

### **Introduction**

In an effort to continually improve users' experience of our resources, usability has become a programmatic step in the development of websites at the University of Washington Libraries. We have discovered that user testing is especially important when relying on an outside vendor's system. Implementation of the system can be adjusted to fit a local user population's needs, and testing the system can also help identify issues that the vendor might want to consider addressing on a universal level.

In summer 2009, the Libraries began subscribing to Springshare's LibGuides system, a hosted content management system designed specifically for library research guides. Subscribing to this service provided a system with easier tools for authors to create and maintain guides, and a wide variety of options for organizing and presenting various kinds of content. We set up the site to take advantage of the LibGuides system features and created a template that authors could choose to use in creating their guides, and that would work across a broad range of disciplines. Rather than spend much time trying to customize the site homepage and navigation to match how we previously had provided access to our guides, we configured it to use the default structure of the LibGuides system. Subject liaisons created guides in different ways, some using our template to put together a very basic replica of the resources listed in their pre-Libguides subject guide, while others took advantage of the system's adaptability by

creating numerous “sub-guides” and developing their own look and feel to distinguish their guides from others.

Our subject liaison program consists of over 60 library staff who support the academic departments of the university. The University of Washington is a large public research university consisting of 16 colleges and schools and serving over 45,000 students annually. When the new subject guides launched in the fall of 2009, all subject guides were required to be published using the new LibGuides system. In order to determine how users were responding to the various guide layouts, how effective the guides were in conveying the usefulness of subject-specific resources and to inform our system design, we started the usability testing process. A list of research questions (see Appendix A) was developed collaboratively with subject liaisons and Libraries Information Technology Services staff to investigate uncertainties with the site's design.

## Method

### Users

We recruited seven undergraduate and three graduate students. Going into the study, it was our assumption that the subject guide's primary audience was beginner researchers, and so we recruited more undergraduate than graduates. The ratio is also more reflective of the student body, with undergraduates comprising approximately 77% and graduate students comprising 21%.<sup>1</sup>

Participants also varied by gender and web and research experience. Additionally, we screened out previous UW Libraries usability participants and library employees with the assumption they would have more familiarity with the library website than the average user.

### Test Format

To begin the study, participants were asked to complete a short survey about their background and library usage, including class rank, previous library instruction, and their familiarity with the subject guides. After completing each task, the participants rated their “ease of use” on a five-point scale.

At the end of the study, participants completed a post study questionnaire of Likert scales and open-ended questions, as means to gather the participant's experience, attitudes, issues, and perceived usefulness of the subject guides

Six research scenarios were used during the usability session in the subjects of anthropology, psychology, English, history, and dance. Users also were asked how to find various formats, such as images.

After the users completed the scenarios, they were asked to participate in an X's & O's exercise, in which they were given five screen shots of pages from various LibGuides. Users were instructed to circle areas of the page that they found useful, cross out any area of the page they did not find useful, and to add in comments or content they felt was missing (see Appendix B).

Libraries staff were invited to watch the recorded tests and participate in debriefing sessions.

### **Task Variation**

The study consisted of intentionally varied task types. The majority of our tasks were specific, e.g., we asked users to find a specific book, or find an article on a given topic, with the purpose of testing a particular feature within the guides. For example, to see how users reacted to drop down menus or a particular organization of a page, we needed to lead them through the process we wanted to test.

Users also completed open-ended tasks, e.g., to find a resource on the topic of their choice within the broad subject of history, allowing us to see how they created a topic, where they looked for information, how many sources they looked at, etc.

### **Equipment**

The usability session was conducted using Microsoft Windows XP Professional Version 2002, Service Pack 3, Internet Explorer 7, Mozilla Firefox 3.5.7, Morae 3, and a webcam in the usability lab. The moderator's chair was positioned slightly behind the participant to provide close access to the participant's actions and to allow for the moderator to question the participant. Morae was used to record the participants' audio, video, and screen movements.

### **Test modifications**

Over the course of the test, several changes were made as issues arose. Both the system search box at the top of the guides and the "Find E-Journals by Title" search box were heavily misused and were removed after testing half of the participants, as they were deemed too big of a stumbling block, preventing us from observing other pertinent issues.

This change, along with guides that were modified after they were printed out for the X's & O's exercise, affected data collection because of the inconsistencies, even though most changes were minor.

Additionally, it was our goal for participants to use the Images Databases & Resource subject guide to find an image. However, the initial image we asked them to find was accessible through the library catalog, resulting in participants finding the image there instead of in the Images guide. Consequently, a decision was made to use an image that could only be found through the Images guide or an image-specific database.

Lastly, we made a change to the history research scenario after the fourth participant. Initially, the scenarios all instructed them to find a specific item. During observation, we realized that we also wanted to see how users explore and create topics without our direction. To address this issue, the scenario was modified so participants would choose a topic and resource of their choice within the broad subject of history.

### **Summary of Findings**

Usability testing showed that some system structures, like the LibGuides homepage layout and navigation from the homepage to general guides and more specific sub-guides were confusing for users.

Format-related guides were difficult to browse for when mixed with subjects/disciplines, even if they were pulled into a separate category or onto the side of the page. The search function for the site was consistently misused to find specific materials like books and full-text articles. We also identified other issues related to page layout inconsistencies that could be improved with stricter content guidelines.

We grouped our findings based on the changes we decided to make within our LibGuides system. These changes are organized around four concepts that we found our guides should follow: provide guidance and context, provide a more consistent layout, improve navigation and follow best practices for the web.

## Guides Should Provide Context and Guidance

During the study, there was a great deal of confusion surrounding the perceived scope of the library catalogs. Users often thought the search boxes were scoped to the subject they were currently on (see Figure 1). For example, if a student was on the American Literature LibGuide, he or she would think the catalog search box was only searching within American Literature materials.

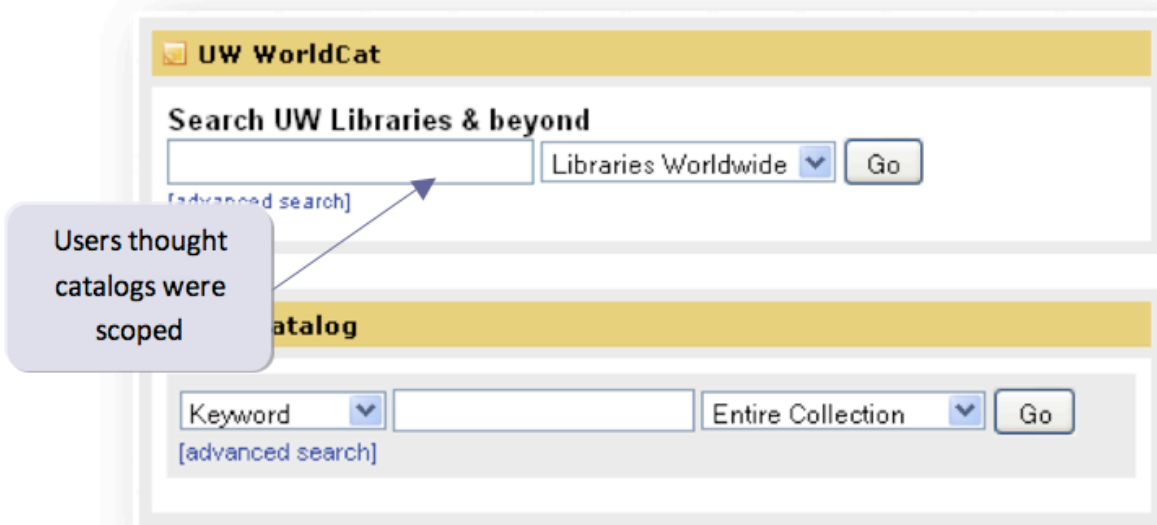


Figure 1. Users thought catalogs were scoped to the subject.

Other students wondered what the difference was between the catalog search on the guides and the search on the library homepage. In this case, users were confused about the purpose of the catalog search on the subject guides. Students were also confused by resources that lacked a description, such as lists of database titles with no explanatory text.

During the post-test survey and the X's & O's activity, several users mentioned that they wanted to see resource-oriented information tailored specifically to the subject they were on and less general information about the discipline (such as RSS feeds of events happening in that university department or non-tutorial videos). Some users, however, felt that this additional information could be useful in

guiding them to topic ideas for a research project, but felt that this kind of content should not be prominent on the guide home page.

We also found that the LibGuides system search box included by default on the top of each LibGuide and in the LibGuide Index was not understood in context to its location (see Figure 2). This search box is intended to allow users to search the content of the given institutions' guides, as well as the library's catalog and site (using a drop-down menu). After testing the first five participants, it was very clear that users did not understand what the top search box on the guide was searching. Each student used the top search box incorrectly at least once and several of them used it incorrectly multiple times. It appeared that the participants would use search without reading the drop down options, thus, making assumptions about what it was searching. One student vocalized that she understood what the search box was searching, but only after using it, receiving no results, and then reading the drop down option. Because the function of the search and the mental models of the users varied so greatly, the search box was removed after testing the first five participants.

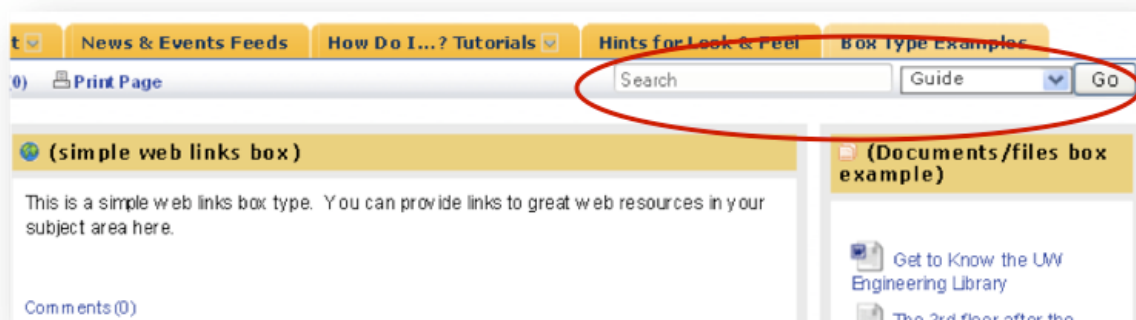


Figure 2. LibGuides system search box was consistently used incorrectly.

Another research goal of testing was to learn where users go when they feel lost or confused. Currently there are "How Do I...?" tutorial videos available collectively on the "How Do I...?" LibGuide and integrated into some boxes on the subject guides. Links to our Research 101 interactive online tutorial, chat widget and contact information also appear throughout many guides. In our observation, we found that the participants went to a variety of places for support. They frequently used guides in the General Research Help category, the "help" section of various pages (including external sites), and the "How Do I...?" guide. Students commented that they would like more help understanding how to research, both in general and within a specific discipline. We also found that they wanted similar "types" of content (such as tutorials and librarian profiles) to appear in the same area of the subject guides.

We also found that format-specific resources (such as image and news databases) were better located when they appeared within a subject guide, rather than as separate guides. Users had a great deal of trouble finding image databases and the Images LibGuide. For the first half of the test, users consistently found the image requested in the task through the UW WorldCat catalog. Realizing this was not what we intended, the task was changed to include a very current photograph, essentially requiring users to use an images database to complete. Even with this change, not all of the participants used the

Images LibGuide, as two of them found the image through other guides that had included links to image databases.

Additionally, most users spent a great deal of time figuring out where to look for images. The average number of “wrong paths” taken to find images – that is, pages that users clicked on looking for images that were incorrect – ranged from 0-9 with an average of 3.5. Moreover, three participants said they would have given up if they were not taking part in a study, and one user did not successfully find the correct image, though she believed she had. Many users also mentioned that they would not have gone to the library to find images because they did not think the library had that content, or they were used to using Google to find images.

### **Guides Should Provide a More Consistent Layout**

During testing it was observed that users frequently did not notice a guide’s tabs right away as a navigational option. Users’ eyes were drawn to the top middle of the page first and would focus on content there, especially if there was actionable content, such as links to other pages or resources.

Additionally, during the X’s & O’s activity, one user commented that she felt the tabs were visually separate from the guide and were part of the UW Libraries header.

Through observation and user comments, it was also found that inconsistent layouts confused the users. User behavior demonstrated that inconsistent structure made it hard for them to find resources and created confusion during the tasks. This was especially apparent when the individual subject guide did not have an introductory Home page/tab.

Several people mentioned that they preferred consistent layouts among the guides. Additionally, users vocalized that they felt that the guides were lacking a focal point, and that they desired an obvious place to direct their attention and actionable content that would lead them to what they should do next.

Most of our subject guides feature a Home page/tab that welcomes visitors to the guide and includes the subject librarian’s profile. Others did not have a Home page/tab and instead simply featured a series of pages organized by content (“Articles”, “Books”, “E-Journals”, etc). During testing we found that users seemed disoriented and unsure of what to do next when landing on a guide without a Home page/tab or a guide whose Home page/tab was not the first tab.

When asked, users overall liked the current look and feel with a preference for brighter tab and heading background colors. They did however have mixed reviews about guides that had sparser layouts, and several users expressed that they would have liked to see more images to add visual interest and break up content. It was also found that most users did not seem to notice or did not mind the colors schemes changing from guide to guide.

### **Guides Should Have Better Navigation**

Based on usability testing we performed in 2002, we began listing our guides in an A-Z list of about 100 subjects laid out over three columns. More guides, either for classes or for more specific subtopics

within that subject area (which we call sub-guides), were then linked under the general guide for that subject. The A-Z list of subjects is the list of subject categories we moved into LibGuides.

Participants liked that there were more specific sub-guides, like History of Asia or Medieval History, which they felt would help people new to the subject understand a subject's breadth. However, during the study users would often go straight to the sub-guides within a subject and would miss helpful content provided on the general guide. Guides did not show or link back to categories and links from the sub-guides to the general guides were inconsistent.

Users also had trouble finding what they wanted on the LibGuides Homepage, due in part to the fact that the Homepage list is very long and difficult for users to scan (see Figure 3). Users seemed to conceptualize a term in their mind and then scan the page for it. This becomes problematic when what they are looking for is not subject, but a format, like an image. Only one out of ten participants found the Images guide in the list on the LibGuides homepage.

Additionally, none of the users seemed to notice the information on the side boxes, such as "Featured Guides" or "Helpful Links" right away. It was not until users were confused or having difficulties that they noticed the side content.

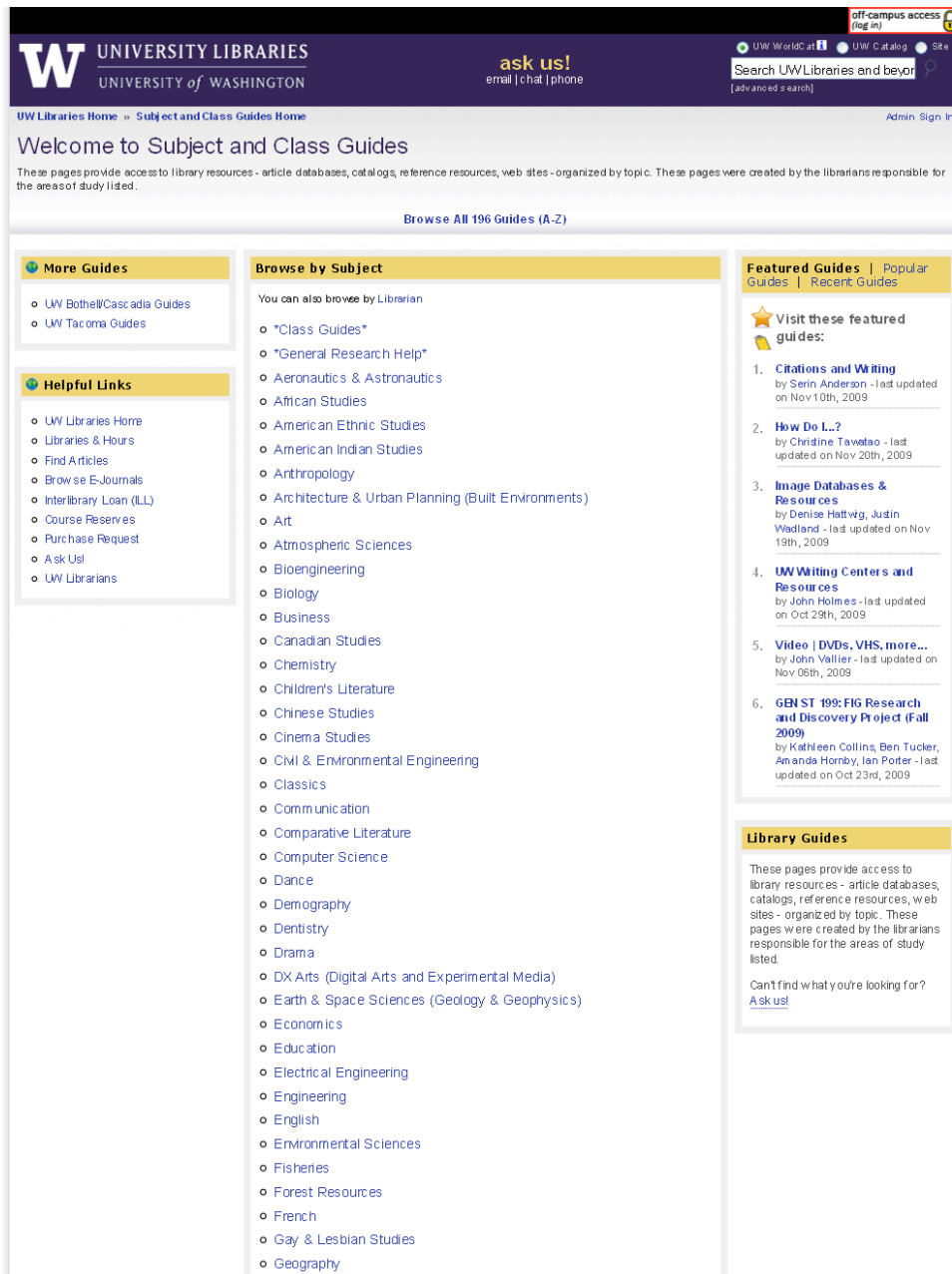


Figure 3. Original LibGuides homepage.

## Guides Should Follow Best Practices for the Web

In general, users did not have issues with the labels of pages/tabs and seemed to understand what they meant. However, users also did not widely explore the tabs, mostly using the “Find Articles” tab and the “Find Books” tab for the tasks we asked them to complete. There was a general preference for tabs with shorter names and fewer tabs on a guide, to help them focus on the most important elements first. Database titles that used acronyms or resources that did not have much description were rejected in favor of resources with more reassuring titles or descriptions that included key terms, like "full-text."



It was also found that students did not read descriptions of resources when these resources appeared as rollovers (see Figure 4). One user verbalized that she preferred static descriptions because rollovers forced her to remember what each said when making a decision on which resource to choose. We learned that important information should remain as static text on the page, rather than being hidden under a rollover.



Figure 4. Students do not like important descriptions in dynamic rollovers.

## Next Steps after Usability Testing

### Remodeling Data into New Guidelines

Staff observations from the usability testing were compiled at a debriefing session in December 2009. In January the Usability Team presented the Libraries Browsable Resources Discovery Group (BRDG) with a Recommendations Matrix (see Appendix C) that detailed recommendations to improve the usability of guides for researchers. BRDG, a group charged with creating and maintaining browsable resource discovery tools on the Libraries website, was tasked with taking these recommendations and turning them into workable, formal guidelines that subject liaison librarians could use to implement changes to their subject guides. While usability testing gave us insight into what was and was not working for our users, devising new requirements for a multitude of guides proved challenging. These requirements needed to work for over one hundred general subject guides, each of which was targeted to different disciplines with varied research needs and were authored by librarians with varying approaches to layout and content.

The group first worked through the Recommendations Matrix to devise a list of changes that librarians would need to make to their guides and then prioritized them to be “requirements” or “suggestions”. We also looked at the new Libraries patron personas, a usability project completed in early 2009 that created five representative patrons of the UW Libraries<sup>2</sup>, and used that information to also help make decisions about changes to the guidelines. A presentation to Libraries staff of LibGuides usability testing results in February gave us the chance to explain the process and general findings. This forum also gave us a chance to introduce the Libraries patron personas and to alert subject liaison librarians of the upcoming changes that would be expected for their guides, and get their feedback on how they would like assistance with the process.

BRDG created two documents for subject liaisons to use: a guide template that included the required LibGuide Home page/tab and content layouts, and a detailed checklist of step-by-step instructions for making changes to the guides (see Figure 5). Screenshots and links to screencasts were inserted into this checklist in order to provide clarification on how to make these changes and how the finalized subject guide should look.

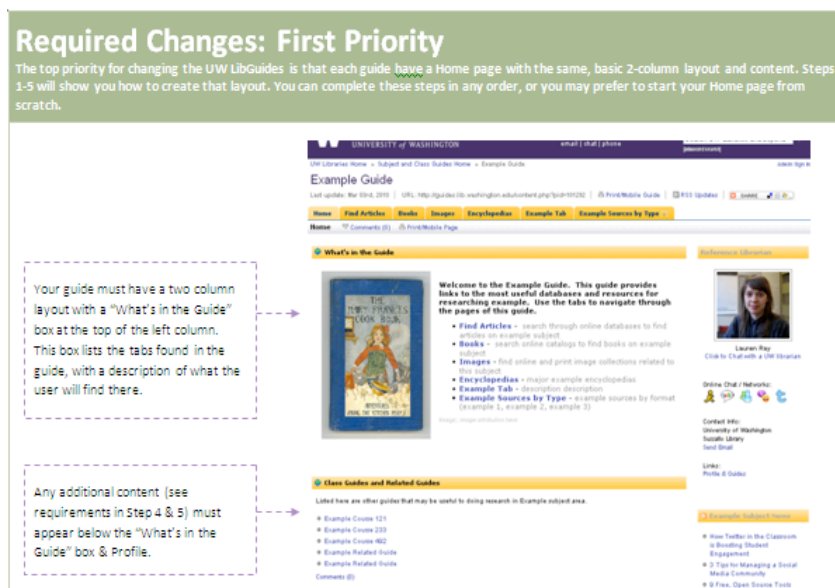


Figure 5. Screenshot of step-by-step instructions for guide authors, detailing the LibGuide Home tab/page template

### New Home page/tab Template Orients Users

A new guide Home page/tab, which was tested on the last five usability test participants to ensure that the content and layout was helpful, was turned into a template and required on all guides. It includes a large, central box titled "What's in the Guide," with a bulleted list of each page/tab title in the guide followed by a short description of what the different tab labels, like "Reference Works," mean. Having the main navigation in a box also gives us the opportunity to place the contents of the guide directly in the users' line of sight, because the guide tabs were sometimes overlooked. This also shifted extraneous content, like news videos or feeds that often would appear on the Home page/tab of a guide, over to the side.

Related guides and links are listed below the "What's in the Guide" box and the author's profile to the right. Consistency in the Home page/tab layout across all LibGuides will help users viewing multiple guides.

### More Description Provides Guidance and Scope

Resources like the library catalog that are not already scoped to the subject area now provide specific tips and guidance on how to use that resource to find information within the subject area. For example, suggesting phrases or LC subject headings helps show users how to best frame a search within the discipline. Besides providing tips, the description for all resources provides an opportunity to highlight

the strengths or limitations of a particular resource, point out useful tools or ways of limiting/sorting searches within the resource, or other hints to help users. This increases the value of the subject guides from being merely lists of recommended resources, to being actual *guides* to doing research within a given discipline.

BRDG created template boxes for both library catalogs that included textual descriptions and a place to include tips for using the catalog. Librarians are expected to copy the template but edit the text to make it context specific to their guide.

### **Improved Layout and Navigation Guides Users to Appropriate Content**

The LibGuides Homepage is back to the same three-column layout we had before we acquired LibGuides. The LibGuides Homepage template did not have enough customization options to mimic the former layout, so the page is hosted on our own web server. We also bypass the LibGuides category pages, so that users must first go through the general subject guide and then drill down to more specific sub-guides from there. This forces them to recognize that there may be broader or related resources available in a broader discipline.

We also standardized general layout decisions, like placing all related “help” content on the right-hand side of the page and keeping all main content areas in the widest column.

---

### **BEGINNER VS. EXPERT NEEDS**

A crucial part of any usability effort is to discern user needs. It became apparent to us during the analysis of the post-test questionnaire and users’ comments that there was a clear line between beginner and expert needs.

Beginners need guidance where to look, how to start, and how to conduct research. They are unsure of what resources are available and need descriptions of resources because they are either unfamiliar with the topic or with research in general. Once they become familiar with the main resources, they need guidance on how to find more in-depth sources.

Experts on the other hand, are already familiar with general and discipline-specific databases. They are looking for specialized sources in their field that will help them become further engaged in their work.

It is important to note that “beginners” and “experts” do not correlate with undergraduate and graduate standing necessarily, but rather with the student’s engagement in research and their expertise (or lack of) in a given subject area.

Keeping this need in mind, we now recommend that authors consider creating separate boxes for “Starting Points” and resources “Beyond the Surface” for more specialized resources.

### **Using the New Guidelines and Checking for Librarian Compliance**

The checklist for guide authors created by BRDG explained the new guidelines for subject guides, what steps one should take to achieve that guideline and the rationale behind each change. BRDG gave staff about 3 months to make the changes (until the end of the academic year). During that time we provided

support for authors by offering personal consultations in-person or via email, and hosted three drop-in “workparties” to dedicate time to review the guidelines, work on the guides and provide one-on-one assistance.

At the end of the grace period, BRDG divided up the guides alphabetically and reviewed each guide for compliance and general usability. Each BRDG member then sent emails to guide authors, one for each guide, highlighting what was done well and offering suggestions for improvements on the guide. The personalized emails were well-received by staff and served as a reminder for those who had not yet made changes to their guides.

Because there is no way to enforce the guidelines beyond this, BRDG’s ongoing plan is to highlight an outstanding LibGuide periodically as an example of worthwhile features or content to emulate. We hope this public praise to peers acts as positive reinforcement for staff to constantly improve the usability of their webpages.

## **Usability Limitations and Further Study**

There are some limitations of doing a formal usability test to observe the normal use of a guide. The testing environment may be quite different from a user’s normal research/study environment. Having an observer/test moderator looking over the user’s shoulder may induce test anxiety and make them more apt to rush through tasks. Some users may feel pressured to provide the “right” answer (even when you reassure them there is no right answer), and work on a task longer than they normally would. Questions to further investigate as students and faculty return to campus for a new academic year include how users access the guides and if that can be improved, how often guides are used for research, and how they compare with other help content provided by the Libraries. These questions can be assessed with other methods, such as surveys, focus groups, and web analytics.

## **Conclusion**

LibGuides lets you customize the look of the site to match your existing brand and help users know where they are. Providing consistency across systems not only helps brand it as your own content, but gives you the opportunity to provide the same tools and links (in our case, our “ask us” links and our catalog and site search boxes) in the same place.

Customizing beyond the branding—redesigning layout and navigation—lets you tailor it to meet the needs of your specific users—both the authors who work within the system to create the content, and the end-users who navigate the resulting site content. For example, at the UW, the organization of the content within the system (general guides and sub-guides) did not work well with existing navigation structures like category pages (where it is difficult to visually indicate the importance of a general guide other than moving it to the top of the list). Customizing how users navigate to guides was easier than further rearranging all of the content provided by 60 or more staff. Customizing also gives you the opportunity to discard any features that you do not use or that might otherwise confuse your users, like the top LibGuides search box that appears by default on each page in the system.

The content hosted by LibGuides is just a part of the entire UW Libraries website. Customizing it to complement the other systems helps us manage a larger chunk of the user experience with the Libraries. Users are constantly delving into other systems over which you have little or no control, so it helps the user to customize when you can. Doing usability testing with your users will help you customize the system to suit their needs and improve their research experience.

## Appendix A

### Research Questions

- How do people want to browse or find information within the guide?
- What general layout improvements can be made, including the organization of the layout, and content to include or exclude?
- Do inconsistent layout structures between guides confuse the user?
- Do the top navigation labels make sense?
- Do users have difficulty navigating back to Lib Guides after researching within a particular offset?
- Do external links on the page confuse or disorient users?
- Are the drop-down menus confusing? Do users know the first tab is clickable?
- Do users get the sense that doing research in varying disciplines is different?
- Do users like the current look and feel?
- Do inconsistent color schemes confuse users?
- Do users know which database to search? Do they know the differences between them?
- Do users know which catalog to search? Do they know the differences between them?
- Where would users go for help if they felt lost or confused?
- Can users find images?

## Appendix B

### Subject Guides Usability Study Protocol

#### Introductions (4 minutes)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our research study. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm going to be walking you through this session.

During the rest of the session, I'll be working from a script to ensure that my instructions to everyone who participates in the study are the same.

Let me explain why we've asked you to come here today: We're evaluating the Libraries' subject guides page.

During the session, I will ask you to use the web site to do a variety of things and will observe you as you do them.

As you do these things, please try to do whatever you would do normally.

I want to make it clear that we're testing the *site*, not you. You can't do anything wrong here. In fact, this is probably the one place today where you don't have to worry about making mistakes. If something is unclear to you, that means we can learn something.

We want to hear exactly what you think, so please don't worry that you're going to hurt our feelings. We are here to gather information and will use this to improve the site, so we need to know honestly what you think.

As we go along, I'm going to ask you questions and ask you to think out loud, to tell me what's going through your mind. This will help us a lot.

If you have questions, feel free to ask. I may not be able to answer them right away, since we're interested in your perceptions, but I will try to answer any question you still have when we're done.

One last thing. We would like to record this session so that we can later review what happened, mostly so I can take a second look at this session and take better notes. We don't use our recordings for purposes other than helping us learn about the site.

If you would, I'm going to ask you to sign something for us. It simply says that you are willing to take part in the study.

[distribute consent form; provide a copy for the participant if they want it]

Do you have any questions before we move on?

[Press record on Morae]

**Now, you will begin with a short questionnaire. (3 minutes)**

UW Task List: (35 minutes)

Now let's start with some tasks I would like you to try. You are going to play the role of a researcher in a variety of fields of study. Look for the information requested for each task. During each task make sure to "think aloud."

Please open a browser window. I will guide you to the Subject Pages

[Navigate to the Subject Guides page from the Library homepage.]

Please Begin

#### Task 1

1. For your anthropology class on North American Indians you have decided to write your final assignment on cultural anthropology and the Cheyenne Indians. Locate the book The Cheyennes : Indians of the Great Plains by E Adamson Hoebel for your paper. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage.

Suggested Questions: \* (Format has been changed from a table view to a list view)

- What do you think each search engine does?
- What would make you choose one search engine over another?

Things to Notice:

- Does the user seemed confused by the lack of description under the search boxes?
- Does user have issues navigating back to Lib Guides?
- Was prompting or assistance necessary? Yes/no # of times\_\_\_\_\_

Successful Completion Criteria

- Preferred path: Subject guides>Anthropology>any >finds resource
- Does the user stay on the preferred path?
- Does the user complete the task?
- Success Score
  - \_\_\_/2

#### Task 2

2. Locate an image of Barack Obama and Hu Jintao together from their recent gathering. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage.

Suggested Questions:

- What would make you search one image database over the other? (Do the descriptions have any effect on which database over another?)

Things to Notice:

- Does the user have trouble determining which guide to search?
- Does the user read the descriptions for the databases? (text below the link)
  - \_\_\_ No                      \_\_\_ Quickly Skimmed                      \_\_\_ Read Thoroughly
- Does the user have issues navigating back to Lib Guides?
- Was prompting or assistance necessary?
  - Yes/no                      # of times\_\_\_\_\_

Successful Completion Criteria

- Preferred path: Subject guides> Images, Audio, Video > Image Databases & Resources >Images by Subject>Pacific Northwest>Any Seattle-related Database> finds image
- Does the user stay on the preferred path?
- Does the user complete the task?
- Success Score
  - \_\_\_/2

#### Task 3

3. You are enrolled in an English class. You have read a few books by Ralph W. Emerson and want to write a paper about his role in American literature. Locate a resource to use in your paper. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage.

Suggested Questions:

- Do the tabs on top make sense to you?
- What does “Find Articles/E-Journals” mean to you?
- How many databases would you generally search in for a resource?

Things to Notice:

- Can the user find the American Literature subject guide which is not on the homepage? What term did the user scan the list for? (English or American Literature)
- Does the opening of the subject guide in a new window confuse the user?
- Was prompting or assistance necessary?
  - Yes/no # of times\_\_\_\_\_

Successful Completion Criteria:

- Preferred path: Subject guides>English>American Literature tab or link on 2<sup>nd</sup> page>finds resource OR Browse all guides>American Literature>finds resource
- Does the user stay on the preferred path?  
Does the user complete the task?
- Success Score
  - \_\_\_/2

Task 4

4. You are taking a psychology course and are interested in writing about child behavior for your midterm paper. Your professor wants you to write about current research in the field, so she requires that your resource be less than 5 years old. Please locate a resource on child behavior that has been published in the last 5 years. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage.

Suggested Questions:

- What are your thoughts on the look and feel of this guide? Does it matter to you that the colors and layout can differ from guide to guide?
- What would make you search one database over the other? (Do the comments or rating have any effect on which database over another?)
- Do the link descriptions influence where you’ll click?

Things to Notice:

- Does the user read the link descriptions? (pop-ups from mousing over, if applicable)
  - \_\_\_ No                    \_\_\_ Quickly Skimmed                    \_\_\_ Read Thoroughly
- Does the user read the descriptions for the databases? (text below the link –articles, text in right hand column – UW catalog)
  - \_\_\_ No                    \_\_\_ Quickly Skimmed                    \_\_\_ Read Thoroughly
- Was prompting or assistance necessary?
  - Yes/no # of times\_\_\_\_\_

Successful Completion Criteria

- Preferred path: Subject guides>Psychology>Find Articles>finds resource
- Does the user stay on the preferred path?
- Does the user complete the task?
- Success Score
  - \_\_\_/2

Task 5

5. You are taking a history class and need to write a paper. Locate a resource on the topic of your choice. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage.

Suggested Questions:

- Do you like the look and feel of this guide?



- What would make you use one search box over the other?

Things to Notice:

- Does the user read the descriptions for the UW Catalog search boxes? (text next to search boxes)
  - \_\_\_ No                    \_\_\_ Quickly Skimmed                    \_\_\_ Read Thoroughly
- Was prompting or assistance necessary?
  - Yes/no                    # of times \_\_\_\_\_

Successful Completion Criteria

- Preferred path: Subject guides>Psychology>Find Articles>finds resource
- Does the user stay on the preferred path?
- Does the user complete the task?
- Success Score
  - \_\_\_/2

Task 6

6. You are taking a dance class and you have to write a short research paper on the history of Renaissance Court Dance. Please locate an article for your paper. When you are finished please return to the library Subject Guides homepage.

Suggested Questions:

- Does this guide give you a sense of how dance research is different from psychology research?
- What are your thoughts about the layout of the page? (articles)
- Now that you're in the subject guide, do you find it useful to have short screen casts showing you how to do specific tasks? Where would you usually look for help?

Things to Notice:

- Did the user have any issues with the drop down menu?
- Was prompting or assistance necessary?
  - Yes/no                    # of times \_\_\_\_\_

Successful Completion Criteria

- Preferred path: Subject guides>Dance>Find Articles>finds resource
- Does the user complete the task?
- Does the user stay on the preferred path?
- Success Score
  - \_\_\_/2

X's and O's exercise: Lib Guides (7 minutes)

Now I'd like to know more about what specifically you use/don't use or like/dislike about the content on this page.

Instructions

- circle any items on the page that you like and would use the most
- cross out any items on the page that you don't like and don't use
- add any items that are not on the page that you would like to have there for your own use

Questionnaire and Debrief (5 minutes)

Thank you. That completes the tasks.

I have a brief questionnaire here that I'd like you to complete. The information you provide is for our use only.

*[Facilitator visits observation room while participant completes questionnaire, to ask if there are any follow up questions from observers. Returns to room and asks follow up questions.]*

Do you have any comments or questions about today's session?

Once again, I'd like to say thanks for coming today.

*[Give the participant their payment]*

## Appendix C

### Recommendations Matrix

Recommendations	Issues	Supporting Evidence
<b>Provide static descriptions under each database for users to scan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Users didn't want to remember what a rollover description contained.</li> <li>- Users wanted descriptions of the databases they were presented.</li> </ul>	Users have a general preference for static text/information -- upfront, not buried, so they don't have to mouse-over in order to access. P2 wrote "Too little info" next to the database links on the History guide during the Xs & Os activity.
<b>Supply short descriptions of what search boxes include</b>	Users wanted short descriptions of the search boxes they were presented.	P5 wrote "blurb" next to the search boxes on the Dance guide. P3, "[would like to see] explanations on functions of the search engines."
<b>Place the most important information in the top center of the page</b>	The center of the page is often used for boilerplate information leaving users confused, and unsure of what to do next.	Time after time, user's eyes were drawn to the center of the page, as seen through observation and the Xs & Os activity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To increase visibility, tabs should be a contrasting color from the background and other colors used on the page</b></li> <li>• <b>Reinforce the structure of the page by using similar colors for the headings background and the tabs</b></li> <li>• <b>Reiterate tabs with textual links in the top center pane</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Users didn't always notice the tabs right away.</li> <li>- Lack of coherence with the color schemes of the guides.</li> <li>- Users felt the tabs were part of the UW site not the guide</li> </ul>	<p>In guides where the tabs were a more saturated color, participants seemed to notice the tabs quicker.</p> <p>Users expressed a preference for tab content to be repeated in the body of the page, with explanations</p>
<b>Keep the number of tabs to a minimum. If something can be a contextual link then place it in the body.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information overload for users</li> <li>- Cluttered pages</li> </ul>	<i>"Repetitive tabs cluttered the pages and made it more overwhelming to be looking at a page trying to figure out where to start. Making it crisp and easy to navigate would be really useful."</i> P1 P8 noted "cluttered" on the Dance page in reference to the tabs.
<b>Minimize Redundancy. It confuses users to have a search box for a database and a link to the database on the same page.</b>	Users were confused about links and search boxes that went to the same place.	Four users noted redundant content during the Xs & Os exercise.
<b>Provide guidance on how to</b>	- Users are confused by	Numerous users thought the search was

<p><b>find books, etc. from the lib guide. Specify that the search is not scoped.</b></p>	<p>duplicity on Lib Guides and the Library homepage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Users thought search boxes on Lib Guides pages were scoped to the subject area of the guide they were on.</li> </ul>	<p>scoped.</p> <p>P1 after searching the library catalog in several guides said, “Can I go through the normal catalog?”</p>
<p><b>Keep like content boxes together (i.e. Help and tutorials)</b></p>	<p>Need to reduce clutter and create focal points</p>	<p>This will help guide student’s eyes when looking for content.</p> <p>P5 expressed wanting a “help” section in which all tutorials or help information would be located in the same place as opposed to in various locations on the page.</p> <p><u>Resource:</u> “Your design should organize the user interface purposefully, in meaningful and useful ways based on clear, consistent models that are apparent and recognizable to users, <b>putting related things together and separating unrelated things</b>, differentiating dissimilar things and making similar things resemble one another.” (from: <i>User Interface Design Tips, Techniques, and Principles</i>)</p>
<p><b>Add an “Advanced” link next to each search box when possible</b></p>	<p>Users have to do a search and then find the advanced search from within the database’s interface.</p>	<p>P2 circled the “advanced search” link during the Xs &amp; Os exercise.</p> <p>P10 “Maybe more options for doing an advanced search more immediately.”</p>
<p><b>Break up content with use of visuals</b></p>	<p>Pages lacking a focal point</p>	<p><i>“I suggest adding something interdisciplinary and making webpage more visually helpful.”</i> P9</p> <p><i>[What suggestions do you have?] “More visuals.”</i> P5</p>
<p><b>Break content into more subcategories. Users have requested places to help them find topics.</b></p>	<p>Users unfamiliar with a subject desire subcategories to help them get started researching</p>	<p>P1 <i>[What she’d like to see] “Perhaps the departments broken down more into different subsets of subjects. For example, how History was broken down into Medieval History.”</i></p> <p>P5 <i>[What she’d like to see] “More subtopics on the various guide pages”</i></p> <p>P1 <i>“It would be helpful if the departments were broken down more into different subsets of subjects for people researching in an area they are not used to.”</i></p>
<p><b>Keep the amount of words in each tab short (3 words max)</b></p>	<p>Users are missing content because tabs have too many words</p>	<p>P10 Didn’t notice the “photos” part in the tab “News Broadcasts, Transcripts, &amp; Photos”</p> <p><u>Resource:</u> “Users typically <b>see about 2 words</b> for most list items; they’ll see a little more if the lead words are short,</p>

and only the first word if they're long.”  
 Jakob Nielsen, Alert Box, UX Expert  
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/nanocontent.html>

<b>Breaking up “Starting Points” and “Further Research” databases</b>	P10 – sees useful information buried P9 – wants to break them up
<b>Homepage</b>	
<b>Still to be discussed, options:</b> 1. <b>Add an anchored alphabetical list to the top of the homepage</b> 2. <b>Adding a scroll bar and anchoring for quick finds (About.com example)</b> 3. <b>Reverting to the 3 column layout</b>	The length of the list is very long and difficult to scan <i>Challenge:</i> Users want to browse the list to know what is there but many were scanning for a specific term
<b>Separate formats and highlight main features</b> <b>Suggestions:</b> - <b>Create tabs on top to separate out formats</b> - <b>Remove extra content to highlight the main content</b> - <b>&gt;&gt;Remove “Featured Guides” as this was not used frequently</b> - <b>&gt;&gt;Remove the Library guide explanation box on the side bar and increase the size of the explanation on top</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to format specific content through lib guides is difficult (e.g. Images)</li> <li>- Mix of format vs. subject vs. class guides in list</li> </ul> <p>Nine out of ten users had difficulty finding the Images guide. Two users claimed they “would have given up already” if they were on their own. Six out of ten users found images without going to the Image guide at all.</p>
<b>Remove all content from the second level page other than the sub-category pages.</b>	Users found it confusing and often though it was a guide itself.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> University of Washington Libraries. “Selected Library Statistics for UW Seattle.” Last modified March 5, 2009. <http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/stats/default.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ward, Jennifer. “Persona Development and Use, or, How to Make Imaginary People Work for You.” Paper presented at the 2010 Library Assessment Conference, Baltimore, Maryland October 25–27, 2010.