

Kennesaw State University

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Student-centered design: Creating LibGuides students actually use


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Student-Centered Design: Creating LibGuides Students Actually Use



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Amy Gratz Barker & Ashley T. Hoffman
Kennesaw State University Library System



Method: Card Sorting


This design research method provides insight into what content users want. Postcard sorting is a user-centered method for organizing content. In 2017, the first major step in our project:

Method:

- 1. Recruit 10 students to create subject guides. These subject guides follow a template: individual, research with a goal of 10 subject cards.
- 2. 10 subject guides participate in 7 sessions.
- 3. Conduct user-centered content group discussion about the content and preferences for multiple sessions.

OPEN

Method: Usability Testing



OPEN


Student-Centered Subject Guides

Context:

In 2017, our undergraduate subject guides were in need of design. Our challenge: Our design had been existing for years, and we had a limited budget. The design was a "hand-drawn" design.

Through a mixed-methods study taking a full year as a user-centered design process, we created a new design. The new design is a subject guide that students find helpful and engaging.

An example of our current design:



OPEN

Design Features: Content

Our final design included content based on feedback from throughout our planning study:

Key Search Tips:

- 1. Search for keywords and related words.
- 2. Search for keywords and related words.
- 3. Search for keywords and related words.

OPEN

Design Features: Layout

Through the user-centered design process, we created a new design. The new design is a subject guide that students find helpful and engaging.


Key Search Tips:

- 1. Search for keywords and related words.
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1 of 10

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METHOD 1: CARD SORTING

This design research method provides insight into what content users want, and how to organize it. We conducted card sorting from July-September 2017, the first major step in our project.

Method

- Scope limited to undergraduate subject guides, the only type of guide following a template
- Individual, open sort with a deck of 40 content cards
- 18 undergraduate participants in 7 sessions
- Ended each session with a short group discussion about the content and preferences for guide design and layout

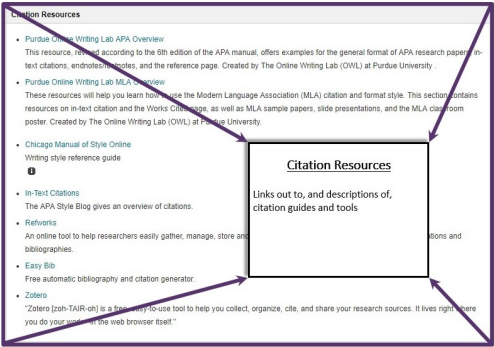
Student Feedback

- Impressed by amount of information; no content was deleted
- Organized content according to a research process

About the Cards

Cards represent content that you intend to include in your final product. We created cards:

- Aligned with content boxes on our LibGuides
- With titles matching box titles, followed by a brief description of the box content
- Representing boxes on our original template OR
- Representing a few boxes frequently used elsewhere



METHOD 2: USABILITY TESTING

This method identifies problems students may have using or finding information on your website.

Method

- 40 student participants in 4 rounds
- 15 minutes per student
- 4-5 real world tasks
- Think-Aloud Protocol
- Prototype guide improved between rounds

Example Task

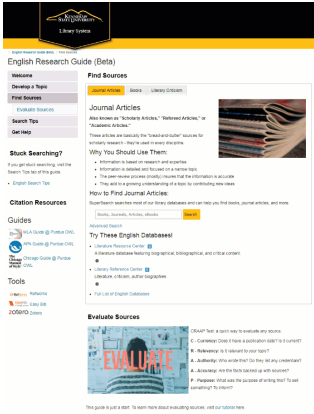
Your professor is requiring you to use a scholarly article for your paper. Where would you go on this site to get started?

Student Feedback

- Usually looked for a search box right away
- Did not scroll past the center of the page
- Did not notice information in left hand column
- Did not watch videos, but reacted well to images and animated GIFs

Q: Could you find what you were looking for?

- In the first round of testing, 45% of students answered "yes," 27% answered "for the most part," and 27% answered "no"
- By the fourth round of testing, 70% of students answered "yes" and 30% answered "for the most part." No students answered "no"



STUDENT-CENTERED SUBJECT GUIDES

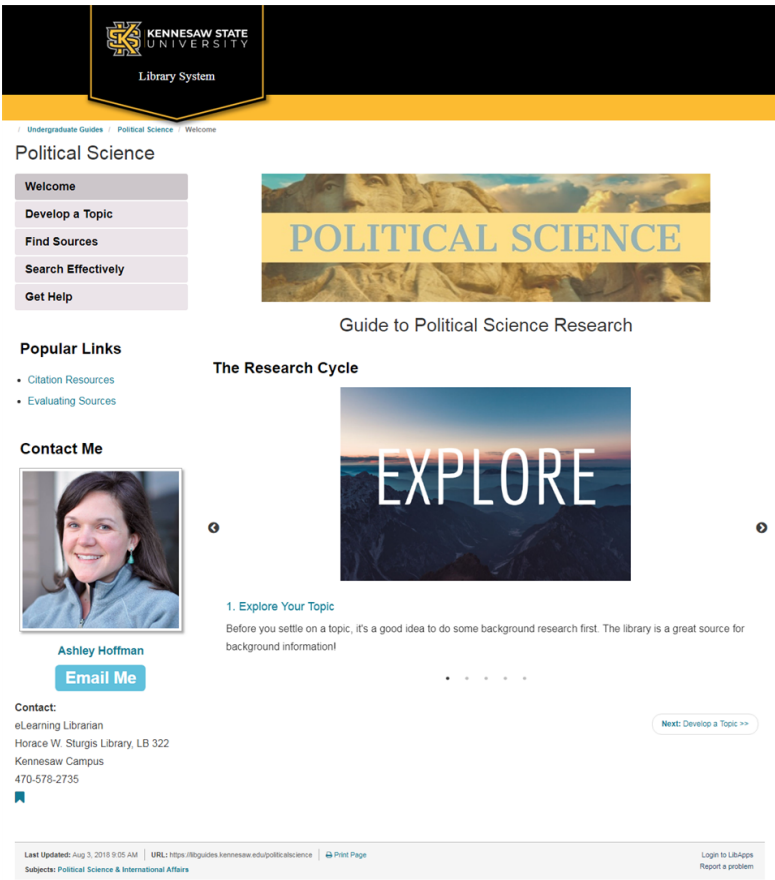
Context

In 2017, our undergraduate subject guides were in need of a significant change. Guide usage had been declining for years, and most librarians disliked [the template](https://libguides.kennesaw.edu/c.php?g=503889) (https://libguides.kennesaw.edu/c.php?g=503889) being used. We needed a re-design!

New Blueprint Design

Through a mixed-methods study taking a full year, a new blueprint guide design was developed. We now have a vibrant set of subject guides that students find helpful and engaging.

[An example of our current blueprint](http://libguides.kennesaw.edu/politicalscience) (http://libguides.kennesaw.edu/politicalscience)



(http://libguides.kennesaw.edu

/politicalscience)

[Explore more of our new subject guides!](http://libguides.kennesaw.edu/?b=t&group_id=11132#collapse3) (http://libguides.kennesaw.edu/?b=t&group_id=11132#collapse3)

Next Steps

Now that our undergraduate subject guides are up and running, we have plans for implementing more changes to our guide offerings:

- Course and other guides are slowly being updated to follow some of the principle lessons learned through the study
- Subject guides continue to be adjusted to provide more subject-specific content
- Design elements that couldn't be implemented initially are being developed behind the scenes, such as providing thumbnail

images for all database links

- Future assessment of the guides is being planned!

DESIGN FEATURES: CONTENT

Our final design included content based on feedback from throughout our yearlong study.

Content

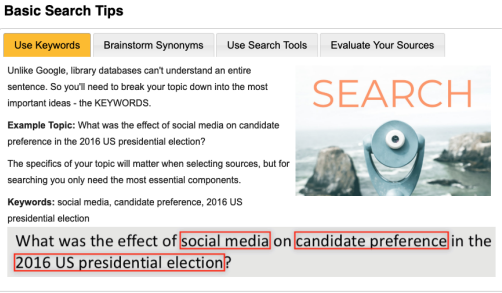
- Outline of research cycle
- Subject-specific information
- Instructional content with curated resources

Significant Features

- Direct, informal language
- Short bullet points over large blocks of text
- Images, graphics, and animations (but not videos)
- Interactive content (e.g. search boxes, clickable tabs, worksheets)

Student Comments

- Even if students did not visit certain sections of the site, most said that all of the content was useful and would not delete it
- Many students commented that the guides would have been extremely useful to them had they known about them earlier



DESIGN FEATURES: LAYOUT

Although the content of each guide was subject-specific, the [final blueprint design](https://libguides.kennesaw.edu/subguideblueprint) (https://libguides.kennesaw.edu/subguideblueprint) featured a uniform layout across all guides.

Structure

- Research Process-oriented design
- Minimal tabs
- Side-tab navigation that mimics parent website
- Minimal scrolling (use of tabbed boxes)
- Left column only for supplemental material

Aesthetics

- Minimalist design
- Modern images
- Increased font sizes
- Streamlined color palette
- Branded subject banners



Benefits of a Blueprint

Following a common blueprint has a variety of benefits:

- Standard navigation and layout reduces cognitive load
- Sets standard of quality across guides created by different librarians
- Simplifies guide creation process for librarians, reducing work-load

For the LibGuide administrator, there are several additional benefits:

- Mapped boxes for standard content simplifies maintenance
- Reduces the duplication of assets and system bloat
- Streamlines quality-control process
- Simplifies training

ABSTRACT

Having trouble creating and maintaining research guides that students actually use? We were! Come learn how we addressed several years of low usage statistics and general dissatisfaction with our guides by creating a new blueprint based on student feedback. Our Research Guides Assessment Task Force conducted a months-long study using card sorting and usability testing methods to uncover students' understanding of the research process and resources. We will share the results of our study, highlighting what students are really looking for, as well as tips for using these design research methods yourself!

REFERENCES

Recommended Resources:

Krug, S. (2010). *Rocket surgery made easy: The do-it-yourself guide to finding and fixing usability problems*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders.

Spencer, D. (2009). *Card sorting: Designing usable categories*. New York: Rosenfeld Media.