The Course Guide: Creating a Culinary Masterpiece "to go"

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Introduction

Librarians operate in a multimodal environment, where Web 2.0 applications allow us to easily create multimedia teaching and learning materials for our students. Yet, course guides frequently follow the print pathfinder model of merely listing resources. In this interactive workshop offered at the LOEX 40th National Conference, participants were inspired to "cook up a recipe" to transform the course guide development process so it resulted in a dynamic 24/7 learning tool. Through discussion and examples, participants analyzed an assignment using a "5 Question Model", applied best practices for visual design, and used pedagogical principles as a framework to develop a dynamic course-specific guide that enhances learning and supports the goals of a specific assignment. Cooking and food preparation metaphors, reflective of the conference theme, were used throughout this interactive workshop to highlight content.

Preparation: Analyzing the Assignment

At Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, we implemented Springshare's LibGuides in 2010, and quickly discovered their utility as a support for research assignments. We began to consider reconfiguring our approach to course guide design following our reading of the Project Information Literacy Program Report titled "Assigning Inquiry: How Handouts for Research Assignments Guide Today's College Student" (Head & Eisenberg, 2010) (referred to herein as the "PIL Report"), which examined content of undergraduate level course-related research assignment handouts. Their findings included the observation that the majority of handouts sampled "emphasized standards more than finding and using sources for research" (p. 1). Additionally, the PIL Report stated that "very few handouts recommended consulting a librarian about the research assignment" (p.1). Given these findings, we decided to look at our course guide design process from the perspective of examining course assignments for *finding and using* processes, and consider ways we could include the librarian's voice in a course guide.

Our first step in the process of designing the course guide used to support an assignment is to *analyze the recipe.* In other words, we need to pull apart the *ingredients* (the resources needed), and the *preparation* (the processes) that students need to employ in order to successfully complete the assignment. We introduced this analysis to our participants by reviewing an example sociology research paper assignment as it is typically received by students, and then framing the assignment using the metaphors of *ingredients* and *preparation* to identify the resources and processes. We referred to the PIL Report's analysis which showed that although there may be quite a bit of detail in an assignment handout, these assignments rarely name specific resources (instead, they just vaguely refer to "databases") and do not provide breadth or depth about finding relevant resources (p. 25). We discussed how sometimes the *ingredients* and *preparation* are comingled; for example, inherent in the resource "scholarly journal article" is the process "identify a scholarly journal article".

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> **From the kitchen of Veronica & Judith**
> ### Sociology Research Paper
>
> Write a 5 page research paper on a topic of your choice covered in the textbook. Your references must include a popular article and a scholarly article. Make sure you include a proper APA citation for the articles, and properly reference the articles in your paper if you use any quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing of the text. Make sure your paper has a properly formatted APA title page. This assignment is due by the beginning of class, Week 6.
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**Assignment as typically received
by student**

> **From the kitchen of Veronica & Judith**
> ### Sociology Research Paper
>
> **Ingredients**
> Topic
> Popular Article
> Scholarly Article
> Proper APA Format
>
> > **Ingredients** are the required materials, resources or formats needed to complete the assignment
>
> > **Preparation** includes the research, writing and presentation processes that need to be accomplished to successfully complete the assignment.
>
> **Preparation**
> Students select their own topic for a 5 page research paper using the textbook as a guide. References must include a popular article and a scholarly article. Paper needs to be in proper APA format, including title page and in-text citations. Students need to be mindful of proper quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing of the text.
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**Assignment with resources and
processes identified**

Once the resources and processes have been identified and separated, we can then examine them more carefully as we continue our design process. As we stated, some **processes are imbedded in the assignment**, or comingled with resource requirements. In order to discover these hidden processes, we presented a *5 Question Model* that could be used while reviewing the assignment. The model consists of the following questions:

- **What do students already know?** Inherent in any assignment is an expectation of certain knowledge. We need to look at the assignment to ascertain what that appears to be. It may not be congruent with the students' actual prior knowledge, and can help define areas for which students may need additional information or instruction.

- **What do they need to know?** We need to identify the critical thinking processes students must undertake to successfully complete the assignment, and ways to support them. For example, our sample assignment requires students to select a scholarly and a popular article. In order to do so, they need to understand the difference between a scholarly and popular article. Given this scenario, it is likely we

need to provide guidance not only on where to find these resources, but how to identify the different types of resources required by the assignment.

- **What do they need to do?** What does the assignment ask them to do, and what can we do to help support that? Within this question, we need to also ascertain:

  - How do we get them to broaden their palate? How do we direct students to try new resources, rather than those they always rely on?

  - As we direct them to alternatives, how do we guide students on the purpose of these unfamiliar resources in relationship to the goals of the assignment?

- **How do students need to do it?** Once students understand what they are looking for and where to find it, they need to synthesize the information with their own ideas in a paper. This part of the process is often missing from a course guide. We need to help them understand:

  - How to begin the writing process

  - How to integrate the sources in writing, through summarizing and paraphrasing

  - How to properly format the paper and cite sources

- **What if they can't do it?** We also need to make help available. Recent research by Sinkinson, Alexander, Hicks and Kahn (2012) showed that help in finding resources and using services were a top preference of what undergraduate students want in a guide (p. 73).

LOEX 2012 WORKSHOP ACTIVITY:
ANALYZING THE RECIPE

Each participant was provided a "recipe" for a research assignment, with *ingredients* and directions for either *presentation* or *preparation*. From that "recipe", they were asked to identify the resources and processes in the assignment using the *5 Question Model*. Participants were encouraged to read carefully in order to uncover any hidden processes or resources, such as the process of *choosing a topic* that was imbedded in the original sample sociology research paper assignment. The resources and processes identified by the participants in this activity would be used later in the workshop as the basis of the development of the framework for the course guide.

Activity

- **What do students need to know?**
- **What do students need to do?**
- What do students already know about this subject or assignment?
- How do students need to do it?
- What if students can't do it?

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Company Research Group Project

From the Kitchen of: Business 2010 Organization /Management
Serves 30 (can be doubled)

Your group will be asked to research a selected company from the Fortune's Best 100 Companies to Work For list.

Ingredients

You will be asked to research the following areas using library resources:

- Description of the company and a brief history
- Description of Products/Services and Markets
- Financial Overview
- Management Practices
- Organizational Environment
- Organizational Culture
- Social Responsibility and Ethical Assessment

Preparation

Each group will present their research to the class using Powerpoint slides. Each member of the group should participate in the research and in the presentation. Your group will also submit a bibliography of the sources used in your presentation in APA style on the day of your presentation as a separate document. Your project grade will be divided between 75% for content (specifically critical analysis and correct use of theory) and 25% for presentation style. It is important to use theory from class to frame the information you present. Presentations will be made during the last two weeks of class.
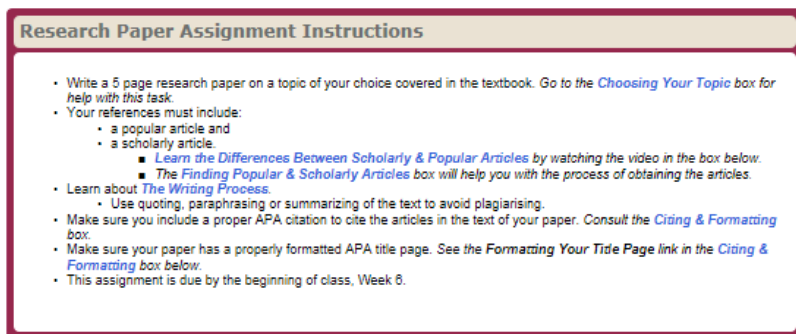

Cooking Methods

Identifying the *ingredients* in an assignment or course syllabus can be a fairly simple process. In the case of the example sociology research paper assignment, the *ingredients* identified included the topic, popular article, scholarly article and proper APA format.

If we stop there, with just guiding the students to a selection of sources and links, we end up with a resource-based guide that simply lists the resources and requirements. By presenting students with only the required *ingredients*, we are leaving it up to the amateurs to take these *ingredients* and create a finished product, and there is no librarian voice or guidance in the process. A resource-based guide does not consider whether students understand how all the disparate pieces fit together. Students want to see the research process and specific research strategies in a guide. Participants in the Sinkinson et al study demonstrated a preference for guides whose organizational scheme was driven by research need (2012, p. 73). So we propose that the course guide be constructed in a way that helps students link these *ingredients* with a meaningful *process*, using the most effective presentation and pedagogical methods. Using this strategy introduces the librarian's voice into the course guide.

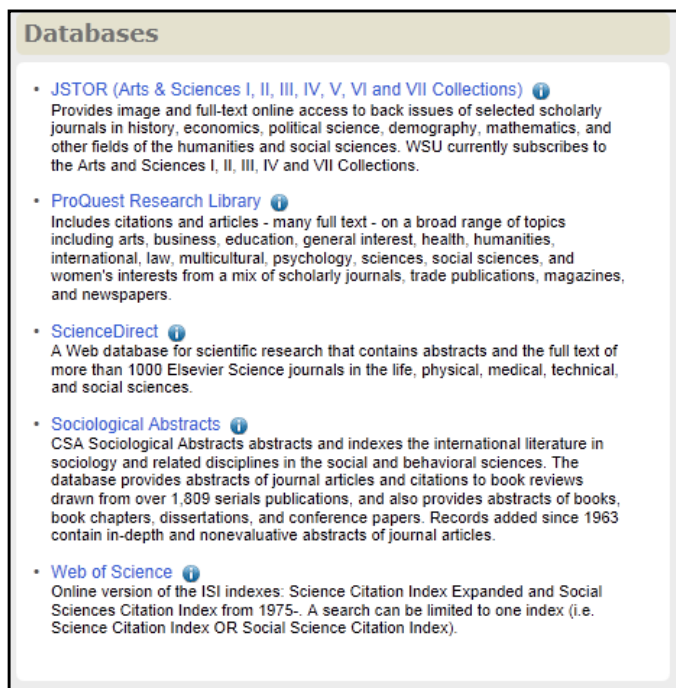This new model of course guide construction considers

the application of good interface design strategies as important as the content. LibGuides and other Web 2.0 tools used for hosting course guides have many options for presenting content: lists, links, RSS feeds, embedded video, embedded audio, attached documents, and more. Along with choosing appropriate content presentation methods, the following best practices should be considered throughout the course guide development process:

- Apply the design principle of *chunking* by breaking apart identified steps in the process and putting similar content together.

- Apply the design principle of *sequencing* by planning a portion of the guide for each of the steps in the identified processes, and apply order to the sequence of processes.

- Consider page layout. LibGuides standard layout of three columns may be difficult for students to navigate.

- Provide direct navigation to resources and services.

- Use images, color and sizing for variety, but apply these in a way that carries meaning. For example, use larger size text for all headings, or a particular color to indicate an information resource.

- Keep text to a minimum. Only include text that (a) is important to students, and (b) relates specifically to the process. Don't write what you can show more effectively through multimedia.

- Use descriptive headings and language that reflects the language used in the assignment document.

- Use a variety of multimedia appropriately. Use video when you need to demonstrate, audio when you need to tell, images when you need to show.

So consider, when designing a course guide, instead of simply replicating the assignment as written (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Before

Assignment

Research Paper Assignment

Write a 5 page research paper on a topic of your choice covered in the textbook. Your references must include a popular article and a scholarly article. Make sure you include a proper APA citation for the articles, and properly cite the articles in your paper if you use any quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing of the text. Make sure your paper has a properly formatted APA title page. This assignment is due by the beginning of class, Week 6.

Chunk the assignment instruction into a series of steps, appropriately **sequenced**, that can serve as the framework for the guide, and provide **direct navigation** through links to corresponding sections of the guide (Figure 2).

Figure 2: After

Rather than presenting students with an overwhelming list of databases with vendor created descriptions (Figure 3):

Figure 3: Before

Figure 4: After

Limit choice by selecting a few optimal information sources or databases that will suit the purpose of the assignment and **provide students with direction** on how to search for and recognize scholarly articles (Figure 4). Schwartz contends that choice overload can increase anxiety in students and lead to reduced performance. He observed that "students given 30 topics from which to choose to write an extra-credit essay are less likely to write one than those given six. And if they do write one, it tends to be of lower quality." (2004). Reduction of choice may lower anxiety and help direct a student's focus on appropriate activities, like reading the article and synthesizing its content, rather than unsuccessfully searching multiple databases.

And do not forget those "hidden" processes like selecting a topic. A simple, resource-based guide may overlook this step, but the learning-focused guide offers students guidance in topic selection as well. In more than fifty percent of the assignment handouts analyzed in the PIL Report, "students were expected to choose and define a topic on their own as long as it fit within a broad topic area." (p. 7). It was also noted in the PIL Report that students reported needing both background information and an explanation of terms related to their topics. Students reported turning to Wikipedia because it provided both in simple terminology (p. 6). As reflected in the content box below, students can be provided with guidance on discovering and selecting an appropriate topic. Here, a link is provided to the textbook's Table of Contents for possible topics using Content Café (http://www.baker-taylor.com/pdfs/content_cafe.pdf), a "Word Cloud" of topics, created using Wordle (http://www.wordle.net/) and drawn from that textbook Table of Contents, visualizes those topics for students, and finally, direct links to a specialized encyclopedia search and a topic-focused database are provided as resources for discovering more about a topic.

Choosing Your Topic

Consult your textbook's table of contents for ideas or take a look at the word cloud below.

- Explore the topic
  Use the search box beneath the book image for the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences to search your topic for a background article that will help you understand your topic. You can cite this source in your paper, but it is not a scholarly or popular article.

- Identify controversies surrounding your topic
  Many social problems discussed in your textbook are included in this list from the Opposing Viewpoints library database. Scholarly and popular articles can be found here.

After contrasting the resource-based guide with the learning-focused guide, we provided our participants with the following rubric (Figure 5), which illustrates the differences in design and delivery of resources and processes that reflect effective pedagogical and design strategies.

Figure 5: Rubric

Pedagogical and Design Strategy Rubric for Course Guides				
Resource or Process	Minimal	Adequate	Exemplary	Pedagogical or Design Principle
Topic selection	Left to student	Link to encyclopedia	Provide instruction about topic selection and link to subject-based background sources	Metacognition Chunking
Library resources	Link to database list	Link to selected databases with a brief text description	Link to a few selected databases in order of preference with instructional materials on how to search	Reduce cognitive load Scaffolding Chunking
Internet resources	Left to student	Link to Google Scholar search	Provide instruction on web evaluation; link to selected resources	Reduce cognitive load Scaffolding Chunking
Help	Link to library contact page	Link to contact page and embed online services	Direct link to liaison librarian contact info with image	Metacognition Confidence & Reassurance
Writing assistance	Left to student	Link to the OWL guide	Link to specific assistance for type of assignment, built in appropriate sequence, and link to university Writing Center	Metacognition Scaffolding Confidence & Reassurance

the resources and processes they individually identified in their assignment with effective visual presentation and pedagogical approaches.

Sample Outcome of Assignment Analysis and Course Guide Activity

LOEX 2012 Workshop Activity: Cooking Up a Course Guide

In our final activity, our participants (in groups of four) took the *ingredients* and *processes* from the assignment they previously analyzed, and used the manipulative materials we provided (template, content boxes for guide design, post-its) to create a course guide. With the guidance of the rubric and presented design strategies, they constructed a model that paired

PLATING THE MASTERPIECE

When a guide is developed using the foregoing process, we believe there will be tangible benefits for students, faculty, and librarians!

• Students connect the assignment, process and resources

• Faculty notice improvement in assignments

• Librarians are instrumental in teaching and learning.

We closed this workshop by discussing how collaboration with faculty in developing the guide to suit the assignment is key to success in this model. Their incorporation of the guide into the assignment or course from its inception is the final step in linking the guide to the learning outcomes inherent in the assignment or course. We also noted that although this development and design model does not capture the iterative nature of the research and writing process, it does improve the overall instructional quality of the course guide, and provides students the context they desire in a guide.

Link to Presentation Materials http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/libsp/52/

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