

# Revisions & Recommendations: Building Effective Research Guides

Patricia Gimenez

Savannah College of Art and Design

## Opportunity

The Savannah College of Art and Design has over 12,000 students across 5 locations and offers 40 majors. During the Winter of 2015, the SCAD Libraries transitioned to Libguides 2.0 and saw an opportunity to conduct usability tests so we could see how students were using our guides. Our goal: **Can we develop a template that can be applied across course and subject guides?**

## Procedure

### Planning:

Permissions

- No IRB, but did require leadership approval
- Resource requirements
- Minimal budget for student incentives
- Used existing equipment for audio & visual recording

Call for participants

Writing the script

- Modified from Steve Krug's "Don't Make Me Think" script
- Writing the questions
- Specific to common tasks and processes
- Consider question order - it can have an impact!

### Testing:

Student disclosure & agreement

- Usability.gov
- Technology setup
- Capturing student's screen and audio via Adobe Connect
- Projected screen overhead for librarians to observe student's navigation (without hanging over their shoulders)

Asking the questions, taking notes

- Had at least 2 librarians in the room for all test sessions
- Note-taker observed student's navigation and verbal/facial reactions to the questions and guide experience

Tested 10 students in total

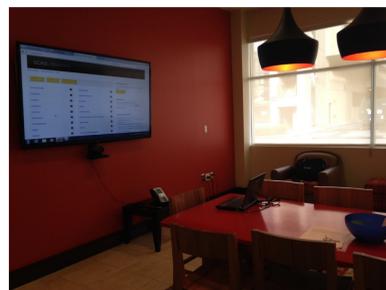
- 5 graduate, 5 undergrad
- 9 majors
- 3 male, 7 female
- 5 international

Average test length: ~28 minutes

Shortest test: 19 minutes

Longest test: 45 minutes

**Note:** After first round of 6 students, we revised one question and altered the question order.



## Results

When students understand the purpose of the guides, they're more likely to return and use them.

When the guides fail or overwhelm, students are just as likely to abandon them for safe, familiar harbors.

## Student Comments

Were the guides useful?  
Would you come back to use them again?

"Definitely, yes! **This makes life much easier** knowing that I can use it online. Because so often you don't have time to come down to the library, and you want stuff immediately, so you can find stuff here."

"Yeah... I know some resources such as the books and magazines that I always go to, **but I'll come back to this one.**"

"Honestly, it's a bit confusing for me [...] **there are so many tabs and so many buttons on it.**"

"The website, is really... it has lots of resources for sure, but it requires a lot of work, to read stuff. [...] **A lot of stuff is on one page, and [students] are too impatient to look at all that stuff.**"

"**I just think there's like a lot of noise...** you know, when you try to find one thing, and there's, like, different things and you're just like **'whoa!'** [...] so you're quickly trying to push what's needed and what's not out."

## Recommendations

### 1. Eliminate Libguide's Search Box (site map search)

All 10 users assumed this was the Catalog Plus (discovery tool) search and used it repeatedly throughout testing.



### 2. Link All Journal Title Lists and Book Lists

Lead users back to the Catalog to find **more** sources



### 3. Revise Labeling

Ensure guides do not include jargon. Rather than naming a tab with the library's search tool ("Catalog Plus"), name it plainly ("Find Journal Articles.")

### 4. Embed More Search Boxes

Rather than instructions to 'search in the library catalog' with no link or directions, embed the library catalog search box across the guide, not just on homepage or "book search" boxes.



### 5. Use Images Sparingly

When images are meant to be instructive, include enough descriptive text – otherwise, it's just more clutter.

### 6. Busy Tabs and Pages Need Better Hierarchy or Index

Reduce visual noise: too many boxes without hierarchy or arrangement quickly become overwhelming. Consider using alternative LibGuides v2 template, moving away from "tabs" arrangement to "menu" arrangement.



## Next Steps

Consider the student's studio/research processes and ways of thinking vs. librarian/faculty-endorsed list of resources

- Prioritize research **process** over resource **format** or offer varying paths to information

Iterative testing

- Work with one or two courses to rework their guides and monitor guide use

- Perform informal testing with students on-site

Input from student groups & faculty

- Avoid "design by committee" by focusing on their bigger needs and issues

With help from Stephanie Grimm and Katy Parker

Download presentation, usability script, and student tasks:

<http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gaintlit/2015/2015/37/>