LibGuides Best Practices: Designing for Usability

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LibGuides Usability Issues

Although thousands of libraries use LibGuides, how students perceive and use these guides is still an emerging area of research. We reviewed the literature related to students’ usage of LibGuides and found the following problem areas:

**Tabs:**
Tabs in LibGuides largely go unnoticed by students. Students either do not notice the tabs or do not understand their purpose. This leads to students primarily using the first page of a guide and missing all subsequent pages. Guides with large numbers of tabs may be especially confusing to students.

**Clutter:**
Librarians have a tendency to want to include every potentially relevant resource in a guide, but this urge can lead to guides with lots of boxes, tabs, and links. The plethora of resources can be confusing and overwhelming for students, who just want a list of the top resources on their topic.

**Marketing:**
Simply creating the LibGuides and adding them to the library website is not enough. Students need to know the guides exist, as well as how to find them. Guides are more highly used when promoted during instruction sessions, recommended by course instructors, and/or linked to from within the learning management system.

**Naming:**
The library’s name for the guides can also affect usage. Students do not know what “LibGuides” are, and even labels such as “subject guide” can prove confusing—students do not understand what the guide entails. Students would prefer guides that are named according to what the guide is intended to do.

**Organization:**
Guides are typically organized by format type—articles, books, websites, etc. The distinctions between different types of sources hold little meaning for students. Guide pages should instead be clearly and consistently labeled according to what they will help students accomplish.

LibGuides Redesign

With the advent of LibGuides 2.0, librarians have a prime opportunity to redesign the guides to improve usability for students. Keeping the usability and usage research in mind, we made the following design changes to improve our guides for LibGuides 2.0:

1. **Tailoring:** We reconsidered the audience for the guides and decided that our students would be better served by research starters for each academic program, rather than comprehensive lists of resources.

2. **Streamlining:** We reduced clutter in the guides by reducing the number of tabs and including only the most relevant resources for each subject.

3. **Reorganizing:** Rather than organizing the guides by format type, we structured the guide pages by what action they helped students accomplish—search tips, citing sources, etc.

4. **Promoting:** We will be working to get the program-specific guides added to the course management system to put them at the point of need and promote their use.

References


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