

In the Classroom 104

Using Library Guides in Your Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you can be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me. I really appreciate it. Technically, I have just completed two years on this podcast, 104 episodes.

We're at number 104, so two years episode every week. I'm feeling pretty good about that. Thank you for those that have been following. This month happens to be a pretty good month. We're at the middle of the month and the number of downloads is just as many as I normally get for a month. I don't know what's going on, but I'm liking it. Today, we're going to be talking about LibGuides and how you can use them in your classroom.

Because of my new role as director of an academic library, I've been taking a deep dive into how libraries can help in the classroom. While I've always appreciated the role of the library, now I have a better understanding that I would like to share with you. Today's topic, as I mentioned is the use of LibGuides in the classroom. Basically, LibGuides are focused collection of references and instruction around a topic. That topic can be your class and you should have a role in creating them. I recently talked about LibGuides in episode ITC 102, when I talked about the whole idea of information literacy.

A LibGuide, I think is a really a central part. To start, I have to make a confession. During all my academic career, all my degrees, I have never used a single LibGuide. I suspect this is pretty commonplace. In fact, I was not even really aware of them until I finished my degree programs. I became more aware of them while working at a community college and working with the librarians and I also tripped upon them while I was doing research on open education resources.

It seemed a lot of libraries had LibGuides created for OER content and I really appreciated that. As I said, I was probably typical of most college students. I used Google and the general database, general library database as a search engine. I didn't go into any special databases. I just use what was presented to me. I don't think that I developed as an academic as well as I could have had I started using LibGuides and really understanding how the library really worked.

As I mentioned, because I am now in charge of an academic library, this is at the forefront of my mind. According to research cited in Bergstrom Lynch's article, LibGuides by design using instructional design principles and user-centered studies to develop best practices, librarians tend to structure library guides according to the research process and around academic disciplines.

While students tend to think more in terms of courses, coursework, and the products of research. Additional research is showing that when creating a LibGuide, if you click created class-specific, specifically for a course, students will more likely use it. Then they get to understand how the library resources are pulled together, how they can best use the library resource resources for a particular discipline. A lot of power to it. I recognize my oversight, and see how important that LibGuides can be if they're used.

The only way that LibGuides will be used is not through the advocacy of librarians. They've found this out with subject guides that librarians would be promoting subject guides, and they really didn't get a lot of use. But when the instructors promoted a course guide, students were all over it. Instructors must make students aware of the LibGuides and encourage or better yet require their use. We're going to talk a little bit about that.

I don't think faculty are going to promote them or require their use until they have input in their development and see how LibGuides can improve the performance of their classrooms. That's what we're really focused about, is how you as instructors or faculty members can weave LibGuides into your class as well as take a little bit of load off your plate. I think working together with librarians, we can do both.

We can improve the classroom performance as well as make your assignments really work for the students. There's all kinds of LibGuides. LibGuides can be developed for an infinite number of reasons. Common reasons include highlighting specific resources, bringing attention to unique collections. For example, ebooks or rare collections. They can also be a collection of how-to guides or they can highlight new technologies.

In terms of maybe information literacy, LibGuides can focus on specific training needs and be part of library instruction. The focus of this specific podcast will be on how LibGuides can be tailored for a specific class. Why should you use a LibGuide? Students are often dumped into the deep end to do research and left to their own devices. That in a typical class, students are told to go create a research paper.

They're told that they need to go research the library to get this material, but an academic library is a vast collection of books, journals, and databases. This is overwhelming to most students. According to the article designing LibGuides as an instructional tools for critical thinking and effective online learning, LibGuides that are designed to guide students through a specific assignment can stand alone as tutorials without the need for mediation by a librarian or instructor.

We know that students don't necessarily have all the skills developed for adequate research. Working with a librarian, you can develop library guides that help them develop those particular skills. Without LibGuides, students may complete the assignments but not develop into lifelong learners of a discipline. They're going to use search strategies that have been successful for them but may not necessarily be correct for them. LibGuides help them see how selected resources relate to a specific field of study.

Students often without this guidance miss key resources and as I said, default to familiar search strategies. Why should you have a LibGuide tailored for your class? Well, there's many reasons. One, it will help you better understand what resources and services are available from your library. It helps you understand what you have at your disposal. It certainly takes a little bit of time upfront, but once it's developed, it should reduce the time because you can roll the LibGuide over from one course to another. Also, it provides a lot more detail for the students and helps answer a lot of questions up front that they may be asking you. The LibGuides can provide students with a filtered list of resources specifically for your class. Just dumping them into the library and saying, "Have at it." That's not going to help them.

The LibGuides can help them filter that material and get to resources that are actually going to be useful for them for the projects that they're creating. Librarians can also tailor instruction necessary to meet your class needs. For a particular assignment, breaking up the assignment that working with a librarian, you can provide specific instructions to help develop that particular skill. Also, students have an expectation that resources are tailored for their needs.

That's why they use Google. They put in a Google search and it comes up based on their needs. Well, we need to meet students where they're at and one of the ways to do that is to tailor that information. As the research has shown, course guides get more traffic than general subject guides. Students will actually use these LibGuides as opposed to creating a general subject guide. Part of a good course LibGuide are guides for assignments.

Those guides can help reduce cognitive load because they supply only what's needed. They don't ask the students to go in and find, have to sift through all this information. It really guides them through the assignment. With a good assignment guide, you can scaffold that approach to mastery. There's a couple of ways to create a LibGuide. One, a librarian can just simply look at your syllabus and assignments and vet materials and get them ready for you and put together a LibGuide that you can then later review.

Or you can work with your librarian to develop an enhanced guide that really fits your class by you helping to craft it. That's what I'm advocating for. When you're building a LibGuide, there are some practices that are more effective than others. Here's some suggestions based on the research. First of all, you should do a needs assessment. This is where there's that collaboration between the faculty member, you, and the librarian.

So getting together and spelling out what you intend to do through the class and having the librarian help you design and pull together resources that are necessary to complete those assignments. Another thing that you would want to do is really assess student needs. This can be done with a questionnaire. Find out what they know about the citation strategy that you're using, whether it's APA, MLA, Chicago, what the students already know. That will dictate whether you need to provide maybe more citation instruction as part of that LibGuide.

For LibGuides that are at the beginning of an undergraduate program will certainly differ than those from a graduate program. The amount of supports that you need will change appropriately for the class. Once you have pulled together this information, then you develop these learning objectives, which I've talked about in terms of backward design, that you would pull those together. Then you also want to tie this, if possible, to this acral framework for information literacy, which I talked about in ITC 102. That'll give you more information on how to make your LibGuides, also defined by best practices with information literacy and how to teach that. You want to weave in instructional design principles.

In the LibGuide for your course, you should have specific pages for each assignment in your class that include resources needed along with relevant tutorials. The tutorials should include step-by-step instructions that are presented in text as well as perhaps a video format and certainly have images with that. Backward Design and ADDIE can be useful for designing your assignment LibGuides for those particular pages. I talked about Backward Design in Episode ITC 41. ADDIE is one of those topics that I will get to here one day.

ADDIE is a design model that has five parts, analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. We talked a little bit already about analysis, and now really moving to the design and development. Your basic goal is to develop objectives, assessment, activities, and contents specifically tailored for the course and its assignments. Being able to point to the right databases, to the right Library of Congress call numbers and get students to the materials that they need.

When designing a LibGuide, it's important to tailor it to the specific class in assignment. This means honing in on the best content rather than providing everything, including the kitchen sink. The more information you provide, the more that you are getting away from designing a good LibGuide. LibGuides should really share what the best content is, the best databases that they should be searching rather than all the databases. For our particular library, we have 40 different databases, but not all of them are appropriate for each discipline. Some databases are more appropriate than others.

Also, when you're implementing the LibGuides you should put it at the point of need. When linking to a LibGuide in a course, link it specifically at that point. You can certainly put the LibGuide as a resource overall in your class, but the integration will be stronger if you can link it to a specific part of the LibGuide at the point where the students need it for an assignment. If you're talking about assignment for developing the research question, well, you would want to link to the appropriate resources in the LibGuide that talk about defining a research question. That would make everything stronger.

You can actually, in your assignment, have a link to that part of the guide. The research has also shown that when LibGuides are tailored for a specific class, students will seek out the resources shared and make more use of the library. If that's one of your goals to get students to become more familiar with the library, then a LibGuide will certainly help do that rather than just put them on their own devices.

In terms of content placement, placing key content on the homepage of the LibGuide will get more use. The homepage is the most used page for a LibGuide than any other of the subpages. If something is really critical, that's the page you want to put on there, but you also want to standardize a placement of common information such as library hours, how to contact the librarian, those types of things. Every LibGuide should have basically a standard look and feel for those common elements, but really be tailored for a particular course.

I think most importantly, keep the LibGuide simple. We can certainly overcomplicate things. We have enthusiasm to share everything, but this overwhelms students, this creates a cognitive overload. We need to just keep it clean and simple and use really the practices that are also aligned with accessibility, so using headings properly, using white space, user-friendly links, and avoid really academic jargon. We reference articles, journals, databases. What do we really want students to know and know how to get to?

That means we have to standardize our labels. We can't call it articles in one place and databases in another. We have to use the same language. For your particular LibGuide, make sure that you use the title of your class with the class number. That way they can look at the list, know that that particular LibGuide is for them. Making things visually appealing that's always important. You can put imagery, you can put videos in there to make it more appealing. I would encourage you to do this. Just use informal plain language, I and you are appropriate action verbs, certainly appropriate.

In addition, when you are providing in your LibGuide, use the language of the assignment that you've written in your content management system or your learning management system, use that language also in the LibGuide. They should mirror each other and break it into steps that can be expanded with instruction, maybe links to additional instruction, but you want to really tie those together pretty tightly.

Now, naturally, this may go and require some rewriting enhancing of your assignments at the point of origin because as I've mentioned before, a lot of assignments that I've seen are pretty weak in the description, but you can do a lot better in building assignments that help students achieve what you want them to achieve. Because you're going to scaffold your instruction, also provide it in chunks that are easy to digest rather than really long overwhelming document. Simplicity, keep it simple.

In your LibGuide, provide a mechanism for feedback so students can let you know what's working, what's not working as well as offer suggestions for resources. They may come across some things that you haven't found yet that could be very beneficial to students in your class and offer it as a suggestion. That helps them become more invested in the LibGuides. Also, as part of rolling out a LibGuide for your course prior to each course being offered, you should take time to review the LibGuide to make sure that it's current.

Additionally, conduct a link check to make sure all the links work. There's a lot of great tools that will do that for you, depending on where your LibGuide sits, fits in a

learning management system. Some learning management systems also have link checkers, and they can do that for you. You also want to assess results. It's important to assess the use of a LibGuide. Ideally, you want to make each element as granular as possible so you can really dive in and figure out exactly what's being used and what's not being used so you can improve that material and make it usable.

Lots of great tools. If you're using Google Analytics to do this, it will provide a lot of information for you. Also, to assess results, survey your students to get their feedback. You can put a survey at the bottom of a LibGuide. We talked about also just getting their feedback, suggestions, but you can also do a basic level two type survey to find out if it was useful or not.

Also, LibGuides can provide a wonderful assignment for your students. You can have students design subject guides rather than create a research paper or a presentation that you can have them create a subject guide on a topic. The subject guide would include books that would be relevant to the topic, journal articles, any web links, images that are appropriate, podcasts, annotated bibliographies, tutorials, et cetera.

It's important that they cite this information correctly, but upon the conclusion of the assignment, if you have some fully developed subject guides that the students rocked it, you can include those in the library system or if the library allows it with an attribution to the student who developed it. That's adding to that real-world assignments, instead of those throwaway assignments that they are creating something that others can use. That can be very motivating for a student.

When working on the assignments, they can initially start it as a Word document or a Google document and even work it as teams in order to build that reference out. Just some suggestions on putting together LibGuides, but when you are looking at your assignments, look at your assignments and what you want to do, work with the librarian on what resources can support that, what tutorials can support that, and link to that material as part of your assignment.

For the next assignment, you're going to scaffold that and you're just going to add more resources, but you'll have them available in a LibGuide in one place that students can benefit from. You can really tailor this. That is what I have to share about LibGuides. I think really powerful tool. I wish I had taken advantage of them much earlier in my academic career, but what I want to do is get you guys on the right track. Before I let you go as usual, here's a quick plug from my book.