LibGuides: A few ideas for better design

LibGuides is pretty easy to use, but there are certain elements of the writing and design process that can be critical to delivering a good guide experience. This guide offers suggestion for developing guides best on the best practices documents of a range of libraries in the LibGuides community.

Text Design

LibGuides offers a number of ways to format and style text content. Effective use of text can make guides more engaging and readable.

Fonts

- The default font size and type is recommended for body and box text
- Try to keep font size and font type consistent on all pages
- San serif text is best for heading and small block of text
- Text should be a contrasting color from the background
  - Use a dark background with light text
  - Use a light background with dark text

Headings

- Keep heading and subheading size consistent across pages and guides
- Heading size H2 or H3 is recommended for main headings
- Decrease the size for subheadings (e.g., H2--> H3)

The H2 Heading

The H3 Heading

Lists

Use lists instead of sentences when possible. Lists should have between 3 and 7 items

Numbered lists show items in a series, like procedural steps.

1. Understand the problem
2. Identify alternatives
3. Choose a solution

Bulleted lists show ideas without ordered sequence.

- Strategic planning
- Brainstorming
- Consensus building
Emphasis

- Bold important **words**, key **concepts**, and vocabulary **terms**
- Use italics for *book*, and magazine **titles, quotations**, and **foreign words**
- Avoid large blocks of bold or italic text
- Avoid ALL caps

Developing Content

Some tips for getting started with content development
There are many content elements required to build a complete guide, from describing guide content, to adding subjects and tags, to writing effectively for the web environment. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when building guide content.

Getting Started

- Combine guides when 2 or more librarians teach the same class
- Use an existing guide as a template
- Use notepad or other text editor to strip background code from word and other documents, when copying and pasting content from outside sources
- Consider including resources for learners at both entry and advanced levels
- Consider providing links to key organizations, professional websites, and journals
- Offer new resources or examples in the subject area, or more in-depth resources
- Offer in-depth instructions for using a database that is new or complex
- Provide resources for writing and citing information, for example link to the OWL at Purdue or other writing site
- Note what sub-disciplines the database covers, types of materials found in that database

Guide Focus

Giving your guide a solid context helps keep learners engaged and on track

- Guides should serve as a research starting point
- Class guides should follow learning outcomes and assignments when possible
- Guide should provide context for your audience: Students, distance learners, and public users may have different needs, requirements, and experience
- Try not to overwhelm users with too much information

Guide Descriptions

- Descriptions are encouraged to clarify focus of the guide
- Descriptions should be brief and focused, no more than 1-2 sentences
- A general example of a description would be…….“This guide will help you find resources about xxxx”
- Put a list of links to each page to help people navigate
Writing Tips
- Writing should be clear, concise and appropriate for subject and audience
- Make your point in as few words as possible
- Make it easy for readers to pick out key points
- Use simple words and sentence structures
- Try to write one idea per paragraph
- Don't explain anything that's readily apparent to the user
- Avoid exclamation marks, cute phrases, jargon, and puns
- Use the spellcheck in the text editor Toggle it on and off with the icon
- Spell out acronyms

Guide information
There are three especially useful ways to make your guide more findable: guide titles, subject associations, and keyword tags you can assign

Subject Associations
- Subject Associations show up as main heading on the LibGuides site
- Add as many relevant subjects as needed to make guide findable
- Request new subjects to be added through the instruction coordinator

Assigned Tags
- Tags help group topics together by context
- Try to use no more than 10 tags
- Use existing tag when relevant to group tag categories

Guide Titles
- Format class guides titles by using the department, course number and instructor name so students can find the class guide
  Ex: Eng 280 Rosenberger
- Format subject guides with the name of the discipline
  Ex :Broadcasting
- Format other guide titles with descriptive words and keep titles to 2 or 3 words
  Ex: Choosing Your Sources, Doing literature Reviews
- All guides should have an easy URL assigned for ease of linking Use an underscore between words
  Example: eng280_rosenberger

Profile Boxes
- Feedback and polls boxes can be used to get summative data about guide / lesson content
- The profile box title should be meaningful
- My Profile," "Nursing Liaison," etc
• Profile box should include office number, email address, and phone number
• Profile photos are encouraged
• Profile picture size is best at a small size like 120 by 120 pixel

Page Design

Page Layout Tips
Put main content in the center column. Put secondary content on the right
The most effective page layouts use either two or three columns

Home pages may work best using a three column layout. For example you can put navigation links on the left, main content in the middle, and contact information in the right column Don’t add a page unless there is enough content to fill all columns

Avoid empty columns by starting with two columns and adding a third if needed

Content should fill columns from left to right. The far right column should be shortest

Organize white spaces to guide readers through the content, provide stopping points to reflect on content, and prepare readers for upcoming content

Scrolling should be limited as much as possible A rule of thumb is that pages should not be longer than 1 1/2 screens

Design pages for reading on the web. People scan web content in an F-shaped pattern

Links
• Linked items should open in a new window
• Create links in these boxes: Rich Text, Simple Web Links, and Links and List Box
• Links in Rich Text / Dynamic boxes are not checked by the link checker tool
• Use the link checker in the Tools on your Menu bar to find dead links
• Links and search boxes should include a short description of what the user will find there (1-2 sentences per annotation)
• Create links to related guides and web sites in a “Related Resources” box
• Create a box with links to all of the tabs with descriptive text about what you find there
Page Tabs
- Tab names should be concise using the fewest context words possible
- Tabs should be a contrasting color from the background
- Homepage should be labeled Suggestions are: Home, Start Here, Introduction
- Use a dark tab with light text, and light tabs with dark text

Images
Visual media (videos and images) should contribute to the purpose of the guide and enhance text content
Provide an alternative text (image description in Libguides) for images
Images must give attribution to the person that created it
Image and video width should be less than the column width on the page
Try to keep dimension images 700px X 700px or less
Libguides will resize image dimensions, but this does does reduce image file size
Resize images in an image editor to make them load faster, large image files load slowly

Box Types and Uses
In general be consistent in naming boxes, and page titles Using the right box you can track content, distribute documents, and link to internal and external resources and content

- Put the Ask-A-Librarian widget on at least one page
- Reuse content whenever possible by linking to existing boxes, pages, or links
- **Rich text boxes are** the most flexible. These allow you to do add text, images, tables, and JavaScript. Anything you can do in HTML, you can do in a rich text box
- **Simple Web Links** boxes are just that: simple lists of links If you add a description, it appears as a tooltip cloud when a user hovers over the link
- **Links & Lists** boxes allow you to add more content: you can add a description to the page as well as a "more information" pop-up window
- **Interactive poll** boxes allow you to create quick, simple polls to add to your guides as a gauge to see if a guide has been helpful
- **Documents and files** boxes let you upload documents & other files for your users It's a quick way to distribute links to download files Files you can upload include Word, PowerPoint, Excel, other Office files and PDFs