

Survey of modern language research guides: A window on disciplinary information literacy

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Abstract

Purpose – This study uses research guides as a window onto disciplinary information literacy in the field of modern language studies from the point of view of librarians. Informed by literature on disciplinary research practices and on library research guides, it analyzes how librarians represent, and teach to, an especially rich and multifaceted information landscape.

Design/methodology/approach – Researchers analyzed the topical coverage, organization, resource emphasis, and instructional content of 182 research guides in the field of modern language studies. Data was collected both manually and automatically using a webscraper. Data was then coded using categories developed by the authors.

Findings – Guides focused on language and literature topics, with some interdisciplinary coverage. Guides tended to focus on resources and formats rather than user tasks or instruction. Over two thirds of guides included some type of instruction, primarily focused on locating resources, and a slim majority of instructional topics were specific to modern language studies.

Research limitations/implications – Looking at guides from another field would have allowed for cross-disciplinary comparisons. It is possible that including guides from additional languages or universities would have given different results.

Originality/value – Although there is significant literature on research guides, few have analyzed how they reflect what information literacy looks like in a particular discipline. This study also contributes to research on information literacy instruction for modern languages and recommends that it be informed by an understanding of disciplinary research practices.

Keywords Research guides, modern languages, information literacy

Paper Type Research paper

Introduction

Undergraduates new to the world of research in higher education face a daunting task, in that they must navigate an information landscape that was not created with them in mind, but instead by experts speaking primarily to other experts in increasingly specialized sub-disciplines. Students must learn to formulate research questions that their professors will consider appropriate and interesting, locate sources of information that their professors will find credible, and interpret and synthesize books and articles that were largely created by professors

for an audience of other professors. They often begin this acculturation into academic discourse in a generalized first year writing class, and then must refine or revise what they have learned when they begin to conduct research in their majors. As a growing body of literature shows, learning to do research in a discipline requires learning its own particular conventions about locating, evaluating, and interpreting information, not merely the application of generic information literacy concepts (Kautto and Talja, 2007; Farrell and Badke, 2015).

Research and subject guides provide one means of helping students to move beyond the generic, one-size-fits-all research practices commonly taught in the freshman year by highlighting the most important specialized resources and skills relevant to conducting research in a particular field. These guides also provide a librarian's-eye view of which resources, instruction topics, and research tasks are most central to a discipline. When guides consist of lists of links organized by format or topic, they imply that users' main quandary is knowing which system to search in for their particular information need, and that these organized lists and descriptions will be enough to help them decide. However, researchers from Kuhlthau (1993) to Head (2013) have shown that students most often struggle with formulating a research question, interpreting results and revising search queries, and evaluating and synthesizing what they find. What any single guide can accomplish in helping a student become information literate in a particular discipline is inherently limited, but librarians can endeavor to take full advantage of guides' potential by designing them in a way that is informed by an understanding of student needs as well as the norms of the disciplines they represent.

This study uses research guides as a window onto disciplinary information literacy in the field of modern language studies. Modern language studies is an understudied (Hicks, 2014) and especially interesting field that presents unique challenges for information literacy instruction. It is foundationally interdisciplinary, encompassing traditional foci of linguistics, literature, and culture, as well as newer areas of research in the social sciences (Becher, 2001), and has often struggled to bridge the realms of practical language teaching and formal linguistic and literary analysis (Kern, 2002). By examining the scope, organization, resource emphasis, and instructional content of guides in modern language studies, this study examines how guides reflect this complex and multi-disciplinary field and to what extent they attempt to teach students to navigate it. By understanding the relationship between disciplinary research practices and library services, librarians can be more reflective and targeted in how they offer information literacy instruction.

Literature Review

The most common studies of research guides focus on best practices, usability, and user expectations. They focus on how well guides meet user needs and how they can do better. To briefly summarize a few recommendations, they encourage librarians to use vocabulary and organizational schema that are meaningful to students (Gonzalez and Westbrook, 2010), to have a clear purpose for the guide and limit themselves to content that supports that purpose (Alverson, 2015), to organize guides based on research needs rather than research format (Sinkinson, 2012), and to tie the guides to particular courses and needs rather than to

generalized subject areas (Reeb and Gibbons, 2004; Nichols and Mellinger, 2007). Veldof and Beavers's (2001) study of library tutorials provides one way of understanding differences in the mental models that students and librarians bring to learning objects such as online guides. They claim that students are likely to think of any part of the library website as a "portal to library resources" even in areas that librarians have explicitly designed as a tutorial. In other words, "Undergraduate students think of the library as a place to DO something. They do not think of it as a place to come to LEARN about doing" (Veldof and Beavers, 2001, p. 9). Therefore, they argue, librarians must be explicit about when they are presenting users with portals to resources or teaching tools, and to represent the research process in a way that is meaningful to students. Sundin (2008) also analyzes library tutorials, but from a sociocultural approach, and warns that focusing on sources over processes risks decontextualizing information from the conditions that shape its creation and use (p. 32).

In addition to these usability-focused studies, other studies have focused on the instructional potential of research guides, often focusing on guides relevant to a particular discipline. Surveying forestry guides, Brazzeal (2006) examines how recommended elements of face-to-face instruction, such as previewing and reviewing instructional content, can be incorporated into a static research guide. However, its review of guides for instructional content pays particular attention to how well resources were described and what "directions or advice" were given, rather than to more general strategies (p. 366).

Pendell and Armstrong (2014) also analyze instructional content in psychology subject guides at 67 research libraries. They advocate for online instruction on its own terms rather than as a poor approximation for in-person instruction, but find much room for improvement when it comes to research guides. They note a general lack of instructional content beyond resource listing and description, limited use of multimedia for instruction, and organizational schemes that emphasize resource format over user needs and processes. Truslow (2009) looks at Slavic Studies guides at 17 universities and recommends that future guides move away from a resource and content-driven focus towards research skills as outlined in the ACRL Standards. Chen and Chen (2013) makes a broad survey of guides for East Asian Studies, looking at everything from how the guide could be accessed to the presence of instructional videos, Web 2.0 content, and librarian contact information. These studies of disciplinary research guides address the question of how libraries are using the web to prepare students, not only in basic, cross-disciplinary information literacy skills, but in the information literacy skills of particular disciplines.

The main impetus for attention to disciplinary information literacy is the recognition that scholars in different disciplines conduct and conceive of research differently. This literature grows out of earlier studies of sociocultural learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), discourse and genre theory (Gee, 2008), and conventions of research practices in the disciplines. Research shows that faculty do not have generic conceptions of information literacy but rather understand information-related behaviors as part of embodied disciplinary practice (Farrell and Badke, 2015). Proponents of disciplinary information literacy critique the emphasis of mainstream information literacy on generalized skills that are supposed to apply equally in all contexts.

Instead, they stress the differences in the information behavior (Wiberley and Jones, 1989; Watson-Boone, 1994), evaluation criteria (Kautto and Talja, 2007), and the structure and conventions of different disciplines (Becher, 2001). Kautto and Talja claim that “what is currently understood as higher order information literacy, abilities going beyond database and web searching skills [. . .] are inherently domain specific in nature, and, as such, cannot be meaningfully taught as separate from disciplinary discourses, contents, and contexts” (p. 55). Simmons (2005) also advocates for librarians to act as mediators between student novices and the highly specialized disciplinary perspectives of professors.

By analyzing the guides in light of what’s known about the information practices and needs of students and scholars in modern languages, we can begin to evaluate their relevance and effectiveness. There have been several studies about the research practices of scholars of modern languages based on interviews with faculty, which can be supplemented by other studies that look at literature scholars and humanists. Evans (1988) and Becher (2001) note the relatively loose disciplinary coherence of modern language departments, with not much more than the language providing a common focus. As Becher observes, “Modern languages might be designated as a cluster of related disciplines, rather than a single unity [. . .] split, not only between literary critics and linguistic scholars, but also within the former between advocates of conflicting theories” (p. 188). Even language-focused professors can be split between pedagogy and formal linguistics. Likewise, non-linguists might focus on film or popular culture instead of literature, or even be more oriented to a social-scientific area studies approach (Evans, 1988, pp. 176-178). Ellis (1993) shows how literature researchers conceptualize their research process, from *surveying* the literature in an area of study, to *chaining* from one citation to another, to *selecting and sifting* which references to prune or focus on and *monitor* further developments in a field (p. 483). Finally, East (2005) reviews previous studies to propose learning objectives for an information literacy class for humanities researchers. He finds that humanists are more apt to find new sources by browsing citations than by searching in article indexes, value physical collections and indexes or bibliographies with extensive retrospective coverage, and rely on professional networks to stay current.

Unsurprisingly, language scholars have had their own debates about the purpose of the discipline and particularly about the structure of the undergraduate curriculum. A 2007 report from the Modern Language Association found fault with the “standard configuration of university foreign language curricula, in which a two- or three-year language sequence feeds into a set of core courses primarily focused on canonical literature” for being too narrow and creating artificial distinctions between literature and language study. It instead advocates for a broader, more integrated curriculum that combines literature, language, and culture to produce “educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence” (MLA, 2007). However, a survey conducted ten years later showed widespread agreement with the report’s recommendations even as only 39% of respondents reported that their own departments had made changes to follow them (Redden, 2017). This fragmented curriculum maintains a situation in which students in the first stages of a language major may rely primarily on in-class readings and textbooks and only begin in-depth use of library tools and resources for their major in their junior or even senior year.

The literature on library support for language instruction shows limited engagement in these broader curricular goals about integrating a two-tiered curriculum and fostering transcultural competence. Hicks (2014) notes a dearth of literature on the application of information literacy to the foreign language curriculum, and speculates that this may be due to misconceptions from both students and faculty that information literacy is only about generic, library-centric skills not relevant to the study of foreign languages or to students' future careers. The most common intervention in the literature is to teach some variation of a typical one-shot in the target language (Wang, 2008; Hicks, 2014; Luly and Lenz, 2015), which supports the language learning objectives of the class but does not necessarily address discipline-specific research practices. Three other studies take a broader view. Barnhart (2004) describes a quarter-length information literacy class for Latin American Studies where students presented on databases, compared domestic and international news coverage, and learned about subject indexing. Hock (2007) argues for the importance of information literacy from the perspective of a language professor, and suggests that its emphasis on finding, evaluating, and using information can help students of German Studies make the transition to more advanced levels of study and become self-empowered learners. Finally, Hicks (2014) discusses learning modules to achieve outcomes related to choosing search terms in Spanish, searching in specialized databases, and filtering by language in Google. This study of research guides adds to this previous work by going beyond the case study by making a broader survey of information literacy instruction for modern languages and considering how this instruction relates to disciplinary research practices.

Methodology

Scope:

The authors decided to focus on libraries at institutions most likely to have extensive research collections and a librarian with specific subject responsibilities. The analysis was therefore restricted to the sixty-one members of the American Association of Universities (AAU). Because the number of modern language doctoral programs at each institution varies greatly, the authors decided to focus on those languages that are most commonly taught (Looney and Lusin, 2018), and which therefore were likely to have the most robust programs. This led to a restriction to guides dedicated to Spanish, French, or German, as well as guides dedicated to foreign language study more generally. Authors reviewed each library's website and course guides and created a list of 182 guides and their URLs.

Because the research questions addressed how the guides reflect modern language studies as a whole, the authors decided to exclude those guides dedicated to particular topics (e.g., the novel, or the Spanish Civil War), as well as individual course guides. In many cases, this meant that there would be no more than one guide per language per university. However, if a university had multiple guides per language that were sufficiently general (for example, one for German literature and another for German language), then all were included. Authors also

excluded guides that were explicitly associated with a program outside the scope of a traditional language program, for example social science-oriented Area Studies programs such as Latin American Studies.

The authors split up various portions of the data collection and coding. Any data related to guide organization, topical coverage, and resource organization was scraped from the web and coded later; information relevant to instructional content was collected manually. These different methods of data collection led to the creation of two datasets.

Data Collection and coding

Dataset 1: Automated Collection

This dataset consists of information extracted automatically from subject guides using a web scraper (webscraper.io). By giving the scraper the homepage URLs of all guides and selectors (e.g., `h2 class="s-lib-box-title"` or `li[role='menuitem']`) to point to desired content in the source html, this automated phase of data collection was accomplished within a few hours. The information collected included guide name, university name, URL, page titles, and box headings. This web scraping method also had the benefit of producing a “skeleton” of guide metadata that could be reused when creating the other dataset.

Data from the page titles, box headings, and description and subject metadata were used to answer questions about topical coverage, resource emphasis, and guide organization. As a first phase of coding, authors designed search queries of these fields within NVivo to autocode for topical coverage and resource emphasis. Then authors reviewed these results to catch false positives and false negatives. For example, “reference” was one of the words used to capture the category of reference works, but also matched “reference help” or “reference desk,” so these instances were excluded. Authors assumed that any guide with significant coverage of a topic or resource would mention it in the page names or box headings. However, in some cases this was not the case, so some manual comparison between codes generated from the scraped data and the guides themselves was necessary. Coding for organizational scheme was done manually based on the types of names used as page titles.

Dataset 2: Instructional content

This dataset consisted of guides’ instructional content. Authors manually reviewed each guide and used an Excel spreadsheet to record brief descriptions of instruction, including any instructional text, as well as the medium of instruction (text, illustration, video, or interactive tutorial). If the instruction was non-textual, authors briefly described it. Simple lists and resource descriptions were not counted as instruction, but more active types of instruction about searching or using different source types were. Content of purely local relevance (for example, about spaces or procedures for interlibrary loan) was also excluded.

For coding, the authors used NVivo, a software package for qualitative data analysis. Topic coding began without any predetermined hierarchy and emerged gradually through practice and conversation. Once topical schema was in place, previous coding was revised to conform to it.

Results

Dataset 1: Automated Collection

This dataset of 182 guides from 56 universities allowed for analysis of the number and language distribution of research guides per university, research guide organization, topical focus, and resource emphasis.

Approximately 45% of universities presented three separate modern languages research guides and 23% presented four research guides for modern languages. For the languages selected for this study, the range of modern languages research guides was between zero and eight. The mean number of modern languages research guides was 3.25 and the median was three. Five universities did not have research guides focused in Modern Languages or were not substantial enough to include. Research Guides focused on Spanish (Spanish language, studies, literature, etc.) were most common, followed by French and German. The smallest category was General, meaning that they covered multiple languages or were aimed at world languages in general. The vast majority of guides were written in English, with only a small handful in the target language. (Fig. 1)

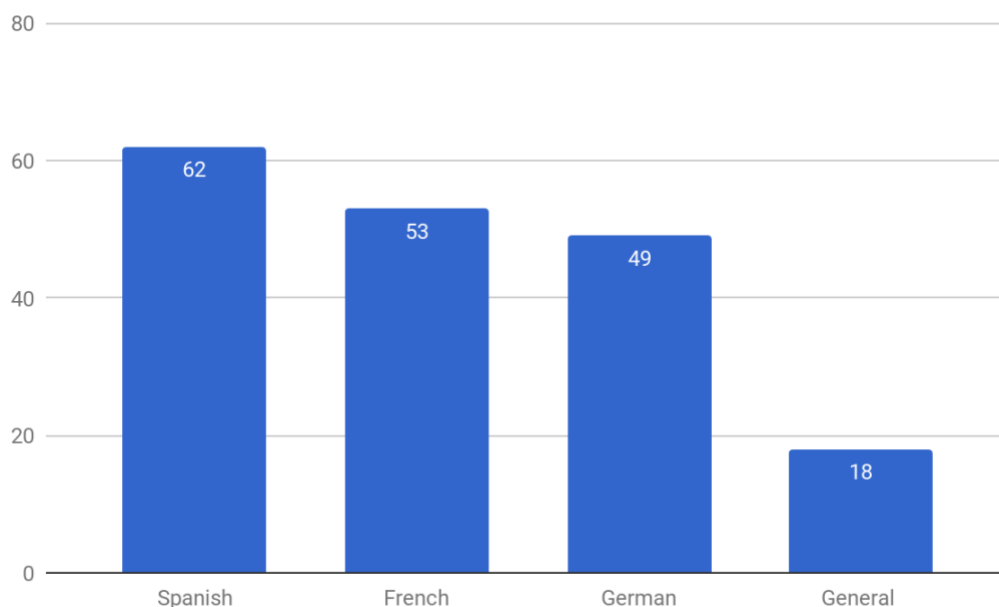


Figure 1: Research Guides by Language Focus

Authors determined the organizational structure of the research guides by examining the page and box names. There were some instances where a guide could be coded as two different organizational structures if both were prominent. The majority of research guides were organized by format. This meant that most of the pages were named by material format, such as books, articles, or primary sources. (Fig. 2) Taking a closer look at the page names of all the guides, a word cloud clearly shows the prominence of resource types. (Fig. 3)

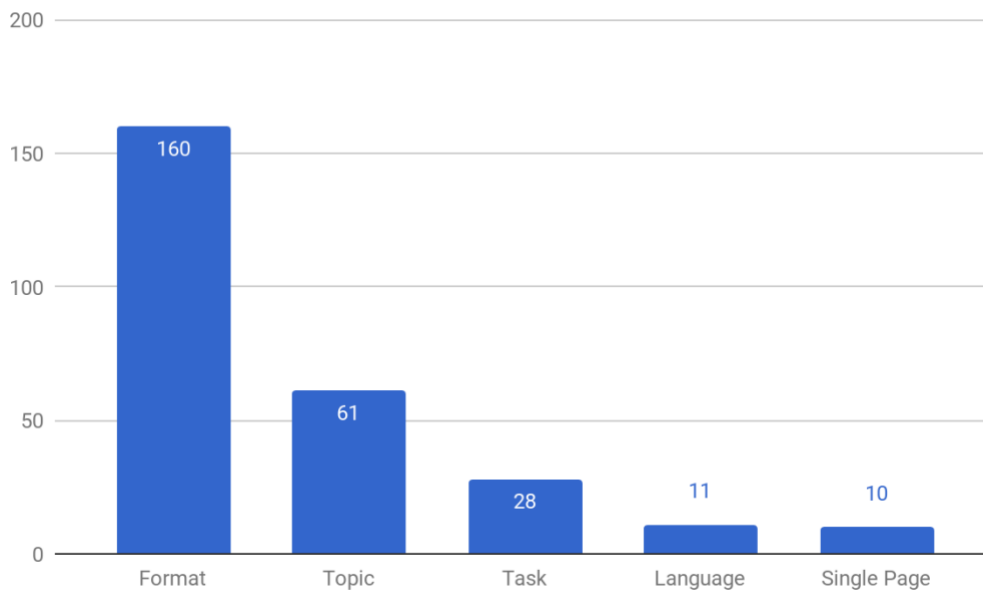


Figure 2: Organizational Structure of Research Guides

88% (156) of the research guides had a topical focus on literature. To code guides for “literature,” there had to be substantial literature content (e.g., multiple literature databases, literature encyclopedias or literature resources) beyond a “stray” reference to MLA or interdisciplinary databases like JSTOR with some literature content. 83% (151) had a topical focus on language. To code guides for “language,” the guide had to have substantial language content, such as a page or box on language, linguistics, or language learning, or if it specifically highlighted dictionaries or other linguistic or grammar resources. More often than not, a guide

would be coded as having both a focus on literature and language. Although in theory it would make sense to separate guide content focused on language learning from that focused on linguistic research, in practice it was very difficult to make consistent distinctions. 30% (55) of the guides focused on related disciplines, such as history, culture, film, music, philosophy or contained substantial multidisciplinary databases and topics and were therefore coded as interdisciplinary. Because coding required substantial coverage indicative of an intentional focus on a particular topic, there were some very minimal guides that were not coded for any topic.

The next layer of analysis dove deeper into which types of resources modern languages librarians decided to emphasize. (Fig. 4) If there was a notable mention of a particular resource type, usually a box containing a list or a page name, the guide was coded as including that resource.

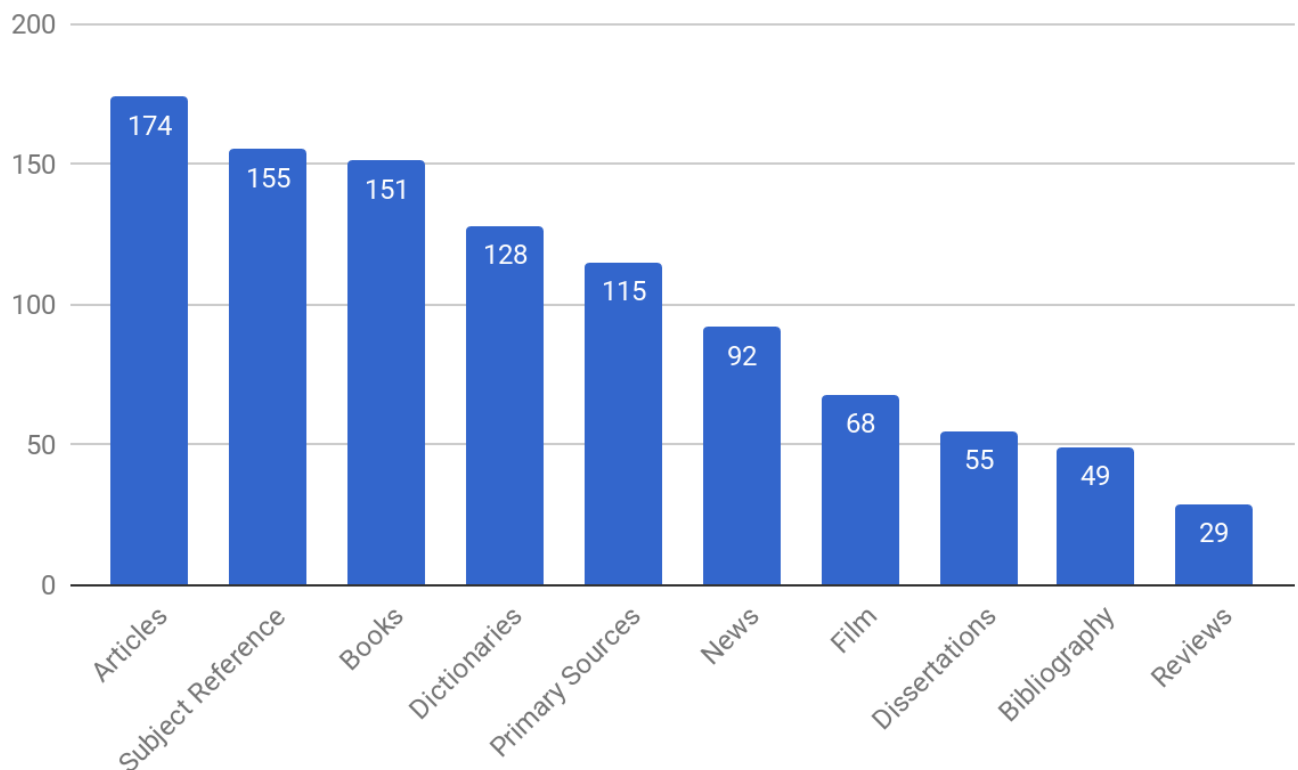


Figure 4: Prominence of Resources in Research Guides

Articles were referenced in the research guides the most followed closely by subject-specific reference and books. Subject specific reference includes literary and historical encyclopedias, as well as handbooks and specialized dictionaries that are more similar in coverage to encyclopedias (e.g., *The Dictionary of French Writers*). Books were monographs, excluding reference materials and books. Language-specific dictionaries, primary sources, and news sources were also prominent in the research guides. In coding, the authors conflated the resources themselves with the tools to find the information. So lists of particular films, streaming

services such as Kanopy, and databases such as Film & Television Literature Index would all have been coded as Film.

Dataset 2: Instructional Content

A majority (71%) of research guides included some type of information literacy instruction beyond merely listing and describing individual resources. The instruction topics were wide ranging and were communicated in a variety of formats including text, illustration or screenshot, handouts, embedded videos, and links to other webpages or research guides. (Fig. 5 and 6)

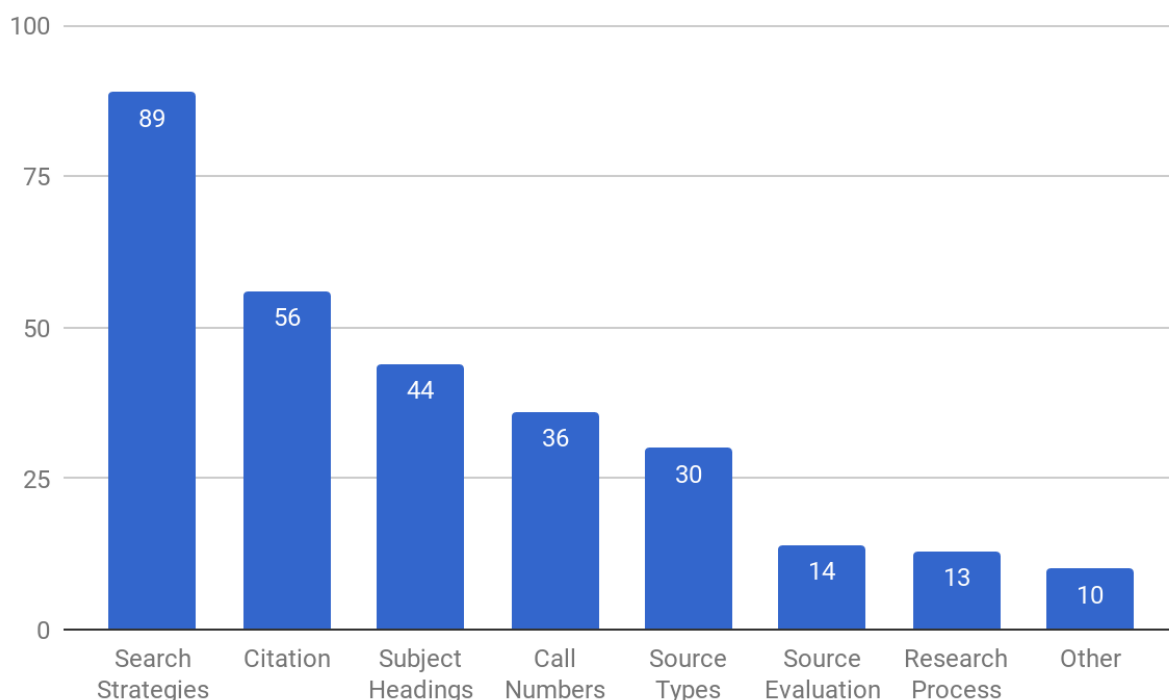


Figure 5: Instruction Instances by Topic

Search Strategies were the most prominent instruction topic. This included strategies for finding resource types such as books, articles and film using various search tools. There were also tips for using both basic and advanced searching in search tools by keyword, subject, title, author, and language. Developing effective search terms or keywords was also popular, as well as the mechanics of boolean searching, phrase searching, and truncation. Citation instruction included citation styles, citation managers, and avoiding plagiarism. Instruction on subject headings generally included information about the concept of subject headings and choosing effective subject headings depending on the language or specific topics. Instruction on call numbers included how to find resources using call numbers and useful call number ranges. Although subject headings and call numbers could be seen as logically falling under Search Strategies, there were enough instances that it seemed worth separating out. Source types generally delved into descriptions of source types such as peer-reviewed journals, primary sources, books and how to use them. Source evaluation was similar, but went beyond description by covering

how to determine if source is credible or reliable. Research Process included basic information on various steps and strategies of the research process. Other was a mixed bag of instruction topics that did not fit into the other categories, often related to specific assignments like conducting a literature review or annotated bibliography. One guide also talked about techniques for close reading.

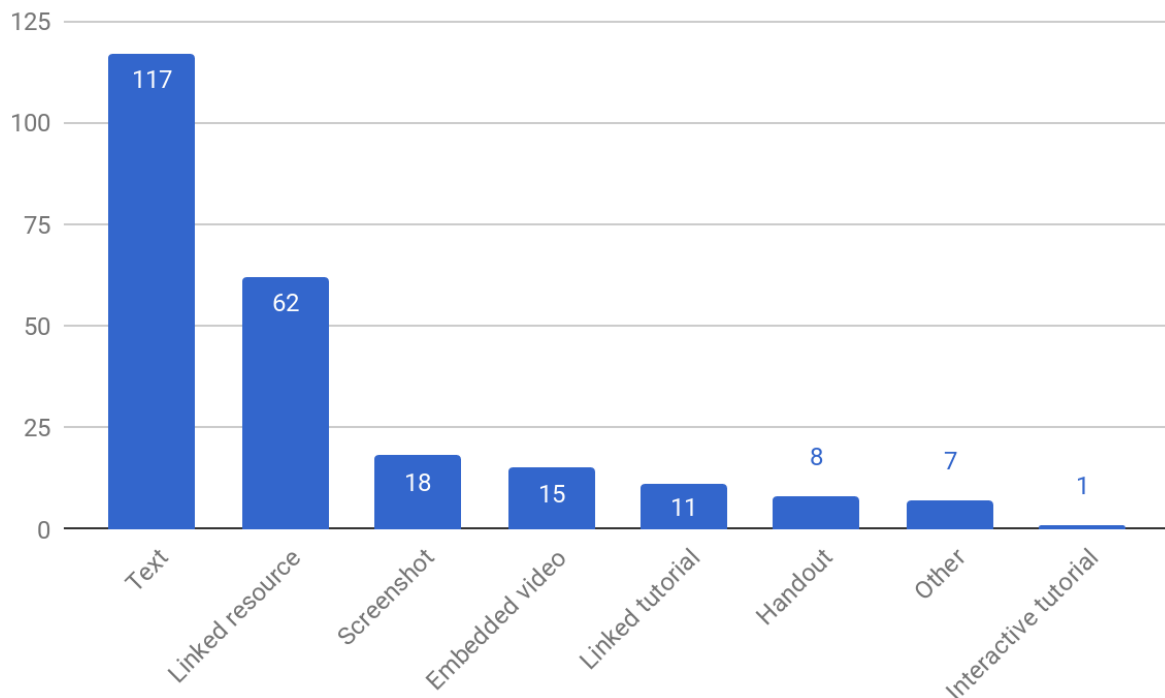


Figure 6: Frequency of Instruction Format

The majority of research guides used text-based instruction followed by linked resources. Linked resources generally were other research guides or more general information that the librarians did not want to recreate. Instruction by screenshots, embedded videos and linked tutorials were less common. Screenshots generally displayed search tools, while embedded videos were generally more concept-based. The authors decided to separate embedded videos and linked tutorials due to the fact that embedded videos were often prominently featured, while linked tutorials acted more like supplementary instruction. Only one research guide had featured an interactive tutorial. In general, the instructional content in the research guides was rather static.

In addition to the instruction topics and instruction format within the research guides, authors also coded for whether the instruction was generic or directed to information literacy skills particular to modern languages. Authors counted instruction as discipline-specific when guides made explicit reference to modern language research (e.g., finding literary criticism, books on German history, or news in Spanish). 53% of instruction was discipline-specific and 47% was not. Two of the most common types of discipline-specific instruction topics were recommended

subject headings and call number ranges. Forty-four research guides only had general information literacy instruction and 35 research guides only had subject-specific instruction topics. Forty-seven guides had both general instruction and subject-specific instruction.

Discussion

The basic order in the popularity of guides for different languages is more or less what one would expect from looking at MLA's data on language enrollments, although the spread for guides is not nearly as wide. For example, in the fall of 2016 there were four times as many students enrolled in Spanish as French, and twice as many students enrolled in French as in German (Looney and Lusin, 2018). By contrast, Spanish guides had only a slight advantage over French and German. This difference implies that the librarians are not overly sensitive to the popularity of a language when choosing to create a guide, at least among those most commonly taught. That most universities made language-specific guides instead of ones for modern languages in general also implies a perception that the relevant resources for each language are sufficiently different to merit separation, and that resources for non-English are sufficiently different from those for English. The presence of general guides may be an indication of smaller modern language departments or smaller numbers of specialized, language-specific library resources to support them. In preliminary analysis of the data, the language focus of the guide did not appear to make any significant difference on the types of resources or instructional content included in the guides.

It was also predictable that language and literature topics would be most common, with a significant minority having interdisciplinary coverage. This implies that most librarians still consider language and literature to be the mainstays of the discipline despite a reported growth in other areas. However, it's also telling that, of the 64 guides that explicitly identified themselves as being dedicated to *either* language or literature, 43 focused on literature and 21 on language, showing a greater emphasis on literature. It was also noted that, even where guides addressed resources or topics relevant to both literature and language, there was typically a much greater emphasis on literary research. This would conform to a model where earlier phases of language learning are focused on practical skills and reliance on textbooks or other media supplied by the professor, and independent information seeking only occurs as students enter more advanced classes. Although authors hoped to draw distinctions between the organization and instructional emphasis of guides with different topical foci, in reality there was such great overlap in the sets of guides with substantial literature, language, or interdisciplinary content that it was difficult to make generalizations.

The most common organizational schemas also implied that librarians were primarily focused on the guide as a portal to resources rather than a space for learning and that users would come to the guide looking for information in specific formats, although studies of the research practices of literary scholars have not shown that distinctions between, for example, books or articles are meaningful for the scholars' information seeking behavior (Evans, 1988; Chu, 1999; Becher, 2001). Topical menu pages are a more discipline-centered way of organizing

resources, but the focus is still on the nature of the information to be found rather than the user's task. This organization may help experienced users to get as quickly as possible to a tool or resource, but it also assumes that users require only minimal help choosing the most appropriate resource and searching it.

Since modern languages as a field is so document-dependent, it's illuminating to see what types of sources are most emphasized in library guides. When the foundational studies of research practices in modern languages and the humanities were conducted in the late 1980s, computer searching was in its infancy, so one would expect preferences regarding research tools and formats to have changed as well. Despite the monograph's role as the gold standard of publication in most fields of modern language studies outside of linguistics, and the overwhelming majority of books in citation studies of literature scholarship (Cullars, 1988), books came third in our ranking, behind articles and subject-specific reference. It might reflect librarians' belief that articles and encyclopedias really are more important than books, but it more likely reflects the existence of so many more discipline-specific tools for finding articles, as opposed to the common reliance on one tool, the local catalog, for finding books. Whereas most guides would not list specific monographs because of their specialized focus, many do seem to see it as their role to direct users to important reference works that summarize or map a field. This "over-emphasis" on one format implies that, even when listing resources, librarians are thinking about their pedagogical function for novice researchers.

When compared to the types of resources listed by East (2005) as being important to humanists, the resources featured in this set of guides reflect the ongoing importance of formats that are marginal in other fields, especially unpublished materials and primary sources, but also print bibliographies, reviews, and dissertations. Formats he identified as of lesser or variable importance, such as microforms, maps, government documents, and scores, were not listed often enough to require systematic accounting. On the other hand, other resources he considered marginal, such as film and news, were much more prevalent in the guides. The popularity of film reflects the growing interest in non-textual media, although one might expect that undergraduates would go to Google for current news and only resort to library tools for harder to locate historical publications. East also mentioned Web resources as important. Although authors suspected that this would be a less useful category because the internet is so interwoven into all of our formats now, over half (97) of guides made some mention of *web*, *webpage*, *website*, or *internet* in their menu pages or box headings, implying that library vs. web is still a meaningful distinction for librarians.

Although the predominance of format as an organizational scheme emphasized the guide-as-portal or environment for doing, the fact that 71% included some type of instruction also showed that most librarians saw the guides as at least somewhat being environments for learning. Furthermore, a slim majority of guides with instruction saw the need for instruction that was specific to modern languages as distinct from generic information literacy skills. If instruction was widespread, it was also spread thinly, with relatively little guide real estate being devoted to instruction beyond listing. Also, the fact that so much of the discipline-specific instruction was devoted to call numbers and subject headings as opposed to process suggests a fairly static

approach, and disregards many of the finer-grained information tasks, such as those defined by Ellis (1993) in his interviews with English faculty.

Instruction topics showed an overwhelming emphasis on searching and locating resources. Instruction related to Search Strategies was featured in over 1.5 times as many guides as the next highest category for Citation. This resource-directed instruction implies that instruction was offered in service of the guide-as-portal rather than as an end in itself. The frequency and prominence of instruction devoted to two other categories related to locating resources, Call Numbers and Subject Headings, was unexpected, since students may not often treat them as salient or meaningful ways of finding information. However, it speaks to the ongoing importance of print materials in modern languages, while also demonstrating an emphasis on library-centric discovery methods. Often, instruction in these categories wasn't about how to use the tool, but consisted of lists of suggested subject headings or call number ranges (for example, ranges useful for French social history and political institutions; or a complete outline of the Library of Congress P classification). While one can question the student-centeredness of these kinds of lists, they also reflect the humanist researcher's penchant for browsing relative to other fields (East, 2005), and show the importance that librarians assign to these tools even in a time of waning print usage. This emphasis on searching and locating was much greater than coverage of understanding and evaluating source types in the disciplines, even though research has found that these higher-order skills are especially important as students move into disciplinary research and significantly affect students' ability to retrieve and select appropriate sources (Kautto and Talja, 2007).

Two examples that were notable for their in-depth, process-based instruction were Harvard's Comparative Literature guide and Johns Hopkins' language-specific guides. For instance, Harvard's Comparative Literature guide (<https://guides.library.harvard.edu/literature/>) had information and resources to help students with close reading, finding context for their interpretations, and make sense of the scholarly conversations through browsing bibliographies and citation chaining. Johns Hopkins's guides (e.g., <http://guides.library.jhu.edu/c.php?g=202491&p=1334928>) also had especially thorough strategies for finding books and articles on authors, works, or themes, and instruction on subject headings that was contextualized within students' research process.

It was disappointing that so few used multimedia or included information about research process or understanding and evaluating sources, although consistent with Pendell and Armstrong's findings. This might be because librarians assume that topics covered in more generic guides or introductory information literacy classes will suffice, or because instruction is being offered in another way.

Some limitations of this study have to do with the types of guides considered and how we collected and coded data. For example, the study looks only at guides from certain languages and institutions, and it's possible that excluded course guides, which could address themselves to a particular audience or assignment, contained more instruction. Authors might also have seen different trends if less commonly taught languages or different types of universities had

been included. In terms of how data collection and analysis was handled, this study measures whether or not a certain feature was present in a guide, but not how prevalent the content was within a guide. One possible direction for future research would be to do a multi-disciplinary study of research guides so that valid comparisons could be made using a consistent data set and methodology. It would also be interesting to supplement this artifact-based research with qualitative studies on librarian and faculty views of research guides and disciplinary information literacy, or usage studies showing which parts of the guides or which links were clicked on most often.

Conclusion

Research guides provide one means of helping students to move beyond generic research skills and towards the knowledge and strategies that will help them to be successful researchers in a particular discipline. Of the guides analyzed, their emphasis on resources over process and their topical coverage shows a generally conservative approach to presenting modern language studies. Although research shows the importance of process and user-centeredness for asynchronous instruction, guides as a whole show a limited approach to instruction. The somewhat thin presence of instruction, as well as the prevalence of text as an instructional format, imply that many librarians consider instruction in discipline-specific research practices to be important, but that the primary purpose of the guide is to act as a portal to resources rather than a space to learn about the discipline.

Guides are of course only one, limited part of a complete information literacy curriculum, but even if one considers them best suited as a structured way to provide access to relevant resources, there is still much that librarians can do to maximize their effectiveness. Librarians should organize them in a way that is meaningful to the user and provide context and explanations that situate resources within user needs and tasks. Knowing what will be meaningful when the disciplinary context may come from personal familiarity, but this should also be supplemented by formal research into the discipline that relies on what disciplinary researchers themselves see as most salient and necessary. The complement of this need for generalizable, research-based evidence about the discipline is the need for similar information about research guides and librarian professional practice. It is one thing for a librarian to apply disciplinary knowledge to improving their own guides, but a general survey and analysis of subject guides such as this one can help all librarians to understand what the overall trends and major issues are.

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