

Scaffolding Online Library Instruction in a Single Class

If you have an embedded role in the class, it may be easier to deliver content throughout the entire research process. For example, some instructors like to split parts of research into sections throughout a course. In a history course, students may be required to find secondary sources for an initial assignment, then primary sources for another assignment later in the semester.

- During the first step of your scaffolded plan, you might tackle just the goal of familiarizing the students with the services available and showing the basics of finding secondary sources.
- The next step in the scaffolded plan would be later in the semester, and you would jump right into using the primary source collections, skipping over the basics of how to use the library's website and requesting help.

Case Study: Personal Librarians for Online Learners

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The University of West Florida (UWF) Libraries launched its Personal Librarian program in fall 2013. Following the traditional personal librarian model, we targeted all UWF first-time-in-college students. However, in response to considerable increases in the growth of our online learner population in recent years, we also implemented an Online Personal Librarian service for all students enrolled in online programs. The Personal Librarian model allowed us to do direct outreach to this growing student population. As of spring 2017, 33 percent (4,062 of 12,340) of UWF's total headcount were enrolled only in online courses. Students enrolled in an entirely online program are assigned to their corresponding library subject specialist. This tactic proves especially helpful for upper-level and graduate students with more advanced and discipline-specific research needs.

E-mails sent by the librarians serve as a delivery method for customized and chunked asynchronous instruction, as well as opening up a gateway for further connections with the learner, such as synchronous research consultations and online workshops. The goal is to provide individualized outreach and proactive research assistance to students through a direct connection with a librarian. Students receive an initial introductory

communication from their personal librarian at the start of the semester, explaining the program and providing the librarian's contact information. After that, personal librarians e-mail students two to three times per semester, highlighting specific resources and services and providing research tips.

The text and schedule of e-mail communications is coordinated by our online outreach librarian, who composes each e-mail and suggests an appropriate subject line. The e-mails that are sent at the beginning of each semester contain an overview of library resources and services for online learners, and direct students to a research guide designed specifically for those learners. The research guide presents a step-by-step tutorial walking students through the basic research process. It links together five short videos covering formulating a research question, selecting and using keywords, discovering and locating sources, selecting relevant articles, and organizing sources for the writing process.

While we strive to keep the text fairly consistent among librarians to ensure that all students receive the same message and information, the point of the program is to develop a relationship with the students that is individualized and capitalizes on each librarian's subject expertise. In the text of a typical e-mail, the librarians include links to two to three library resources. Each librarian customizes the e-mails sent to the students with discipline-specific information. This may include a link to a research guide created for a discipline or database, a Link and a brief explanation of a database, short tips for searching in such a database, or directions on how to search for statistics or other information outside of library databases. For instance, the education librarian might include links to state websites containing education data and scorecards, with a few short tips for searching for school success data. The business librarian, while using the same or similar introductory text in the e-mail, might edit the resources offered to highlight a new business database. The instruction presented through the e-mails is also varied throughout the semester with tips on how to access information and request items provided at the beginning and information on citations and creation of scholarly products provided later.

In addition to the asynchronous, customized instruction presented in the e-mails, all e-mails give students the option of contacting their subject specialist librarian for individualized instruction via a research consultation. This process is facilitated by our use of youcanbook.me, a calendar service that allows students to make their own appointments. Most of the research consultations with online students are conducted via Collaborate Ultra, since it allows for video connection and screen sharing, but we also offer students the option to use Skype, Google Hangouts, or phone (often in conjunction with a join.me session). The personal librarian e-mails also

serve as a great way to market synchronous online workshops and to distribute links to the recordings of the workshops for asynchronous access after they have taken place.

Bottom Line: A Personal Librarian program targeted at online learners allows for direct contact with the learners, creates a connection, and allows for scaffolded library instruction timed to match student needs at different parts of the semester.

Some Tips for Designing Content

Graphic Design and Text

Sometimes we need students just to read so that they can learn the concepts. This can be challenging. A common refrain in higher education is "Students just don't read anymore!" There are plenty of theories about why that is—chiefly, that daily repeated scrolling through online content causes us to read more shallowly. In asynchronous online classes, students often have to read even more than students in face-to-face sections since the majority of content is conveyed through text. Students who don't read all of what they are given are likely to do poorly in the course. There are several things that you can do to encourage reading of the text you provide if you are designing it yourself (Vai & Sosulski, 2011):

- Use an easy-to-read typeface.
- For accessibility, use a typeface that can be read by screen readers. Look here for a list: <http://webaim.org/techniques/fonts/>
- Keep right margins jagged.
- Put ample space between lines of text.
- Keep it uncluttered. White space is good, no crowding.
- Use bold type sparingly and for emphasis.
- Be consistent with all graphic elements.

Chunking

To avoid information overload, practice chunking, which means dividing your content into short modules. Not only will students stay more engaged with the content, but when you create smaller chunks, you can easily reuse and rearrange content for other classes. Being able to reuse content is ideal; it will save time in the long run. Creating smaller chunks of content also allows for an easier refresh. Instead of having to rebuild an entire lengthy tutorial, you can just replace the part that needs updating.