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# **UW Libraries Usability Testing**

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The Information Gateway's "Libraries FAQ"  
and "Research Guide" Sections – Executive  
Summary

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this test is to evaluate the usability of the redesigned “Libraries FAQ” and “Research Guide” sections of the Information Gateway. Questions considered include:

1. How quickly are patrons able to locate the information they need?
2. How well does the design of the FAQ facilitate the finding of information?
3. Is the patron able to find information by themselves without resorting to the “Ask a Librarian” service?
4. What are the affective reactions to the FAQ page design?

The eight participants who agreed to take part in the test include five female and three male subjects, the majority of which have used the Internet for more than five years. The favorite and most frequent use of online time among this group of participants was for social and entertainment purposes. The test consisted of a questionnaire to obtain demographic information, a series of tasks to test performance of the website, and a final post-test questionnaire to collect user feedback. The test itself included five questions:

1. What does photocopying cost in the library?
2. Find an answer to the question: “Can I check out videos and DVDs from the library? What is available?”
3. Find an answer to the question: “I’m supposed to find “scholarly” articles for a paper. How do I do that?”
4. Find an answer to the question: “What do I do if the book I want isn’t available in the library?”
5. Find an answer to the question: “What is the best database to find an article for my biology paper?”

The results of the study show that both the Libraries FAQ and Research guide are effective tools for orienting students. Of the five questions, the UW library pages scored a 100% completion rate three times. On the question regarding finding videos/DVDs, participants would resort to asking a librarian, or giving up, 37% of the time. (Part of the problem with this question was that the participants were mistakenly sent to the FAQ page, and not the research guide. Even though they were free to do so, none of the participants thought to visit the research guide for this information.) With the question regarding interlibrary loans, one participant was unable to find the correct information using the Research Guide.

The overall design of both the Libraries FAQ and Research Guide were found to be useful. The design was compared to several alternatives:

Type	Site	Corresponding Success Results
An index-style FAQ	Arizona	Was successful only when participant knew the correct term.
A drop-down dependant home page	Michigan	This was too overwhelming and was not preferred.
A highly interactive research guide	Purdue	Success rate was low and the resource was universally reviled.
An FAQ with a small number of subject groupings	Iowa	Mixed reviews: some liked the look and feel, others found it hard to use.
Research Guides with a small number of subject groupings	Duke and Wake Forest	Many preferred this method. The Wake Forest method of integrating subjects into the process was particularly successful.

The recommendations suggested by this study include:

1. Cut down on visual overload by minimizing the amount of text that is hyperlinked. Constrain link text to target objects (either the action or thing.) This should cut down on the amount of information that users must visually parse.
  - i.e. convert link from “[Jobs in the Library](#)” to “[Jobs](#) in the Library”
2. Add link to Odegaard media page from the Libraries FAQ page labeled “Videos and DVDs”.
3. Create a browse by subject link on the “Top 20 Databases” page. Make the link changes mentioned above to the Research Guide as well as FAQ.