

ABSTRACT:

As librarians we often believe that students are using research tools in specific ways and we design them to meet this assumption. But what if we are wrong? How would that change the way we design our tools and approach our teaching?

We gathered data from Primo, LibGuides and our Databases A-Z list for week 2 and 8 of the Spring Term 2017 and 2018, and performed usability studies with undergraduate students to learn more about how they use LibGuides and Primo.

Using a mixed methods assessment approach, the process is revealing how students currently interact with library tools and how the design can lead to frustration and seeking out non-library methods to complete their research. Through our analysis, we are examining how we can improve the content and design of the three platforms to be more user-centered. We are specifically focused on clearly defining the purpose of tools and updating terminology to match student expectations.

This study seeks to strike a balance between assuming our domain expertise and seeking to “instruct” students on how to navigate the complex and sometimes disjointed web of library resources with a sincere interest in learning more about how they perform their research “in the wild” and meshing some of our best practices to be more compatible with theirs.

METHODS:

We downloaded, cleaned and coded qualitative data on searches conducted in Primo, the Databases A-Z list, and LibGuides homepage for week 2 and week 8 during the Spring Term 2017 and 2018.

For searches in the Databases A-Z list and LibGuides, we identified the type of searches most appropriate to generate successful results and used this to determine percentages for accurate searches. Each search term received a code describing the type of search.

For searches in Primo we limited our qualitative analysis to searches by undergraduates (except for Spring Term 2017, Week 2 when information was not available) that returned zero results. Each search term was coded to describe why the search appeared to fail (misuse of filters, scopes, using too many words, etc.)

HOW ARE STUDENTS USING THE TOOLS?

While we see the search boxes of our tools as unique, students do not. Whether it is the search box for Primo, Databases A-Z lists, or LibGuides, students treat them equally and often use google-type searches, copy and paste from other sources, and search for items not available within the resource.

Our findings indicate that instruction over the course of the term does not increase searching accuracy.

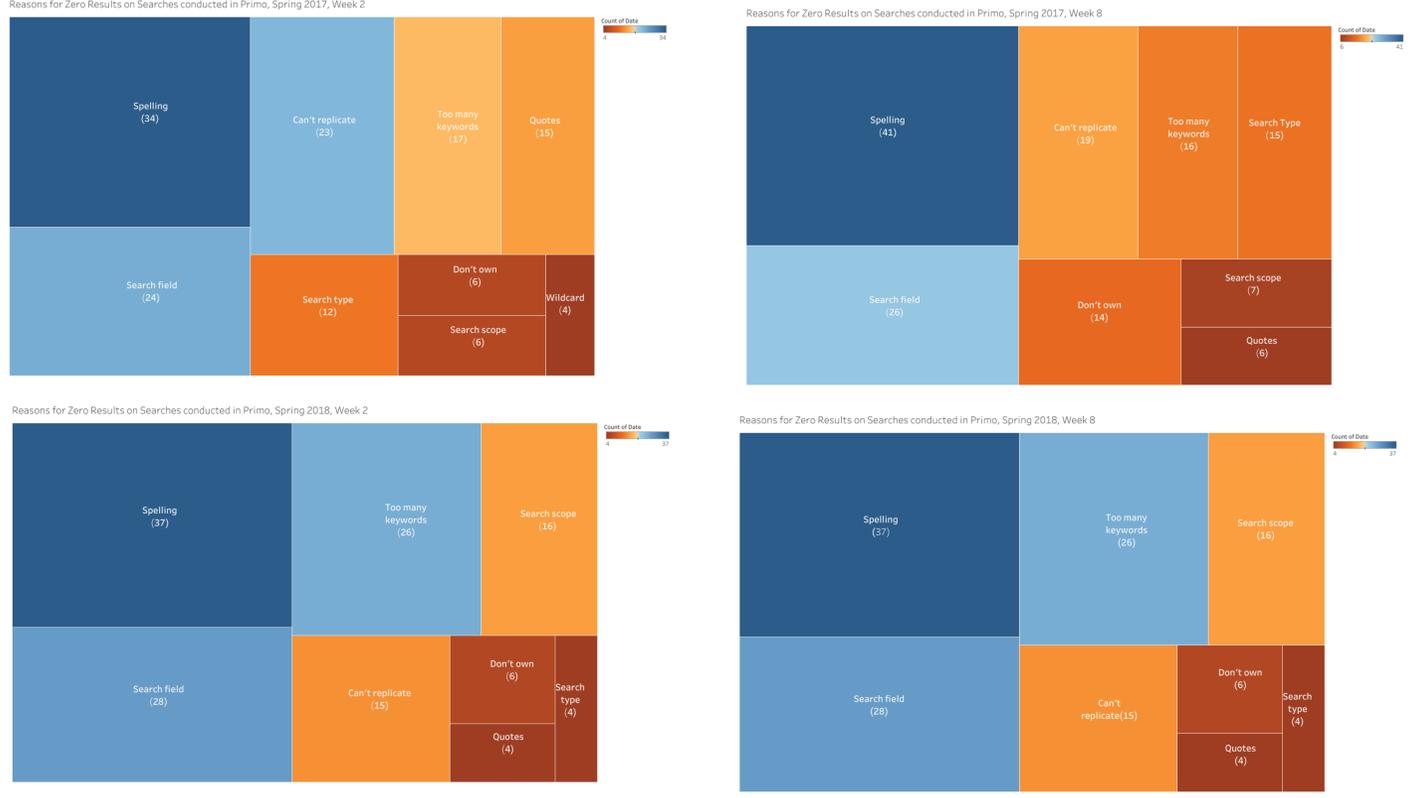
		Databases A-Z	LibGuides Home	Primo Searches
Spring 2017	Week 2	32% accurate	50% accurate	Not Available
	Week 8	23% accurate	38% accurate	1.9% Failed
Spring 2018	Week 2	32% accurate	76% accurate	2.7% Failed
	Week 8	26% accurate	26% accurate	1.8% Failed

ARE WE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE?

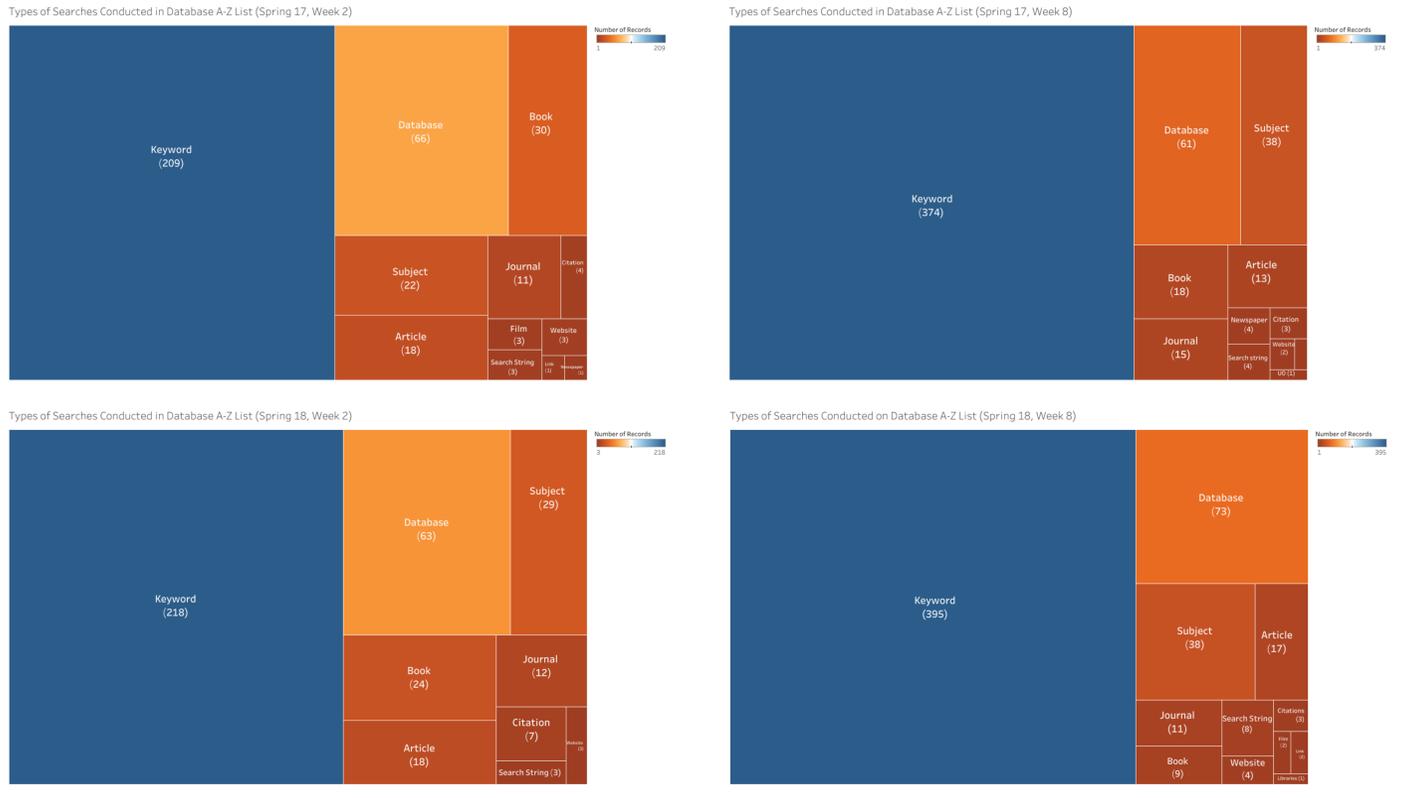
Developing best practice for technology interfaces and teaching through user-focused assessment

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FINDINGS: ZERO SEARCHES IN PRIMO



FINDINGS: DATABASES A-Z LIST SEARCHES



ANALYSIS:

Our analysis found that students understand the basics of searching for information, whether known items or keyword strings, but do not differentiate between our search tools.

For example, we discovered full Boolean search strings on our Database A-Z list, LibGuides homepage, and Primo. While this type of search might work in Primo or a database, it will not work in LibGuides or a database portal.

While there is an assumption that accuracy with using our search tools will increase over the course of the year, our findings indicate that this is not the case. In the case of our Databases A-Z list and LibGuides homepage, accuracy actually decreased over the course of the academic year.

To learn more about how students use LibGuides, we conducted a focus group with our Student Advisory Board (SAB). Students discussed their awareness, expectations, and uses of guides. Their responses mirrored our findings. They expected to find books, articles, and other types of sources on the guides – not necessarily lists of resources.

We also conducted usability studies with our SAB about how they search in Primo including in the advanced search. Most stated that advanced search was too complicated for their research. They noted that not all search scopes could be viewed without scrolling down. They also assumed “subject” meant something more general than Library of Congress subject headings..

RECOMMENDATIONS/FUTURE STEPS:

We recommend the following steps to help students improve navigation of these tools:

1. Present results to instruction librarians, summarizing common search problems and potential remedies on the three platforms. Incorporate their feedback in next steps.
2. Make error messages more helpful and encouraging. For zero results in LibGuides, Databases A-Z, and Primo state the most common reasons for zero results and offer suggestions on how to improve the search.
3. In Primo, limit search type and field customization to advanced search.
4. Develop tutorials and handouts for searching each tool that explain best practices and pitfalls.
5. Continue to collect and analyze data to track changes over time.

For more information about this project see:
<https://bit.ly/2DQfbrR>