University of Alabama Libraries
LibGuides Guidelines and Best Practices

The goal of the University Libraries is to provide LibGuides’ users with a consistent and user-friendly online experience. To maintain usability, Subject Guides will look similar to each other in terms of content organization. For General Purpose Guides and Course Guides, content organization will draw from the specific needs of the course, assignment, or interdisciplinary library content. If you are having difficulty complying with the guidelines, consider modifying the scope or organization of the specific guide.

Think (1) accessibility, (2) usability, (3) universal design, and (4) mobile first. When choosing guide layout, consider content and column width for the best fit. In general map existing boxes or assets rather than creating duplicate content.

LibGuides Content
LibGuides are instructional tools that show users library resources and techniques that assist in academic research. LibGuides can correspond with subjects, courses, or other scholarly activities at the University. A LibGuide’s purpose is to present users with meaningful academic content; authors may include relevant popular content, such as blogs, if it does not detract from the intended purpose of the guide. LibGuides serve as reference tools and supplements to face-to-face or online instruction as well and provide opportunities for independent learning.

General Purpose Guides
Address interdisciplinary topics related specifically to the library’s resources and research, but without replicating website content. General Purpose Guides require approval from the LibGuides administrator.
  •  Sara Whitver’s Citation Guide

Subject Guides
Correspond with UA Academic Majors or departments. Liaisons should evaluate the needs of the departments and their students for which they are responsible when determining which subject LibGuides to create.
  •  Mangala Krishnamurthy’s Physics Reference Guide

Course Guides
Correspond with a specific class taught at UA. Collaboration with course instructor is encouraged.
  •  Alex Boucher’s HY 430: The Modern Civil Rights Movement
Audience

Beginning researchers
- Guides serve as a starting point.
- Include key databases, journals, reference works, and websites.
- Consider including how-to research tutorials.

Advanced researchers
- Guides should provide new, lesser-known, or more in-depth resources.
- Consider including instructions for new or high level databases.

Accessibility
- If using images, please add a short description in the Alt Tag field.
- Links external to the guide will open in new windows, links internal to the guide will open in the same windows.
- Refrain from changing font style/font family, as the default settings are best for accessibility and usability and branding (See UA Web Guidelines). Maintain a consistent font format (style, color, size).
- Embedded videos must be fully captioned and have an accompanying text transcript including a description of activity occurring on the screen during the video. It is the author’s responsibility to see that these text files are supplied with any video content.
- Please check your guide’s accessibility compliance by copying and pasting your guide URL into the WAVE tool (http://wave.webaim.org/). If you have any questions, please contact the LibGuides Administrator.

Style Guidelines

General Layout
Liaisons should exercise discretion in styling each LibGuide. While there is value in having a common look and feel, some resources and some subject matter may require some adjustments. In general:

- Prefer two-column layout.
- Avoid placing profile information on each tab of a LibGuide.
- Use heading designators for subdivisions of content (i.e., h1, h2, h3, etc.), and do not skip levels or use other text conventions to indicated headings.
- Do not use heading designators for font and text size purposes.
- Avoid underlined text.
- Do not use ALL CAPS anywhere.

Mandatory Features
With more allowances in the design and organization of each LibGuide, it is imperative to maintain a consistent and cohesive look by following these mandatory guidelines:

Guide Description: a detailed introduction to the guide
- Try to address an audience unfamiliar with the university
“Welcome to the course guide for EN 101! Filled with lots of videos and links, this guide will help you identify tools and learn skills so that you can write successful academic papers!”

Profile Box (appears on the right most column of the Guide)
- Only listed on the “Start Here” page.
- Titled “Ask Me.”
- Include email address, office number, and phone number.
- Must include a picture at 130x130 pixels, either of yourself or from the stock profile images we have for University Libraries. Please contact LibGuides Administrator.

Contact the Library (appears on every at the bottom of the right most column)
- Listed on each tab of a LibGuide.
- Title specific to each branch
  - “Contact Rodgers Library”
- “Contact the Library” boxes will be located in the repository with specific branch information.

Start Here Page: the home page/tab for each guide
- A single page guide’s page may still be entitled “Start Here.”
- The “Start Here” page must include an author profile box and a contact the library box; all other content should address broad guide/topic overview information with links to other relevant guides when appropriate.

Tabs
- One or two-word titles with ampersands as conjunction “and.”
- Use title case.
- Prefer tabs to subpages.
- Use subpages sparingly.
- Limit number of tabs on a LibGuide to no more than eight. If more seem necessary, consider splitting the content into multiple LibGuides.
- Every LibGuide should contain a “Start Here” tab unless there is only one tab. Other examples include:
  - Articles
  - Books
  - Websites
  - Media
  - Primary Sources
  - Secondary Sources
  - Company Information
  - Statistics
  - Scholarly Sources
  - Popular Sources
  - Reference
  - Scores
  - Recordings
• Naming Conventions
  o Course Guides
    ▪ Course Number: Full Name of Course (Instructor Name, if needed)
    ▪ COM 340: Communication & Social Identity (Smith)
  o Assets
    ▪ Whenever possible use an existing asset, rather than creating a new one.
    ▪ When creating video and widget assets, it is recommended that you include a short title, the type, and the owner in the name field (e.g. Basic Searching in Scout - Video - Ezell or JSTOR Search - Widget - Wright) so that you will be able to easily search for the asset for re-use or editing at a later date.

• Database/E-Resources Descriptions
  o Avoid providing custom descriptions. If you would like to include instructions or introductory text, consider using a Rich Text item before or after the link asset.

• Minimalist Design
  o Maintain a balance between white space and text on a page - images can help with this.
  o Try to avoid text-heavy content, as users tend to scan.
  o Box names and tab names should be short and meaningful.
  o Avoid empty columns.
  o Use guide space efficiently by matching box content width to column width.

Best Practices
The best practices suggested here reflect web usability studies, LibGuides-specific usability research, and the majority opinion of University of Alabama LibGuide creators, made with the intention to help authors create efficient and helpful instructional tools for our users. They are not mandatory, but they are highly suggested.

Navigation
• Attempt to limit the number of tabs to no more than seven.
• Use subpages sparingly, and, if used, always place a link on the main tab page.

Tags
• Tags provide an alternative way for users to search for guides because they are searchable in the LibGuides search box and are indexed by Google. Providing effective tags makes your guide more discoverable.
• Strike a balance between as few options as possible, while also giving users a choice that satisfies.
• Reuse suggested tags that are provided by the system.
• Be as specific as possible, use terms not appearing in the title, and think of tags as keywords.
Links

- For any link to the main page of a resource that appears in the A to Z list, use the official database asset (available by clicking Add /Reorder > Database). This will ensure that your database links are always up-to-date.
- When at all possible, use existing assets rather than creating links or duplicate assets.
- When necessary to add a link, use the content type “link”, instead of hyperlinks in rich text.
- No more than 12 links in a list—otherwise use a new tab or a tabbed box.
- Group links by relevance.
- Use an introductory paragraph to a list of links.
- Always use the description field for each link.

Friendly URLs

- Lower case.
- Avoid underscores.
- You may use “/” to delineate by instructor or section if that is relevant or helpful:
  - http://guides.lib.ua.edu/basketweaving/jones

Editorial Considerations

- Practice good grammar and syntax.
- Proofread the guides; ask a colleague to proofread it as well.
- Refrain from excessive punctuation, e.g., *, !, ‼, ??.

Assets

- Search for assets (links, databases, media, documents, etc.) before creating new ones.
- Map the reusable search boxes instead of copying.
- Administrator will provide a repository in LibGuides that contains commonly used, reusable content.

Special Considerations

- If creating a guide for a course or assignment that requires only a few resources, you may consider adding it as a page in an existing subject guide under a “Courses” tab.
- For courses that cross disciplines (cross listed courses), contact the potential authors/liaisons to collaborate in creating a single guide that accommodates all listings.
- Refrain from creating duplicate guides; use common sense.

Oversight

Administrator Responsibilities

- Oversees and manages all aspects of LibGuides in consultation with Web Technologies and Development, other University Libraries departments, and branches as necessary.
- Provides information, assistance, and instruction to LibGuide creators.
- Facilitates communication among the Associate Dean of Research and Technology, Head of Web Technology and Development, and LibGuide authors.
• When an author leaves the organization or liaison responsibilities shift, in consultation with the administration, the administrator makes the necessary author responsibility adjustments.
• Develops and implements LibGuides usability studies.
• Sets default fonts/styles in compliance with accessibility standards and UA Visual and Web guidelines.
• Creates and maintains LibGuide Assets.
• Collaborates with the Instructional Design Librarian to ensure that learning objects are included in LibGuide Assets.
• Offers at least annual training in May and provides support as needed. Sessions will be assessed to track changes in guide content, author expertise, and user satisfaction. Additional training will be provided after new versions of the LibGuides software or these guidelines.
• In consultation with LibGuide authors and the administration, guidelines may need to be revisited and amended based on data from usability testing, technical concerns, or SpringShare updates.
• May notify author and unpublish any guide that is out of compliance with the LibGuide guidelines or not actively updated by authors if author remains unresponsive to feedback.

Author Responsibilities

• Create new guides as appropriate with an understanding that the author is responsible for maintaining all published guides under his/her authorship.
• Revisit guides at least once a semester to remove out-of-date or inaccurate content, and update links if necessary; review deadlines: August 15 and January 5.
• Consider unpublishing course guides if they are not in use for more than a semester. If guides remain published, authors will need to actively update them.
• Consider usage statistics when evaluating guides.
• Consider gathering feedback from course instructors and users through informal surveys or conversation to assess the use and success of LibGuides.

Rev. 11/1/2017