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Libr 254

Guide on the Side Tutorial

<http://slisguide.sjsu.edu/guide_on_the_side/tutorial/fa2014-bredenkamp-luna-nbclearnk12>

We wanted to address school libraries because instructors and students would most likely have access to this type of database through their school’s database subscriptions.  The NBC K-12 database is different from traditional databases because its heavily media oriented. It provides over 16,000 2- 5-minute videos on current events and includes archival content from the 1920’s.  We believe that learning to use this database and its features will help deepen course instruction and reach a wide range of students. Students process and respond to formats differently, so if they are exposed to different types of formats during a lesson, retention rates can increase!  Videos are also more engaging for students, and create opportunities for critical thinking and discussions after playback.  Since videos provide an alternative format for students that are more engaging, instructors can use these videos to supplement their lessons and assignments.

        The NBC K-12 database provides a number of features that are extremely useful for instructors to meet their educational goals. There is content organized by subjects and content organized by state standards. Using the state standards feature is extremely useful because instructors can focus on certain subjects and standards they feel will benefit from streaming video. They also have the ability to pinpoint content based on their needs, such as, grade level. The database also offers other useful features, such as, playlists and interactive “cue cards” that allow downloading, annotating, citing and embedding resources. While all these features are useful, it is too much information to compact into a single tutorial and would not be comprehensive enough to fully explore the databases potential. Focusing on one aspect will prevent cognitive overload and allow instructors to become familiar with the database first before they explore the advance features.  As a result, this tutorial’s main objective is to teach instructors how to navigate through the browse and search features offered. This is the most important goal, because without finding good content to use for course instruction, all the other features are useless to an instructor.

        Given the nature of this database, it is available through school libraries, so instructors and students are the main users. While it is important to teach information literacy to both students and instructors, instructors are the main focus of this tutorial. Many of the features available on NBC K-12, are extremely beneficial for instructors and if instructors are not aware of them, how will they incorporate it’s content into their course instruction? We want to encourage instructors to seek the resources available at the school library, to aid in the creation of their course instruction plans. It is important to work with the library and it’s staff because library staff can make recommendation on other resources and provide hands on instruction when needed.  Librarians and instructors working collaboratively are important because both backgrounds can provide expertise in areas that the other is not familiar with.  This Guide on the side serves to provide that collaborative support that will encourage instructors to use the NBC K-12 database for videos that provides students with a richer learning experience.

The guide on the side tutorials are constructivist by nature. They allow the users to set their own pace, providing a self-directed learning context that is critical to helping adult learners learn, according to Reece in “Critical Thinking and Cognitive Transfer” (p.487). The user can manipulate the information and pause when necessary to process and synthesize the information. Our tutorial offers a hands-on approach to learning the concepts of database use at the users’ point of need, which also “aids in the assimilation of knowledge” (Reece, p. 487)

Another benefit of the guide on the side is that it lessens cognitive overload because of the spatial contiguity principle, which states that when on-screen text and visual materials are shown together rather than separately, this allows the user to learn more effectively. Because the tutorial is physically integrated into the database website, the proximity of the text and images create connections that make it easier to process the information (Tempelman-Kluit, p. 366). This helps to mitigate the disadvantage of the guide on the side tutorials, which is that they do not utilize both channels of information processing, the verbal and visual, which provides maximum effectiveness of cognitive processing (Tempelman-Kluit, p. 366).

The guide on the side also allows for the development of automaticity, an important stage in the learning process according to Reece (p. 487). Not only do users follow the directions of the tutorial, but they are free to practice the skills using their own topics by loosely referring to the guide on the side until they feel comfortable navigating the database on their own.

Beginning the process we came up with objectives that are clearly stated at the start of the tutorial and again at the end. We used language that was clear, and free of library jargon, that could be understood by the average individual. Directions for navigating through the tutorial were clearly given. We tried to keep the directions to one concept per page so as not to overwhelm the user and to allow for processing time and improve readability. Signaling, either as numbers or as bullets, was used to make reading the steps of the directions easier. Headings were highlighted in bold text and placed at the top of the page to increase readability and make it easier for the user to navigate forward as well as backward, in the event it is necessary to go back for review. Checkpoints, or formative assessments were given throughout the tutorial to allow users to check their understanding of the content up to that point. If they are not able to correctly identify the answer, they can go back and review. The end of the tutorial shows a recap of the learning objectives of the tutorial and the final page of our tutorial mentions other capabilities of the NBC Learn K-12 database, such as playlists and sharing. Users can then look for other tutorials, or explore the database on their own if they feel comfortable with the concepts they learned.

Designing and building a guide on the side tutorial is a very time-consuming process. A librarian needs to have adequate time to prepare, as well as knowledge of the content to be taught. This could help to encourage collaboration between librarians and instructors. Also, the fact that a tutorial only needs to be created once is an argument in favor of them. They are user-friendly (or can be) and help the user at the point of need. They are also a good collaboration tool because they can be accesses by multiple parties from different locations.

References

Reece, G. J. (2007). Critical thinking and cognitive transfer: Implications for the development of online information literacy tutorials. *Research Strategies, 20,* 482-493.          <http://dx.doi.org.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/10.1016/j.resstr.2006.12.018>

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