

Academic BRASS

Published by the
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 12 (1), Spring 2017

Grace Liu
Business Reference Librarian
Fogler Library
University of Maine

Searching as a Strategic Exploration: Using Visual Guides to Teach Business Research Strategy

Since 2008, the Project Information Literacy has conducted a series of national surveys about college students' research habits. The project has surveyed over 11,000 students at more than 50 U.S. colleges and universities (Head, 2013). In one of these surveys, researchers found that 84% of students reported "getting started" is the most difficult step in the research process. (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). As business librarians, we have witnessed students struggling with starting their business research, while relying on Google, showing a lack of strategy in using information resources, and having tunnel vision on available approaches.

Starting from fall 2016, I reflected on my teaching and shifted the focus of all project-related, one-shot instruction from resources to strategies. I created visual bookmark-sized guides (see appendices) to enhance my "Searching as a Strategic Exploration" instruction. I have received very positive feedback from faculty and students. Working with a wide range of business and economics course projects, I had the opportunity to create eight different visual guides, including:

1. Empower Market Analysis with Research
2. Empower SWOT Analysis with Research
3. Empower International Business Analysis with Research
4. Research Legal Issues Faced by Businesses
5. Research Process – Position Paper
6. Where Do I Find Business Information?
7. Where Do I Find Economic Information?
8. Where Do I Find Statistics?

These visual handouts are available at the ACRL Sandbox at <http://sandbox.acrl.org/users/yiranyuxuan>.

Purpose of Strategic Research Guides

The "Searching as a Strategic Exploration" guides were tied to students' research projects and they encouraged students to go through different steps, take different approaches, and use different tools to gather information. The purpose is to cultivate students' strategic thinking and help students develop flexibility and adaptability throughout the business research process. It helps students understand searching as a strategic exploration, understand the holistic picture

of a business information landscape, and build their confidence to handle complex business research problems.

The visual research handout is also an effective tool to teach critical thinking and affective learning, and incorporate other information literacy framework concepts. So in my visual guides, I included the critical step of evaluating information and also included tips to help students overcome emotional challenges. I used framework concepts such as “Searching as a Strategic Exploration,” “Information Has Value,” or a quote from Socrates to encourage students’ pursuit in diligent business research.

Tools and Designing Process

I have investigated several tools, but finally found Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>). It is an excellent graphic design platform in terms of free images and templates, and offers the possibility to download your design as an image or PDF without limitation. The charged service provides access to more resources and group editing functionality with the flexibility to move around your own designs. I am satisfied with their free service. Most of my designs were created using their infographic templates. I also found other templates useful for other purposes and used some of them in my in-class presentation.

I would normally start with “step/concept mapping” on a piece of print paper and draw a relationship picture of different approaches, and at the same time I would test the validity of the process. After feeling satisfied with the approaches, I would select the infographic templates with graphs, images, charts or symbols closer to what I would like to express. You can also select useful graphs from other infographic templates. Depending on your graphic design ability and availability of images, it would take hours to days to create a new template. But once you have a template, creating other visual guides can be much easier. For a new project, it normally takes me about 4-8 hours to map concepts and create the visual guide with my already prepared template.

Printing and Sharing

If you would like to save paper, I would suggest that you print two bookmark-sized visual guides on one sheet of paper (front and back). I have had success using the following steps¹:

1. Download the whole document as a PDF file
2. Open the PDF in Adobe Acrobat
3. File - Print
4. **Page Sizing & Handling** – “Multiple”
5. **Pages Per Sheet** – “Custom” and “2 by 1”
6. **Page Order** – “Horizontal Reversed”
7. Select “Print on Both Sides of Paper” and “Flip on Short Edge”
8. **Orientation** – “Landscape”
9. **Properties – Printing Shortcuts – Print on Both Sides – “Yes, Flip Over”**

Please keep in mind that using card stock will give you a better effect, but it would be more costly, and card stock may need to be manually fed into the printer. If you use card stock, you will need to change your “Paper Type” in Properties also. You can also incorporate your visual handout in your LibGuide when downloading it as an image.

¹ With special thanks to Dianne Paradis, the Library Specialist at Fogler Library, University of Maine. She helped me greatly with double-checking and documenting these steps.

References

- Head, A. (2013). Project information literacy: What can be learned about the information-seeking behavior of today's college students? Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2281511
- Head, A., & Eisenberg, M. (2010). Truth be told: How college students evaluate and use information in the digital age. Retrieved from http://www.projectinfolit.org/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_fall2010_survey_noappendices.pdf