The Library Skills Workbook is a general education requirement that all University at Buffalo undergraduates must complete in their first year. The Workbook is a self-paced, online, graded tutorial on library policies and research. It is completed and managed in Blackboard.
When the Workbook was first launched online in 2006, there was only a general version. I’ll be showing a little bit of the music version that we introduced last year. It is one of four optional, discipline-specific versions that any student may select. Each of five prescribed sections contains five questions on different subtopics. Each question is randomly selected from a pool of five. We left the general sections mostly unchanged or just substituted music-related examples. Questions on specific tools or resources were heavily edited or rewritten to incorporate very basic music research skills.
The Workbook cannot assume any particular subject expertise or any experience with the UB Libraries or college-level research. Given these conditions along with the fact that students see only 25 questions, the workbook is a very brief introduction. The Workbook emphasizes ways to find help when it is needed, and we hope students will remember that, if nothing else.
The biggest challenge was customizing a very small number of questions to introduce skills important for searching for music. These concepts are particularly emphasized in the section “Finding Books, Scores, and Recordings,” that I’m showing you a little bit of. This is the section that covers the Libraries’ online catalog. We rewrote all 25 questions in the pool for this topic. Core concepts we tried to communicate were 1) it is essential to read search results and the contents of individual records; 2) take advantage of the links in catalog records; and 3) “authors” didn’t just write books. The general Workbook uses only book authors in questions, so we added performers and composers. The introductory text of the question shown here is quite convoluted because the OPAC display uses both the labels “author” and “contributors.”
One question pool demonstrates how keyword searches and topical subject headings complement each other. Students are given keyword search terms that were carefully selected to include only cases where subject headings are different from the search keywords or common terminology. Feedback for both incorrect and correct answers emphasizes important functionality: “clicking on the links will lead you to other library materials on the same topic.”
To highlight the catalog’s and Libraries’ coverage of formats other than books, a question on “Advanced searching” covers pre-search limits of printed music, audio music, and film/video. Students are given a precise search to enter, and correct answers require students to examine search results as well as apply limits. We further emphasize the depth of our music collection in a question dedicated to our streaming audio databases.
The most difficult question pool to create was “Identifying Titles and Works.” Having students see only one question on what is at the heart of searching for scores and recordings was quite challenging. Two of five possible questions require students to carefully read the contents of sound recording records to identify specific songs. Introductory text explains that titles of works or songs can appear in places other than “title” in a list of results or in an individual record. The intention with these questions and with some of the questions on authors is to show students that they will often need to click on a search result to find more information and then read what appears.
Of course, we had to decide what to do about uniform titles! The remaining questions in the “Identifying Titles and Works” pool address these. We did ultimately include the term “uniform title” but explained it with the term “official title.” Unfortunately, in our catalogs, uniform titles are labeled as “Other Title” and “Contributors.” Given the poorly labeled display, the limited functionality of uniform title hyperlinks, and the increased number of clicks needed to view contents notes in VuFind, in the next Workbook revision I’m replacing these questions with additional questions requiring scrutiny of descriptive parts of catalog records.
One of the positive outcomes of developing and maintaining the Workbook is that we are more attentive to changes to the Libraries’ web pages and discovery interfaces, so we can edit questions or make changes to public pages as needed. This slide shows our newly expanded “M” schedule in a help page for the question on LC call numbers—here we added information to reflect the fact that we don’t use LC call numbers for our score collection.
How are we doing so far? Since June 2011, 120 students have taken the music version of the workbook. 11 of 60 survey respondents indicated that they are music, music theater, or dance majors. Outreach to the Department of Theatre & Dance has been particularly successful. As you can see, comments from the surveys have been very enthusiastic, and we hope to see enrollment increase toward the end of the year.

**ACTUAL STUDENT COMMENTS:**

- Before I completed this workbook, I never knew you could listen to music from any era by streaming. But now I know!
- To name a few, I learnt tips on narrowing my research question topics and, conducting a more effective and concise search on the databases/search engines.
- I learnt how to conduct a proper and thorough search with the UB Library website. I really didn’t know there was so much more to a search function than just typing in a keyword. I can actually adjust my search to streamline it better. Well, I guess I knew that the streamlining functions existed, just that I didn’t know how to go about doing so.
Thank You

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