Video Tutorials
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Overview and Definition
Video tutorials are one method for academic librarians to provide researchers with an opportunity for asynchronous and self-paced instruction. While tutorials can exist in a variety of formats, video tutorials are multimedia learning objects that engage both the auditory and visual systems. According to the multimedia principle, individuals learn more effectively from a combination of words and pictures rather than from words alone (Butcher 2014; Mayer 2009). In this vein, academic librarians can employ this principle to better inform researchers about a variety of topics, such as general and advanced research techniques, navigating and using specific electronic platforms or software, and even as a medium to promote access service policies.

Why Do You Need to Know?
Providing general information literacy sessions and course-integrated instruction are core ways academic librarians service their institution. Instructional support can range from one-shot sessions during scheduled class time to credit-bearing courses that span a semester. Whether these offerings are conducted in-person or virtually for distance learners, synchronous instruction is an effective way to teach a group simultaneously while allowing librarians to address questions in real time. However, scheduled class time has become increasingly more precious to faculty. As a response, academic librarians have devised creative ways – such as flipping the classroom – to make the most out of any class time allotment. Video tutorials can be used to introduce students to general concepts of information literacy, which can then be actively explored and applied during synchronous instruction. When a researcher’s information needs evolve in unexpected ways after the librarian’s instruction session, video tutorials can support the inquiry whenever additional general guidance is needed. Moreover, even when librarians are not given the opportunity to conduct course-integrated synchronous instruction (in part due to the implausibility of visiting every single course offered at their institution), a thoughtfully curated and topically diverse series of tutorials can bolster the research pursuits of disparate departments. While these learning objects can be tailored to aid a specific course or a recurring assignment, the concepts highlighted are broad enough that researchers can apply the content to their own topic. If the complexity of a researcher’s topic extends beyond the tutorial’s learning objectives, a researcher can then contact the tutorial’s creator for a one-on-one consultation.

Additionally, academic librarians can leverage video tutorials to support distance learners, whose unique needs and program structure diverges from traditional full-time, on-campus students. The ACRL Standards for Distance Learning Library Services outline what members of an academic community are entitled to, in terms of services and resources, regardless of whether they are on-campus or distance learners. Access to a
comprehensive (and responsive) collection of video tutorials enables distance learners to develop their information literacy proficiencies at their own pace during times when they may not have live access to a librarian.

**Current Applications in Libraries and Higher Education**

Video tutorials produced by academic librarians can vary widely in length and sophistication depending on the specific topic of focus and the intended audience. For example, the bite-sized “Getting Started” video by the University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries runs about a minute long and introduces viewers to the libraries’ website. In contrast, “Medical Subject Headings” from Yale University’s Medical Library runs about eleven minutes long and delves into sophisticated searching techniques using the Ovid platform. In any case, the aim remains the same, which is to convey information in a palatable and accessible manner. The learning object may be conceptual or technical and can be categorized broadly into three practical groups including: General Research Concepts; Intermediate and Advanced Research Concepts; and Access Services and Library Policy.

**General Research Concepts**

One of the more common groupings of video tutorials focuses on introducing researchers to general (often subject-neutral) research concepts. Each video covers a single specific facet of information literacy throughout the research cycle. These videos typically range between one and four minutes long. Since the earliest stages of research can be daunting, there is a sub-genre of videos intended to help individuals simply get started, such as “Developing Your Topic” by University of North Carolina Libraries and “Choosing Keywords” and “Searching With Keywords” from Northwestern University Libraries. Once researchers have a topic selected, they can then move on to tutorials describing different types of usable sources, for example, “What’s a Journal? Journals vs. Magazines” by Kapi‘olani Community College Library and “Finding Government Information” and “Searching for Patents” by the University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries. Finally, understanding the importance of properly citing sources and formatting citations is another pertinent general research concept. Examples of these tutorials include “Examining Citations” from Northwestern University Libraries and “Citation: A (Very) Brief Introduction” from North Carolina State University Libraries.

**Intermediate and Advanced Research Concepts**

These videos build upon foundational research concepts graduating to instruction on how to use a specific platform (like a database) and/or how to effectively navigate a handful of resources to explore a specific topic. The genre is highly skill-focused and audience-targeted. While these videos are sometimes presented in a lengthy webinar-style format, more often the information is clustered into a series of videos with each video describing a single discrete task. Segmenting concepts into more easily digestible components of a grander cluster is a sound practice not only from a pedagogical viewpoint, but also in terms of strategically attracting viewership. Namely, studies have shown that video length can influence whether an individual decides to view a tutorial at all (Rush and Stott 2014). An example of this sub-genre focusing on a specific resource is Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries’ CINAHL tutorial series, which comprises ten videos demonstrating how nursing students can efficiently use the platform. Other examples of this sub-genre are: New York University Libraries’ Business Tutorials, which explores topics like marketing, economics, and locating industry information; and Boston University Libraries’ tutorial series, New Product Development and New Services Development, which supports the semester-long projects of the Questrom School of Business’ Cross Functional Core course.
**Access Services and Library Policy**

Academic libraries can branch out to create engaging video tutorials that inform users about library policies and services beyond traditional research support. For example, the University of Chicago Library Essentials series includes videos like “Library Introduction & Tour,” “Printing in the Library,” and “Access Library Course Reserves.”

**Potential Hurdles**

Before attempting to create a suite of video tutorials, it is important for librarians to carefully consider the financial investment. While there are free tools available for tutorial creation, such as Jing and H5P, the popular paid software applications can be cost prohibitive. For example, Camtasia academic licenses range from $169 for a single user, to $152 per user for up to twenty-five individuals; institutions wanting to license more than twenty-five users need to contact Camtasia directly for pricing. Adobe Presenter is another option; however, the application exists outside of standard Adobe Creative Cloud licenses and can range anywhere from $149 to $499 for a single (academic) license.

In addition to financial barriers posed by software acquisition, librarians also need to consider the time investment in creating and maintaining video tutorials. Firstly, there can be a significant learning curve when using tutorial creation tools. Secondly, these learning objects should be accessible to a wide variety of learners. Content creators can look to the United States General Services Administration’s “Create Accessible Video, Audio and Social Media” guidelines for practical steps for ensuring their video tutorials are compliant with the United States Access Board’s Section 508 Standards for Electronic and Information Technology. Moreover, creators should also use the principles of universal design as a best practice guide. While not all the principles are applicable to video tutorials, six out of the canonical seven are appropriate:

- Equitable use: integrating colors that contrast against each other well, large sans-serif fonts, and clear narration.
- Flexibility in use: allow users multiple ways to interact with a tutorial, like offering the images in a static form along with a text transcript.
- Simple and intuitive: keep videos succinct and focused, eliminating library-specific jargon and irrelevant information.
- Perceptible information: provide accurate closed captions with video tutorials.
- Tolerance for error: ensure the tutorial gives users the opportunity to pause, rewind, and move forward easily. If there are interactive check-points, provide positive and descriptive feedback for incorrect answers.
- Low physical effort: try to mitigate any barriers to using the tutorial (e.g., must download a specific software, use of a costly product when there are free alternatives, etc.) unless essential for learning outcomes.

Creating thoughtful video tutorials incorporating these principles can take time and creativity. Moreover, once the tutorial is created and published, librarians must devote time to periodic maintenance. For example, website appearances, content, and functionality can change; links can become broken; and hosting platforms and video formats can become unsupported (e.g., Adobe Flash). To keep tutorials relevant and useful, librarians may need to edit or recreate outdated videos.

**Conclusion**

The creation of useful and appealing video tutorials requires significant investment of financial and time resources on the part of the academic library and its librarians. While such investment could seem prohibitive, it should be balanced against the benefits to both the library and the users. For
example, video tutorials allow researchers to grow their skill sets at their own pace and without the need for mediation. Access to such self-service instruments at the point of need can also demonstrate the continued relevance of library services while potentially acting as a gateway level of support leading to future individual consultations.

In sum, the creation and use of video tutorials in the library instruction community has successfully followed a forward progression facilitating researchers in a variety of ways. Thus, the utility and ease of access of these learning objects – both for on-campus students and distance learners – bodes well for its continued use in promoting research skills and information literacy.

**Tools Discussed**

- Adobe Presenter (fee-based)
- Camtasia (fee-based)
- H5P (free)
- Jing (free)

**References**


Further Readings