

Embedding Information Literacy Principles in Interface Design

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Types of searches

Stats from our discovery layer

- 13% known-item searches (n=620)
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What happens after you execute your search?

- After the patron gets the results of their known item search, they are almost done
- After the patron gets the results of an exploratory search, their job is just beginning

Typical, unhelpful ways to re-formulate queries

- Moving words around to be in a different order
- Changing short words for each other (e.g. “a” becomes “the”)
- Switching singular → plural, changing verb tenses
- Changing a single word for its synonym

Patrons are hesitant to use broader/narrower terms, related terms, radically change their search

Searching as Strategic Exploration

From the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education:

“Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.”

Searching as Strategic Exploration: Dispositions

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- exhibit mental flexibility and creativity
- understand that first attempts at searching do not always produce adequate results
- seek guidance from experts, such as librarians, researchers, and professionals
- recognize the value of browsing and other serendipitous methods of information gathering
- persist in the face of search challenges, and know when they have enough information to complete the information task

Note: these dispositions are part of a longer list

We can (and do) foster these dispositions when we teach and do reference work.

But is there a way to foster them when the patron is researching on their own? Can our search interfaces encourage patrons to develop these dispositions?

Some preliminary thoughts

- Make it as easy as possible to submit the initial search
- Offer example searches for inspiration, but taking care not to constrain patrons
- Be intentional about the feedback we present along with the search results
- Facets facets facets
- Make it easy to seek guidance
- Make the patrons sloooooow doooooown

If you have a piece of this puzzle

I would love to talk to you / email

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