

Re: Search Podcast

Episode 2: Subject Guides

Hello again! Welcome back to George Mason University Libraries' podcast titled Re:Search! Today's episode is going to delve deeper into the "Subject Guides" part of our library catalogue, which we only briefly touched upon in the previous episode. So, now we'll go into the specifics, so I would encourage you to, if you want, follow along on your own computer as we go more in-depth into the GMU library website. To start, go to library.gmu.edu. Now then, let's get right into it!

We can talk about when and why you'd want to use the GMU subject guides. Personally, I like to use them when I know what topic I want to write about, but I don't yet have a good, specific research question. (If you're not sure of what constitutes a good or specific research question, don't worry! That podcast episode will be coming soon!) For today, we'll use an example topic so we can actually walk through the subject guides. First off, when you're first starting out on the library homepage, you'll find "subject guides" right underneath the search bar. It's in a blue box, all the way on the left, so all you need to do is click and it takes you to the "Info Guides" page.

Now that we're here, let's look up our imaginary topic! Let's say my professor wants me to write about computer game art-- anything that falls under that category. Well, if I don't have a specific interest in computer game art, or I don't know much about it, I would be very lost! Luckily, with the help of the subject guides, narrowing down a field of research just got a lot easier! Alright, so we're going to make sure the tab at the top left says, "by subject," and then we'll find the tab that says "Computer Science and IT." Once we click on it, a dropdown of various topics within this field will appear, and we'll go to the one that specifically says, "computer game art and design." (You might notice a number of other tabs that have more complicated names like "IT 204," and those are what are called "course guides" which we'll go more into in a bit.

Also, for more information, you could find where it says, "subject homepage," which will take you to a web page that has all the same guides and also information on the subject librarian! So, if you have a more complicated question or are looking for some guidance, you will know just who to contact! Subject librarians love answering questions and helping students!

Back to our research topic, about Computer game art and design! So, once we click on the tab that says, “computer game art and design,” we’re taken to a page that actually gives a step-by-step on how to begin your research! The subject guides for each topic are sorted out based on resource type, so you have a link for articles, news and reviews, books, music and audio resources, and professional resources. The “find articles” link will take you to a page with various databases that are specific to Computer game art and design; you can browse these for specific fields like “art and design,” and “music and sound,” etc. There’s also “multi-disciplinary,” which is more general so it’s a good place to start to get a good feel for the broader topic of computer game art and design.

The “find articles” feature is so great because scholarly journal articles are where all the current, hot topics are being discussed. So, if you ever have to do an assignment where you don’t have a specific focus yet, it’s very helpful to browse among some of the recent topics being discussed in the journals; you can get a feel for what variables are being researched, gaps in the current research, etc.

Going back to the previous page, there’s “news ad reviews” and “books,” which are pretty self-explanatory; if you’re looking for resources other than articles, check here! The music and audio resources are where you can find public domain/library access sounds, and professional resources is where you can find conference proceedings, career tips, and professional organizations relating to the field (these last two are more specific to this field, so not every subject guide has them, but the first three will most likely apply to every field)

Beneath these options are “write and cite,” which offers citation guides for APA and MLA style guides. Second, there’s also information on how to use Zotero to organize and generate your citations and bibliographies. Third, there’s a section titled “how to become a better writer” which lists books which are writing guides for the specific field, in this case, science/technology. These writing guides are available through the GMU libraries, either as hard copies or online.

Going back to the subject guide page again, beneath “write and cite” is “Get help,” which takes you to a page where you can directly contact the subject librarian to set up an appointment or ask a question, and to the right you can also find information about GMU’s academic services, like the academic skills workshops, writing center, and academic coaching program. To the right of these is “tutorials,” which gives a link to the GMU Libraries’ tutorials page, where you can

find all sorts of information on how to use the library resources. Finally, on the far right, is the “workshops” section which tells you when the next upcoming workshops are, and how to attend them.

There’s also an interesting link that says, “design your story,” which is specific to this field so not every subject guide has something like this; and if you click on that it takes you to a wonderful page that has all these resources for the programming and artistic aspects of computer game development, to help you design the narrative of your game. It’s even divided into sections for “story design” or “related websites” to help give you ideas.

If you go back to the InfoGuides page, you may notice on the right-hand side, something that says, “Course Guides,” which we mentioned just briefly before. Certain GMU courses have “Course Guides” set up for them, where resources are provided that are specific or relevant to a certain course’s curriculum. The page for the course guide looks pretty similar to the subject guide, so we don’t need to go into any further detail here; it’s just nice to know if your class has a “course guide” specific to it, because it could be a really useful tool for you, since it has a lot of relevant resources gathered into one place!

If you’re not able to find your topic of interest in the subject guides, or you’re just looking for more resources and you want to branch out, another place you could search is in the “Databases” section of the GMU library website. In fact, that will be our next episode’s topic, so if you’re curious about how to navigate the databases, stay tuned for that! Thank you for listening and see you next time!