



# The Wind beneath my Wings

**Falling in and out of love with an online  
library research skills tutorial**

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The 87th ABQLA Annual Conference  
May 24, 2019



Created by StoneHub  
from Noun Project

“

Dear Tutorial,

You are truly lovely. You are clear, and give me all the information I needed. You were a great help. You helped me find everything I needed to write my paper. I do wish you could show me how to access the research data bases without picking a subject but in the end you were a great help and I truly appreciated.

Thank you, till next time.



Created by amy morgan  
from Noun Project

“

Dear Library Research Skills Tutorial,

You're just not that important to me. We're in different places. We would have been good together a few years ago when I was young and didn't know what I was doing. But I'm older now, more mature, and I don't need you.

Best of luck,

## In February 2018, we launched the Library Research Skills Tutorial

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Concordia University Library Research Skills Tutorial. The header features the Concordia University logo and the title "Library Research Skills Tutorial". A navigation menu includes links for "GETTING STARTED", "SEARCH BASICS", "FINDING ARTICLES", "FINDING BOOKS", "FINDING OTHER TYPES OF SOURCES", "READING, WRITING & NOTE-TAKING", "CITING", and "CONCLUSION". A search bar and a "Live chat" button are also present. The main content area contains a introductory paragraph and four columns, each with an icon and a brief description of a tutorial section: "Getting started" (shoe icon), "Search basics" (laptop and magnifying glass icon), "Finding articles" (document icon), and "Finding books" (books icon). A "Feedback" button is located in the bottom right corner.

Concordia University  
LIBRARY

Library Research Skills Tutorial

Live chat Search

GETTING STARTED SEARCH BASICS FINDING ARTICLES FINDING BOOKS FINDING OTHER TYPES OF SOURCES READING, WRITING & NOTE-TAKING CITING CONCLUSION

Concordia.ca / Library / Learn

This tutorial can be used to help you achieve academic success and undertake university-level research by providing the necessary skills to find useful information, evaluate it critically, and use it wisely for your various assignments.

**Getting started**  
Learn how to choose a research topic, come up with a research question, and find the right place to search.

**Search basics**  
Discover the best search techniques for finding books and articles, as well as what to do if a search produces too few or too many results.

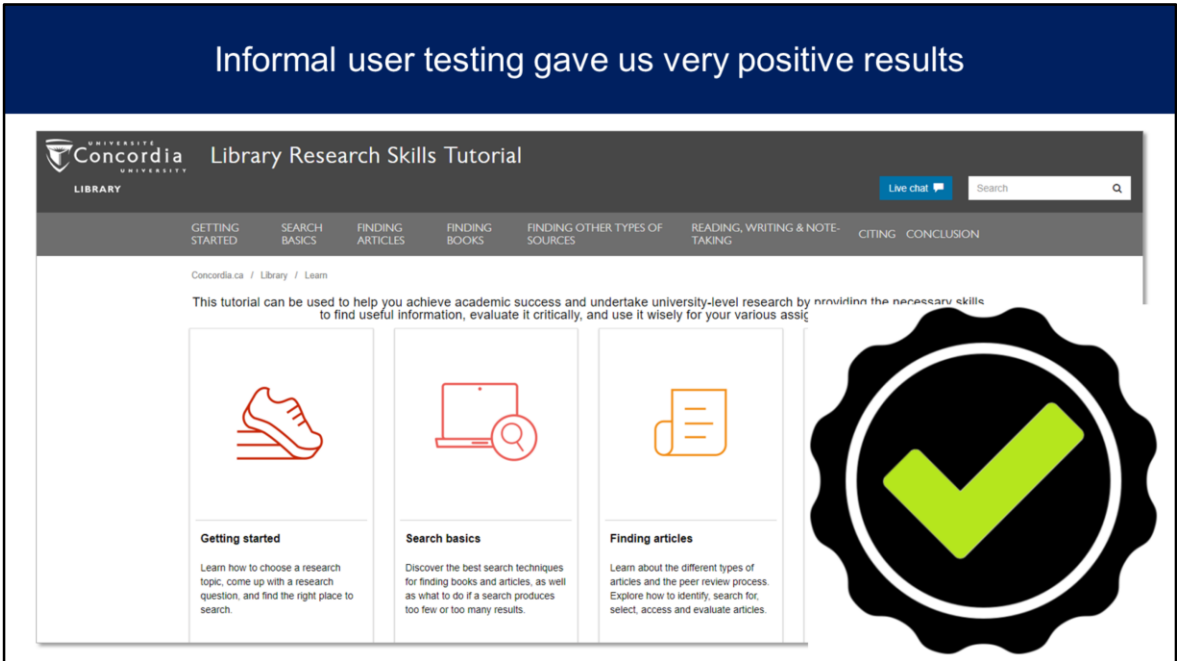
**Finding articles**  
Learn about the different types of articles and the peer review process. Explore how to identify, search for, select, access and evaluate articles.

**Finding books**  
Learn about the different types of print and online books available at the Library. Explore how to identify, search for, select, access and borrow books.

Feedback

The library research skills tutorial is an information literacy tutorial that Concordia library launched last year. We built it to update and replace an earlier tutorial created in 2004.

## Informal user testing gave us very positive results



Concordia University LIBRARY

Library Research Skills Tutorial

Live chat Search

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Learn about the different types of articles and the peer review process. Explore how to identify, search for, select, access and evaluate articles.

Before the launch, we did informal user testing where we asked 20 mostly undergraduate students to have a look a few sections of the tutorial and then fill out a survey. The students overwhelmingly told us that our tutorial was very clear, useful, it had the right amount of detail, and good design and navigation. The responses to the open ended questions allowed us to tweak certain elements of the tutorial, but overall, the comments were again very positive.

## We had two research questions that we wanted to explore

1

Is the Library Research Skills Tutorial a useful tool when recommended to undergraduate students with research assignments?

2

...

With these results, we felt very confident when we launched the tutorial. But we still wanted to see if the tutorial would be useful in real educational settings. That's why we decided to do this research. For our research we had two questions that we wanted to explore. The first one was « Is the Library Research Skills Tutorial a useful tool when recommended to undergraduate students with research assignments? » We didn't want to answer this questions by using regular attitudinal research like surveys or focus groups. Nor did we want to do yet another usability study. There are quite a few usability studies of tutorials in the library literature

We decided to investigate our question using a UX methodology



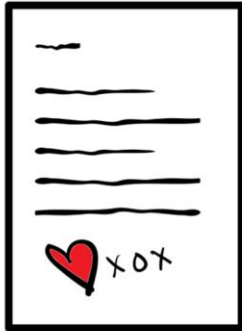
Created by Moome  
from Noun Project

“ **User Experience** is everything that happens to your users when they interact with your service in any way (physically or remotely). It includes everything they **see**, everything they **hear**, everything they **do**, as well as their **emotional reactions**.

- Priestner (2017)

We decided to investigate our question using a user experience methodology or a UX methodology. Andy Priestner defines user experience as ... While the user testing that we did looked at how our tutorial was effective or easy to use, we were hoping that a UX method would add to this by giving us information on students' psychological expectations or emotional feelings, and that would give us a more complete picture of how a student might interact with our tutorial

## We chose a novel UX method: the love / breakup letter



Created by Lil Squid  
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“ A method that reveals how people relate to and are attached to everyday technologies [or services] by asking them to participate in the familiar activity of writing love or break-up letters (...). These letters tend to be playful, but also facilitate emotional expression in a way that can allow users to easily reflect on their attitudes and feelings

- Walker et al. (2018)

Although there are many different UX methods out there, we decided to try a novel UX method called the love or breakup letter. Walker defined the method in the following way: ...

Walker continues by saying that the use of creativity and exaggeration can allow students to uncover hidden needs or motivations.

This technique has not been used extensively. There are only a handful of articles outside of the library literature that report using this method. And it was used mainly to understand peoples' relationship to technologies through the lens of what they called product attachment theory. In the library world, the technique has been mentioned maybe 2 or 3 newsletters, but very little (if any) details were provided on the outcomes.



## Our second research question relates to the effectiveness of this UX method

1

Is the Library Research Skills Tutorial a useful tool when recommended to undergraduate students with research assignments?

2

Will the love / breakup letter method work in a library setting? Will students know how to participate? Will it provide helpful feedback, different from our pre-launch user testing?

Since we decided to use a novel methodology in the world of libraries, we wanted our second research question to be related to this. So...

## We worked with four social sciences classes to recruit participants

Incorporated tutorial  
in assignment  
description



Created by Thijs Rentier  
from Noun Project

We collaborated with professors in four different social science classes. We worked with them to adapt either their course outline or their assignment descriptions in order to incorporate a paragraph that asked students to use the Library Research Skills Tutorial

## A paragraph in the assignment asked students to use the tutorial

Incorporated tutorial  
in assignment  
description



Created by Thijs Rentier  
from Noun Project



For this assignment, you are required to use the Library Research Skills Tutorial. <https://library.concordia.ca/learn/>. The Research Skills Tutorial provides guidance on choosing a topic, finding sources, taking notes and citing. Not all sections of the tutorial will apply equally to your paper, but you must consult it as part of your process as you will be asked to evaluate this tutorial on the day of submission.

**Participation in the evaluation will be optional.**

Essentially, the paragraph said ...

We do let the students know that the participation in the evaluation will be optional. The professors also reminded the students at several occasions to use the tutorial to help them with their assignment.

## We worked with four social sciences classes to recruit participants

Incorporated tutorial  
in assignment  
description



Created by Thijs Rentier  
from Noun Project

Did not reveal  
methodology to students  
until evaluation day



Created by Adrien Coquet  
from Noun Project

On the day that the assignment was due, we went to each of the classes and asked the students, on a voluntary basis, to evaluate the tutorial using the love / break up method. We purposefully kept the method a secret until we visited their class so that they would not have time to think about it in advance. The goal is to have their response be as authentic and spontaneous as possible.

## We worked with four social sciences classes to recruit participants

Incorporated tutorial  
in assignment  
description



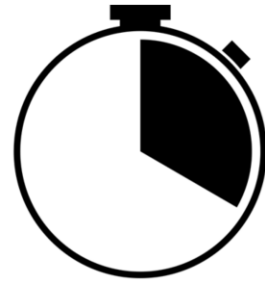
Created by Thijs Rentier  
from Noun Project

Did not reveal  
methodology to students  
until evaluation day



Created by Adrien Coquet  
from Noun Project

Gave students  
only 20 minutes  
to write letters



Created by Thomas Marjissen  
from Noun Project

We also only give them 20 minutes to write the letter, as this was suggested in the literature to encourage spontaneity, but it never took more than 10 minutes in each class.

## 52 students participated in our study

SOCI/ANTH 298

**2** (75)



AHSC 281

**21** (50)



AHSC 350

**21** (41)



SOCI 402

**8** (9)



Created by chiccabubble  
from Noun Project

In total, 52 students participated in our study. We first visited a 200 level sociology class where only 2 out of the 75 students volunteered for our study. The low participation rate had to do with the nature of the written assignment which was optional. Then we visited two separate applied human science classes where we got approximately a 50% participation rate in both classes. Finally, we visited a 400 level sociology class where 8 out of the 9 students participated. Since we only visited this last class about 3 weeks ago, we haven't had the chance to fully analyze the data yet, so the results we'll be showing you in the presentation will not include this class.

SOCI 298 – 2 / 75

AHSC 281 – 21 / 50

AHSC 350 – 21 / 41

SOCI 402 – 8 / 9

We received 41 usable letters, which we divided into 4 groups

In total, we received 44 letters (when we exclude the letters from that 400 level sociology class). Of the 44 letters 41 of them were actually usable. By looking at the letters, we saw that they actually fell in four groups.

Excluded letters (from AHSC 350)

- 1 was song lyrics
- 1 was talking about a database or discovery search – not the tutorial
- One was addressed to the library, not the tutorial

We received 41 usable letters, which we divided into 4 groups

Breakup

Love



The first two groups were the types of letters that we expected to receive. These are breakup letters and love letters. Although we did not have any expectations as to the proportions of each letter...

$23 / 41 = \text{breakup}$

$9 / 41 = \text{love}$



We received 41 usable letters, which we divided into 4 groups

Breakup

Love

56%



..we were a tiny bit surprised to see that the majority of letters were breakup letters to the tutorial. This was a little bit surprising especially since our pre launch user testing seemed to show that students actually appreciated the tutorial. That they saw the value of the tutorial.

We received 41 usable letters, which we divided into 4 groups

Breakup

56%



Love

22%



For the love letters, only 22% of students decided to write these types of letters. But we received another 22% of letters that we had not anticipated. We categorized them under two separate letter types.

23 / 41 = breakup

9 / 41 = love

We received 41 usable letters, which we divided into 4 groups

Breakup

56%



Love

22%



Swipe left

15%



One-night stand

7%



That we named swipe left and one-night stand. So for those Tinder users, you'll understand that swipe left means that the students never even took the time to look at the tutorial. They never used it. They were just not interested and swiped left. A small group of letters were what we've called one night stands. In these letters, the students said they used the tutorial, and found it quite helpful, but after using it once, they didn't feel that they needed to use it again. So they essentially broke up with it.

Another 22% were other types of letters

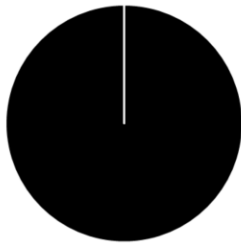
6 / 41 = never used

3 / 41 = used once, now flying on my own (one-night stand)

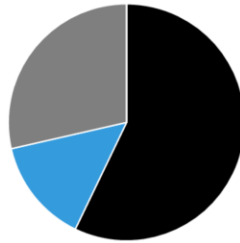
Of the 41 letters, 30 letters (3/4 of the letters) had a love letter structure (they either started with Dear... or addressed the tutorial directly)

There wasn't a big difference in the amount of breakup letters between both AHSC classes.

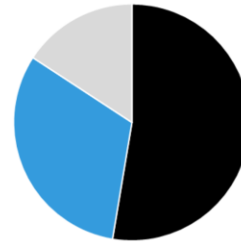
SOCI/ANTH 298




AHSC 281



AHSC 350



One-night stand  Breakup   
Swipe left  Love 

In terms of the letters written by each of the classes, both students in the 200 level soci classes wrote breakup letters, As for the Applied Human Sciences classes, there wasn't a big difference in terms of the amount of breakup letters the were written (that's the black part of the pie), but there were interesting differences in the other type of letters that were written. For example, 300 level class wrote more love letters than the 200 level class (that's the blue part), and were the only ones to write the one night stand letters. So at the 300 level, outside of those who wrote breakup letters, there seems to have been more of an appreciation of the tutorial as opposed to 200 level classes. On the other hand, the AHSC 200 level class were the only ones to write swipe left letters (that's the dark grey). Susie will talk a bit about a possible reason why students who would probably benefit the most from a tutorial (200 level students) would not even bother to look at it.

Now we're going to read you a few of the letters so that you can get a sense of the themes that emerged.



Created by amy morgan  
from Noun Project

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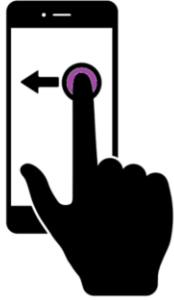
Dear LRST,

As I am already pretty comfortable looking for articles and research papers I was very reluctant to go on a first date at all.

Seeing how a friend set us up, I decided to give it a chance. I wasn't particularly wowed as the information was pretty basic. Too many links also create stress. I personally would have preferred a webinar style tutorial

Anyway, it was nice to meet you

Take care



Created by TMD  
from Noun Project



Dear Library Tutorial,

I'm sorry I never gave you a fair chance. I am sorry to say I've been using another software. Coming from cegep where I am used to using google scholar to write my papers, I have trust issues using someone new.

I suggest to promote yourself competitively to convince me why I should choose you. Don't be so shy next time, brag about your qualities!

I am not used to new relationships and tend to stick to my old ways.

Maybe in the future I will give you a second chance 

I mean it when I say, it's not you it's me.

Love, Google Scholar user 



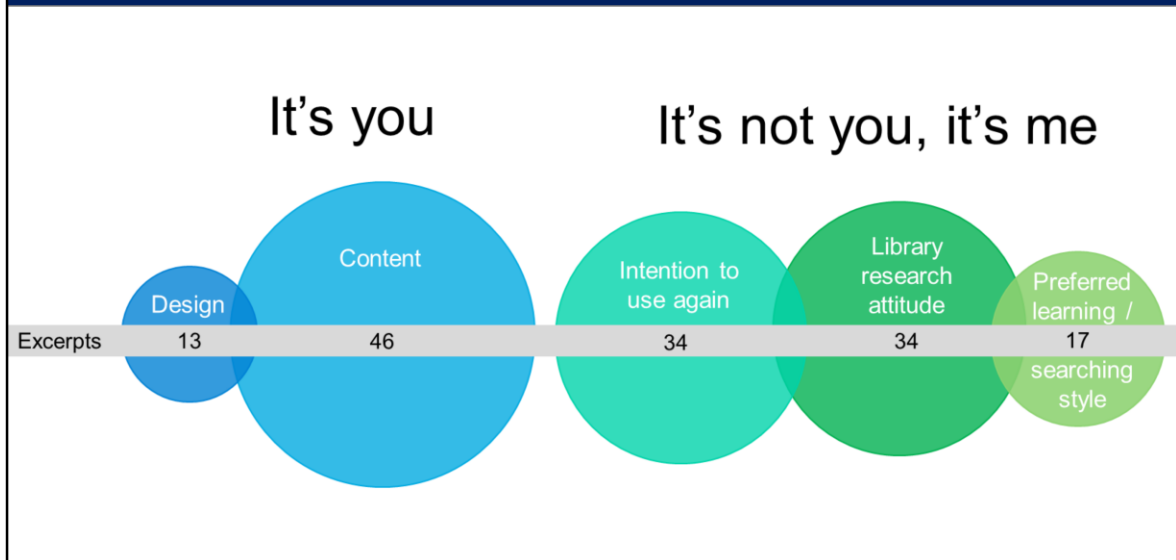
Created by Gan Khoo Lay  
from Noun Project

“

Dear Library Research Skills Tutorial,

Our relationship is kind of like when you try and make a meal for the first time. You already have an idea of how it should be prepared, but you feel somewhat unsure of all the intricacies of how to go about it. Looking at the long list of steps to follow is daunting and makes you question if it's really worth it or if you should just pop a microwavable meal in instead. You muster up all your energy and plow forward. As you continue, you see that it isn't so hard at all, and when the meal is done, it was well worth [it]. The next time you make the meal however, you don't follow the guidelines. You might look at it every now and then for a reminder, but generally you don't need it and want to go forth and try things on your own. You were great at the start (...) However, I've grown since then and want to fly on my own now. We can stay in touch.

We uncovered five major themes in the letters, divided into two frames:  
tutorial characteristics and student context



In addition to categorizing each letter as a whole, we used a general inductive approach to analyze the text of the letters and we came up with 28 codes for specific EXCERPTS or passages that we had identified, and we then grouped those under 5 overarching themes or categories - the 5 bubbles you see here. But it also became apparent to us that the comments in the letters related to two very different things: comments about the tutorial itself such as its content and design -- IT'S YOU -- vs comments about the students' own context: their intentions, their attitudes, preferences and experience -- IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S ME.

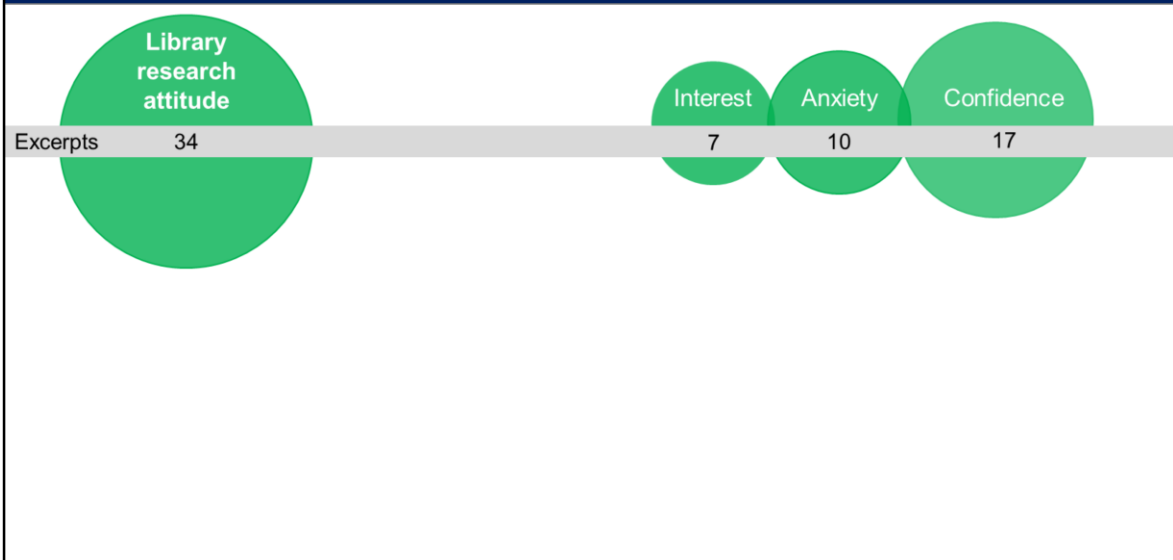
In this case, we actually found the comments about the tutorial itself to be less useful and informative, as with a few exceptions, they were generic and non-specific, so we're not going to mention anything more about these, other than to note that this is where we found the most positive love-like passages.



**It's not you, it's me**

Back in the world of the students' own context... here we DID find some interesting specifics, and there was a good variety of them...

## Attitude towards library research: Refers to how students perceive library research



But what we found as the most prevalent sub-theme may not shock you if you've read the literature about students' attitudes towards library research, or experienced those attitudes firsthand.

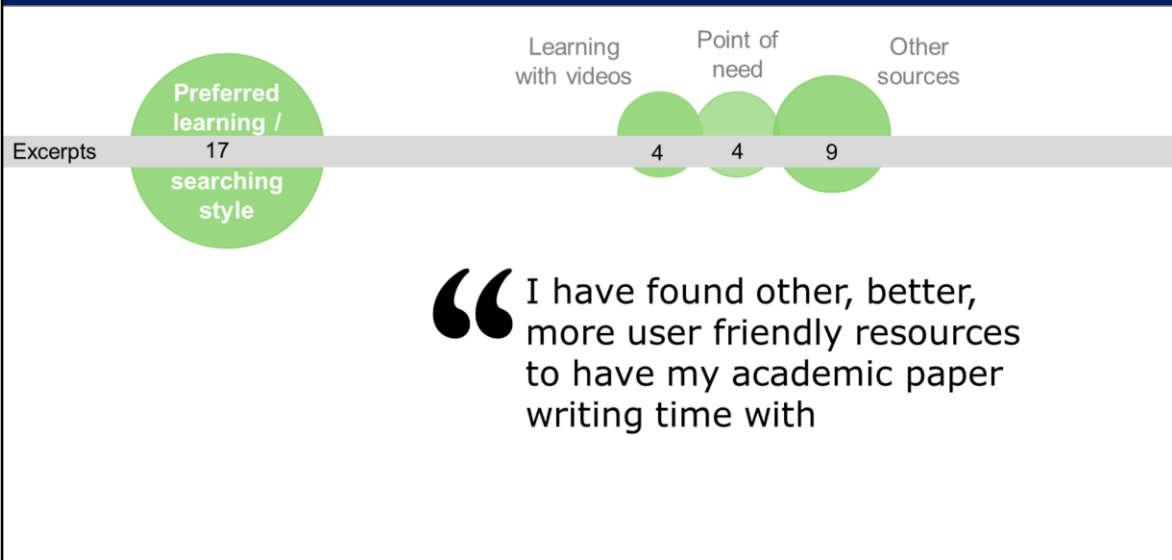
**Confidence:** students already know how to do library research or learned it previously



Confidence in “already knowing how to do this stuff” is definitely what was mentioned the most.

Half of all break up letters included confidence as a theme, and though the excerpt here says it all quite succinctly, we should mention that these comments were often tempered by suggestions that those with LESS experience or writing a paper for the first time would likely benefit from the tutorial,

## Preferred learning or searching style: How students prefer to learn or where they prefer to get library research help or to search for information



But of course we found more than just blind statements of confidence. Some students took the time to list and describe their learning and searching preferences. (Learning with videos) Videos on YouTube, (Other Tools) Google and Google Scholar -- this excerpt was referring to a library course guide that a student had bookmarked, and (Point of Need) we had some passages telling us, essentially : I don't want to sit here and read all about how to do these things in general and why they are important, I want help with the specific search I'm trying to conduct right now, or with the citation I'm trying to format.

## The answer to the first research question:

**1** Is the Library Research Skills Tutorial a useful tool when recommended to undergraduate students with research assignments?

Back to the Research Questions: **Research question 1:** Is the Library Research Skills Tutorial a useful tool when recommended to undergraduate students with research assignments?

## The answer to the first research question: **NO**

**1** Is the Library Research Skills Tutorial a useful tool when recommended to undergraduate students with research assignments?

Gross & Latham (2009)

“

[S]tudents report that they do not use electronic resources such as help files or online tutorials. Their overwhelming preference is just to ask someone else, whether that is a family member, a friend, a classmate, or the person who happens to be sitting next to them.

“

[P]eople who have a lot of confidence about their level of ability are unlikely to seek opportunities to build skills they think they already have. (...)

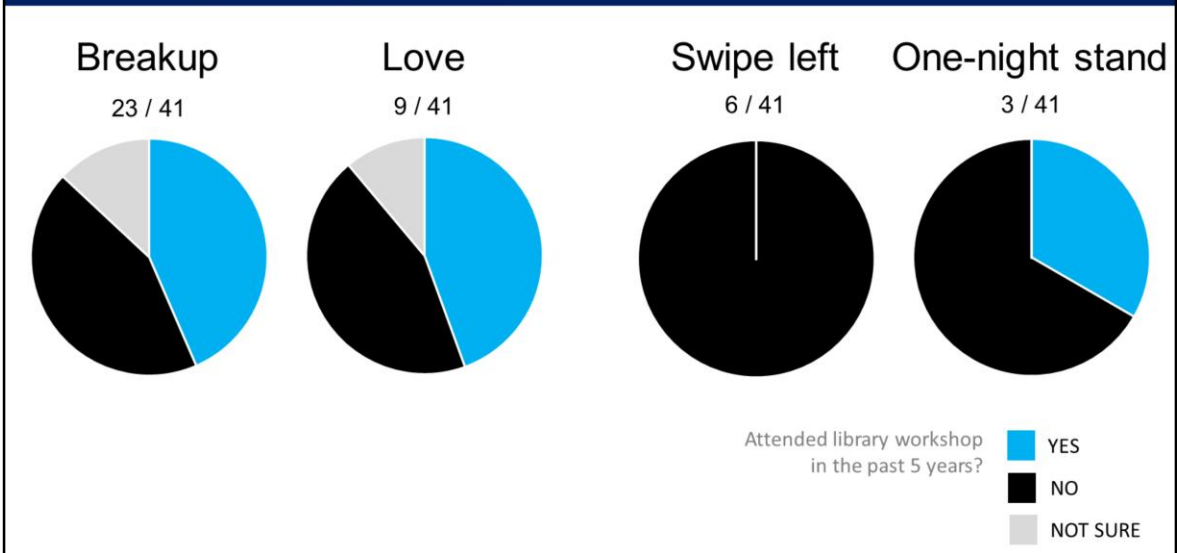
NO!

In our case students were directed to use the Tutorial in their assignment descriptions, and the professors specifically mentioned it at least twice, but still the students did not give it much attention. Gross and Latham, in their research on undergraduates' perceptions of information literacy, also found similar results. They wrote..." **QUOTE** "

For others, the tool didn't necessarily deliver what they wanted and the majority didn't see the relevance of it for **themselves** -- they considered it TOO BASIC... **Gross and Latham again speak to this in their article: QUOTE**

So in summary we are saying that in the same way that is not usually useful to recommend a library workshop to students outside of class time, even when they are doing a research assignment, the tutorial is not especially useful when recommended for students to use independently for their research assignment, -- at least not without any other intervention. Speaking of intervention... I'm going to interrupt our questions and answer with a small aside here...

Students who wrote breakup letters were not more likely to have taken library workshops in the past than those who wrote love letters



When visiting the classes, we asked the students to answer a couple of survey questions before writing the letter itself. One of the questions was whether they had ever attended a library workshop. Although there was no real difference between breakup letters and love letters in terms library workshop attendance, ALL students who swiped left, admitting they had never even clicked on the tutorial link, also said that they had never attended a library workshop. ---- It's a super small number and may just be a fluke, though we think it is worthy of further investigation as it supports the notion that a lack of intervention -- even if it's just to expose and actively putting to use the library and library resources might tend to towards a negative persuasion in terms of even trying out one of our tools.

Sure the professors mentioned the tutorial in their assignment descriptions and brought it up in class, but they did not actually use it in class. We had initially intended on visiting the class twice, once to introduce and contextualize the tutorial and once for the letter-writing, but it actually made more sense not to do so as we were testing its usefulness WITHOUT our intervention.

And these suspicions about intervention are not only ours...

## How should online tutorials be employed and promoted?

Held & Gil-Trejo, 2016. Students weigh in: usability test of online library tutorials. *Internet reference services quarterly*, 21(1-2), 1-21.



Created by Katya Prokofyeva  
From Noun Project

“

Participants ... seemed to see many ways for [the online tutorials] to be useful, although there emerged two camps: those who would explore them if made available and those who needed a reason (such as a grade) to engage in them.

“

[I]f faculty feel such information literacy is valuable to research assignments, they should value them through either credit offered or, for face-to-face courses, class time allotted to teaching with them (flipping the classroom).

The idea is borne out in similar studies to ours as well. Tim Held and Laura Gil-Trayho, as part of their usability test of a suite of online library tutorials at California State, asked students in focus groups how they thought the tutorials should be employed, deployed, promoted, and they found that **QUOTE** Participants seemed...( some of the students specifically said: If it isn't mandatory, many students won't think it is useful to look at; I'm going to prioritize what I get points for, so make it required for me to get around to it.)

In relation to this point, the authors concluded that **QUOTE** –[I]f faculty feel such information literacy is valuable to research assignments, -- as offered by the online tutorials --.....



The answer to the second research question is more nuanced

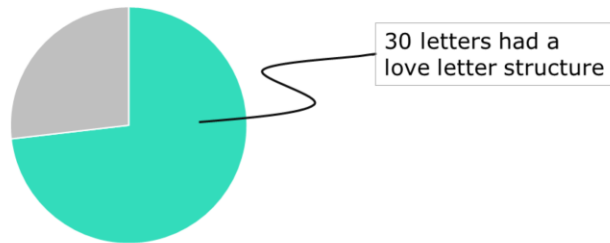
**2** Will the love / breakup method work in a library setting?  
Will students know how to participate? Will it provide helpful feedback, different from our pre-launch user testing?

Research Question 2 related to the methodology -- Or rather set of research questions. Let's break it up start with the subquestions....

## The majority of students did use the love letter structure

2

Will the love / breakup method work in a library setting?  
Will students know how to participate? Will it provide helpful feedback, different from our pre-launch user testing?



Will students know how to participate?

Mostly, yes. 30 letters had love letter structure (and we only introduced the idea to them when we arrived for testing in the class) and some also told us that they enjoyed the format.

## Love letter language can obscure the message, but feedback was unique and useful

# 2

Will the love / breakup method work in a library setting?  
Will students know how to participate? Will it provide helpful feedback, different from our pre-launch user testing?

“

I feel you don't understand me anymore

“

I have to change myself to suit you

Is it helpful feedback? Depends what you are seeking:

Sometimes the love/breakup letter language actually obscured the message we were trying to decipher, and we had to be careful not to indulge in OVEREAGER interpretation. With lines such as : « I feel you don't understand me anymore (...) I have to change myself to suit you» -- I leave it to you to figure out how you would code that

We did NOT get the kind of useful specific feedback which the pre-launch user testing provided, and which allowed the team to make significant changes to the tutorial design, layout and content.

BUT..., YES, we DID get unique feedback in terms of the students' context, with what we think are revealing clues as to students' actual behaviour and attitude in their own classroom setting.

The methodology may be more successful if attempted with a technology / service that elicits attachment

2

Will the love / breakup method work in a library setting?

Will students know how to participate? Will it provide helpful feedback, different from our pre-launch user testing?

And as for the larger question: **Will the love / breakup method work in a library setting?**

We think it can, but, if we were to offer any advice to future researchers we would urge them to consider, in addition to the points we just made, that this method has mainly been used to understand technological ATTACHMENTS. So, ask yourself, are you evaluating a service or a tool to which you want students to become attached? Or for which you want to measure attachment?

We could imagine yes, for instance, with a bibliographic management software, a library space, or a service like ILL

But when it comes to **teaching tools**, like the tutorial, breakup letters, and certainly one night stands we discovered, are not only indications of failure, albeit useful ones. They are also reminders that our goal is not simply for students to become attached to our stuff and love it forever -- we also **want** them to fly on their own. Or, it's better to have loved and lost.....



## Acknowledgements

Andrea Cameron, Dianne Cmor



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Andrea Cameron for helping to get the study off the ground and reviewing the letters with her own qualitative analysis

Dianne Cmor for suggesting the love / breakup methodology

Thank you!

