

Pathfinders: A Navigational Tool Through The Library

BC Library Conference

April 22, 2005 Laurie A. Prange

Introduction to Pathfinders

Pathfinders, the handouts Libraries create and distribute to facilitate students' independent use of Library services, are called by many names:

- Handouts, guides, information packages, instructional packages, etc.

The Expertise That Students Can Develop Using Pathfinders

- 1. General Research or Reference Skills
- 2. Online Catalogue Skills
- 3. Database- or Software-Specific Search Skills
- 4. Discipline- or Course-Specific Research Skills
- 5. Assignment-Specific Skills
- 6. Internet Skills

Design Elements To Consider

Tables, Lists, Bullets, etc.

Easiest thing to read is something that is in a list because it is often concise and logically organized. Plus, it's also easier to remember!

White Space

This is the most under-rated, yet most essential, part of the entire handout. It's better to leave out than to overwhelm!

Fonts, Bolding, or Italics

Identifying the relative importance of words becomes easier when formatting is used. Consistency is the key!

Handout

Graphics, Underlining, or Outlining By using graphical elements, the reader is able to identify breaks in the information and follow the flow easier. Keep it simple for photocopying!

Colour

Something so simple makes a huge difference to the reader yet so many people don't use it. Why?

Advantages and Disadvantages of Pathfinders: Are they really the greatest marketing tool ever or a waste of time?

Pros	Cons
A quick answer to questions	but never a complete answer
Available online, anywhere, at any	as long as the student has a
time	computer and/or Internet access
Part of an initial step towards library	as long as the student has an idea
research	of what to look for
Great tool to help new staff orient	as long as the handouts are current
to the library	
Great way to market the library	as long as it's done well!

Tracking Usage of Pathfinders

- Rate of reprinting (especially certain times of the year)
- Number of times web-link is accessed
- Questions from students about the pathfinders themselves
- Rate by which sheets are updated

Results of Survey on Yukon College Handouts

- Handouts were most likely obtained from the Website and Spin Rack, then from a Librarian.
- 100% people liked colour in their handouts.
- Mixed results on opinions of layout but all liked having some formatting.
- The APA referencing guide is the most popular handout.
- Almost all didn't like it if the handout was too "busy."
- Many liked one page, hole-punched papers to go right into their binders.

Recommended Reading

Kalfatovic, Martin R. (2002). Creating a winning online exhibition: A guide for libraries, archives, and museums. Chicago: American Library Association.

Malone, Debbie, and Videon, Carol. (2003). First year student library instruction programs. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association.

Smith, Susan Sharpless. (2001). Web-based instruction: A guide for libraries. Chicago: American Library Association.