COPPUL DISTANCE EDUCATION FORUM

GUIDELINES FOR ANIMATED ONLINE TUTORIALS USED IN DATABASE
INSTRUCTION

Introduction

As databases become more complex, the use of online animated tutorials employing
Flash and other technologies is proving to be a good solution for basic instruction in
database use.  Such tutorials can address specific skills at point of need and are able to be
used by the patron without the need for direct librarian intervention.

Clearly, such a tutorial needs to walk a patron through basic and advanced features
available in a particular database.  We must recognize, however, that most patrons have
little patience for prolonged instruction.  Thus the tutorials need to be structured in such a
way that they do the most good in the least amount of time.

There are several software packages available for creation of online tutorials (Viewlet
Builder, Wink, Flash, RoboDemo, etc.).  Some provide only animations while others
offer full video and/or audio.  There is thus considerable scope for creativity in
envisioning and producing tutorials.

Production Software

There has been some effort within COPPUL to standardize production software, using
Viewlet Builder.  Full standardization, however, is not likely to be achieved, especially in
light of the many products available in a variety of editions and development of new
products with new capabilities.  These standards do not, therefore, specify a single type
of software, though the following features are desirable when available in a software
package:

1.  Ability to share the underlying code of tutorial so that it may be adapted by
    another library to meet local conditions.
2.  Capability to create static screen shots along with the animated tutorial so that
    patrons who want to study the procedures more slowly may do so.
3.  Capability for audio as an adjunct to visual instruction.
4.   Interactivity where appropriate.  This could take the form of informal quizzes or
    requests for students to briefly interact with the tutorial to demonstrate (to
    themselves) that they understand a simple concept that has just been explained.

Content Guidelines

1.  Format

For the purposes of sharing tutorials, they should be created in a standard format that
includes at least: Simple sans-serif font, yellow for notes and light blue for balloons.

2. Sequencing

Patrons are likely to abandon an online animated tutorial early if they feel they have learned what they needed or if the tutorial itself appears too complex. Thus tutorials should begin with basic searching and only then move on to advanced searching.

3. Database Features

It is easy for a tutorial to point out the various features of a database. To do this simply as a tour of the interface, however, is to deprive the patron of a relevant context. Thus database features should be demonstrated within the confines of real searches of the database.

4. Demonstrating Basic Searches

The tutorial should begin with demonstration of a basic keyword search. Elements to include:
   a. Choice of a relevant topic using two or three keywords.
   b. Presentation of a result list from a search on those keywords

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   a. Choice of a relevant topic using two or three keywords.
   b. Presentation of a result list from a search on those keywords
   c. Information to show the patron how to get access to a document as outlined below:
      i. If the tutorial deals with a full-text database with links to full text articles, articles in e-journals and ILL (such as in EBSCOhost), include bringing up articles in full text or e-journals and information about using ILL, but indicate that in order to find a complete list of local hardcopy holdings patrons need to click on a link that will take them to a locally created "How to locate Documents in our Library" tutorial. This tutorial would talk about
         1. using local link resolver buttons included in their databases,
         2. finding local holdings in their library catalogs or ABC lists.
      ii. If the tutorial deals with a full-text database with links to full text articles but no links to ILL, it should demonstrate how to locate full text articles, but also indicate that in order to place an ILL patrons need to click on a link that takes them to the local ILL page or a tutorial about the local ILL process. Similarly, if they want to learn how to locate e-journal articles or locally held

hardcopy articles, they need to click on a link that will take them to a local "How to Locate Documents in our Library" tutorial (as mentioned above.)

iii. If the tutorial deals with a database without full text, have a link that says "In order to learn how to locate complete articles, please click here." (providing a link to the "How to Locate Documents in our Library" tutorial as mentioned above.)  Similarly, in order to place an ILL, patrons need to click on a link that takes them to the local ILL page or a tutorial about their local ILL process.

d. Bringing up a full citation when an article/book is deemed to be appropriate, and viewing the terms used to define the topic (keywords in titles and abstracts, as well as thesaurus terms when appropriate).

The basic search portion of the tutorial should thus take the patron through the process of searching on keywords and coming up with results.

5.  Demonstrating Refined Searches

Before moving on to advanced searching, the tutorial should use the results from basic search to demonstrate use of various limiters and expanders in the database, showing how these help to provide more relevant results.

6.  Demonstrating Advanced Searches

Before moving to advanced searching, determine whether your tutorial should now include a patron-controlled button that will either end the tutorial or allow the patron to move on to the next stage.  The thinking here is that patrons may now want to exit the tutorial and use the knowledge gained in the first part of it.  Even if they want to move on, a patron-controlled button at this stage will make clear that the tutorial is moving on into a new stage.

While the advanced search portion of the tutorial may continue with the same topic used in the basic search, different ways of searching may require new terminology. This part of the tutorial should include any of the following that are relevant:

a.  Introduction to the "Advanced Search" grid.
b.  Introduction to the thesaurus
c.  Introduction to the index system enabling controlled vocabulary author, title, subject, etc. searches.
d.  Any other special features of the database.

When demonstrating advanced searching, as with basic searching, it is best to do real searches that produce real results.  This makes the tutorial much more relevant to the patron.

The advanced search portions of tutorials could also be used as links from a "learning objects" page intended to teach generic skills. For example, a tutorial demonstrating Thesaurus searching in PsycInfo, could also be used on another page to teach "Database Searching with a Thesaurus." A learning objects page could even offer students the opportunity to learn a generic skill in a variety of databases by providing links to relevant specific database tutorials.

Cautions

1. Online animated tutorials need to be as helpful as possible in the shortest period of time. Thus they must be planned strategically. If a tutorial is longer that 3 minutes, it should be broken up into segments. One useful way to do this is to provide a menu as the first page of the tutorial, inserting links to the various segments.
2. It may be tempting to speed up the animation to make the tutorial finish more quickly, but be sure that whatever captions there are on the screen can be read slowly in the time allotted for that particular portion of the animation. Remember as well, that patrons may want to spend a few extra seconds just looking over the interface. Most tutorial programs allow for a pause feature, but it is wise to pace the tutorial itself so that users are not constantly required to pause.
3. While we may want patrons to use advanced features more than they do basic ones, life tells us that most will search a database like they search Google. We must, therefore, be sure that the early part of the tutorial helps them to perform basic operations well.

Prepared by William Badke, Trinity Western University, September 2004, revised January 2006