

A NEW LAW RESEARCH GUIDE – UNITING STUDENT AND EXPERT VOICES TO IMPROVE ONLINE LEARNING DESIGN

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Abstract:

Online learning resources need to be “continuously evaluated by usability evaluation methods (UEMs) to measure their efficiency and effectiveness, to assess user satisfaction, and ultimately to improve their quality”.¹ This presentation reflects on our experience assessing and updating a past Legal Research Workshop (LRW) at the University of South Australia (UniSA). We will discuss lessons learnt and elements included in the new Law Research Guide (LRG). This presentation highlights the importance of including both student and expert voices to improve online learning design and contribute to the e-learning of present and future users.

The LRW was created in 2008 as a self-paced online workshop for law students to develop legal research skills through text, videos and quizzes. Intended learning outcomes included finding legislation, case law, journal articles and books. In 2018 library staff reviewed the LRW to support the development of a new online Bachelor degree in Criminal Justice. An online cohort highlighted the importance of ensuring the LRW met the cognitive processes of learning without overloading working memory.² The initial review found the resource to be visually overloading, with a large amount of text and repeated information. Usage was low and law academics were reluctant to promote.

A Library and Information Management project student was tasked with assessing the LRW. Recommendations were provided based on User Experience (UX) testing, benchmarking against similar resources and mapping against curriculum requirements. Six students with various levels of knowledge in legal research were selected for UX testing. This number was based on empirical studies showing “80% of usability problems can be identified with a sample of five users”.³ The sample size provided some indication of real-world usage and identified problems quickly. Key findings included repeated information, poor navigation and lack of usage for videos and quizzes. Recall tests confirmed working memory of participants was overloaded.

The new LRG, combining the LRW and the Law subject guide was created. The LRG incorporated recommendations from the student project, academic library staff and expert

¹ Roobaea Alroobaea and Pam Mayhew, 'How many participants are really enough for usability studies?' (Conference Paper, 2014 Science and Information Conference, 27-29 August 2014) 48.

² RE Mayer, 'Using multimedia for e-learning' (2017) 33(5) *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 403, 406.

³ Alroobaea and Mayhew (n 1) 49.

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advice. Throughout the creation a range of experts were consulted including law academics, Digital Curriculum Librarians and Online Education Designers. These experts provided advice on layout, platform, learning requirements and content. Key improvements include clear navigation, research skills taught by function not databases and interactive micro-resources. Preliminary results and feedback indicate the resource is well used and promoted by law academics. Further UX testing is planned to ensure the new resource continues to meet end user needs.

This experience highlighted the need to continually assess online learning resources to ensure present and future e-learning user requirements are met. Incorporating various voices from the user and experts can allow for targeted improvements to be made quickly and efficiently.

Reference List:

RE Mayer, 'Using multimedia for e-learning' (2017) 33(5) *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 403.

Roobaea Alroobaea and Pam Mayhew, 'How many participants are really enough for usability studies?' (Conference Paper, 2014 Science and Information Conference, 27-29 August 2014).