



# INTRODUCTION

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Screencasting lets librarians demonstrate, teach, and guide our library users to all types of our online resources—from complex databases to simple online books. A screencast is a video recording with an audio narration of screen actions. Rather than just a video of a person sitting at a computer with a hard-to-read screen, a screencast focuses on what happens on the screen.

It teaches graphically, and reinforces with audio, the exact process and steps that a user needs to follow to get a specific result. A screencast video can show a user just where to click on the page, which limits to choose, and how to navigate through an online resource. Most importantly for busy librarians and trainers, screencasts can be very quick and easy to create so that it can take little more time than an in-person interaction to personalize a screencast for a particular question. In addition, more sophisticated software can be used to make more extensive, online training tutorials for those with available time and such a goal.

## ▶ A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIBRARY TUTORIALS

Librarians have been creating tutorials for decades, at least. Paper worksheet tutorials helped students learn to use library card catalogs and print indexes. With the rise of the web and the movement toward online library resources, tutorials moved online as well. For example, the Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT) was well used in Texas and elsewhere because it was made freely available in a way that could be adapted to other local situations.

In working on an earlier book, *Teaching Web Search Skills*, I reviewed a wide variety of online library tutorials. For that book, I was particularly seeking tutorials that covered web searching topics. In general, I found two types of tutorials: the well-designed ones with good graphics and low-quality content and high-quality content tutorials that were text-heavy with little or poor

graphic content. The best obviously took a long time to develop and often involved multiple creators.

In addition, particularly with web searching, the pace of change in technology was quick enough that every tutorial had at least some outdated material. Given the long time and amount of effort typically used to create a library tutorial, and the increasingly rapid rate of change with so many online library systems, this style of production did not seem sustainable. As I continued to poll attendees at many of my workshops, I found that many librarians started to work on extensive online tutorials but that the efforts often failed to reach fruition.

This problem is exacerbated by the growing number of online resources to which libraries subscribe. A few years ago, librarians at the New York Public Library complained to me about how difficult it was to keep current with their 600+ databases. With so many databases, online journal packages, e-book collections, and other online library resources platforms launching new versions every year or two, that can translate to an average of one or two changes per day!

What I also found disappointing about many of the library tutorials from the early 2000s was that they were, in a word, tedious. As with TILT, many started by explaining how to navigate the tutorial. Then they followed the advice of that time to add interactivity. This was often accomplished by asking the viewer to click the “next” button to move on to the succeeding section. Interactive, yes, but it made going through the tutorials extremely tedious.

Then, one day, I came across an early screencast by Jon Udell, a well-known computer columnist for a succession of magazines and now continuing life as a tech blogger and evangelist at Microsoft. Jon created an eight-minute screencast demonstrating how *Wikipedia*'s history function tracks every version

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### Heavy Metal Umlaut Screencast

Jon's original screencast is still available at <http://jonudell.net/udell/gems/umlaut/umlaut.html>. Jon was the one who, when wondering what to call this type of video, decided on the term “screencast” after he ran a “Name That Genre” contest for it (Udell, 2004a). Two people, Deeje Cooley and Joseph McDonald, suggested the winning name (Udell, 2004b).

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of a *Wikipedia* article. I had never used that function in *Wikipedia* previously. The screencast started with an explanation from Jon, and then in the video he progressed through various versions of the article using the history to move from one to another.

Rather than forcing me to keep clicking on the next button, and presenting lengthy textual descriptions of the process, I could just sit back, view, and listen. It was much easier to understand the point, and the screencast had controls at the bottom so that I

could jump back to watch a section again, pause the screencast, or jump ahead. I could also control the volume. It was more like the television model, and to me, at least, it seemed that I learned the concepts much more quickly with less effort than a traditional click-through-me-one-step-at-a-time tutorial.

## ► HOW SCREENCASTING CAN HELP IN LIBRARIES

Libraries continue to buy online resources, make their contents available via the web, and aim to help users in both the physical library and the virtual library. Computers dominate in libraries. With the large number of resources available, and frequently changing user interfaces at each one, reference and instruction no longer occur only in person. Many new technologies can help, but screencasting can make it quick and easy to produce an instructional video of screen activity along with an explanatory narration. These can be quickly and (relatively) easily shared with an individual or a group or the entire online public.

Shortly after first viewing Udell's screencast, I downloaded the free 30-day trial of TechSmith's Camtasia Studio to evaluate the software. Then I received an e-mail reference question about how to find specific types of nursing articles. While writing out an e-mail answer outlining a roughly 12-step click path from the library website to CINAHL to the search results (and how to add the appropriate limits), I realized that this would be a good time to try creating a screencast for a reference transaction. A mere 45 minutes later, I was able to send the e-mail response along with a link to the screencast that demonstrated the 12 steps and appropriate limits.

Reference librarians at various libraries, while talking by phone or chatting online, have been able to create quick instructional screencasts to show patrons how to get to the requested result by the same process the librarians use by sharing exactly what steps they take to get there (Jacobsen, 2009, 2011). Electronic resource librarians use screencasts to troubleshoot access problems (Hartnett and Thompson, 2010).

Find some money in these difficult economic times to purchase a new e-book package? Instead of just announcing a new resource with a name that may well have no meaning to most users, create a quick screencast that demonstrates a few key features and titles from the resource.

Redesigning a website? Any time major website changes occur, long-time users can get disoriented. Use a screencast to show the differences between the old and the new site, highlighting where commonly used links have moved and/or been renamed. The screencast can include examples of how the new design makes common tasks easier, show off new features, and highlight where the most important parts of the site are now located.

Within live instruction sessions, a screencast can be used for several functions. It can show what off-site access procedures look like and how to navigate them, even if the instruction is taking place on-site. Use another for an introduction that teaches a process in a short and simple example. Screencasts can also be useful backups for instruction at a location where Internet access is spotty or unreliable. In a hands-on class, loop a screencast (without audio) that demonstrates a process while giving the students time to try it with their own examples, freeing you as the teacher to wander around the room checking on their progress while still providing an example of the process that they can view if needed.

Screencasts are also useful for promotion, outreach, and marketing. Host screencasts at YouTube (and/or other video sharing sites), and create a channel for the library to which viewers can subscribe and interact by posting comments, rating the screencasts, and even sharing responses. Create QR Codes or Microsoft Tags on printed promotional materials that link mobile users to screencasts about the library. The more libraries move online and the more experience you get with screencasting, the more ideas you will develop on how to use this exciting new technology.