How Do I Write an Abstract?

Academic Librarians' Perspectives on Dispensing Qualitative and Topical How-To Advice

> Ruth Wallach University of Southern California Los Angeles, USA

Premise:

Academic librarians have an informational and/or disciplinary expertise to provide qualitative advice on:

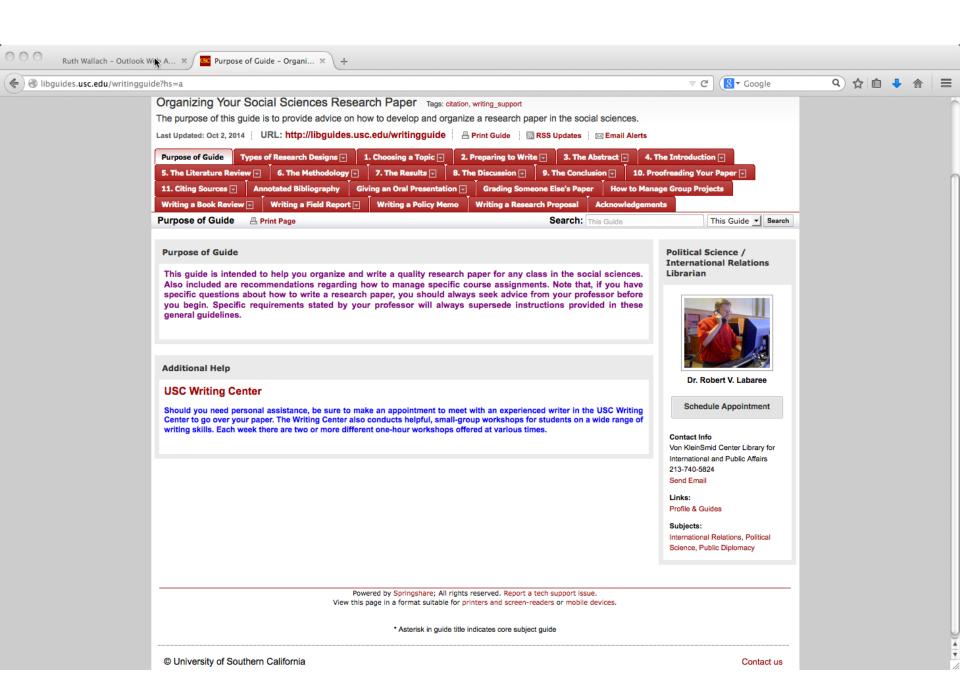
- What kind of information is appropriate;
- How to evaluate and *contextualize* retrieved information
- How to use information to produce research results

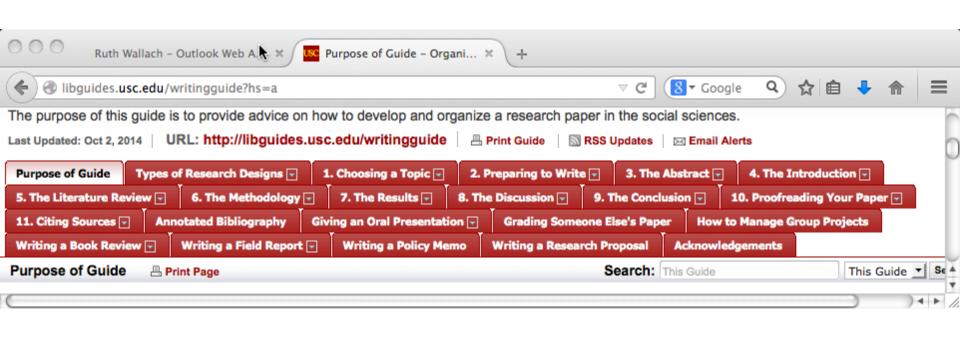


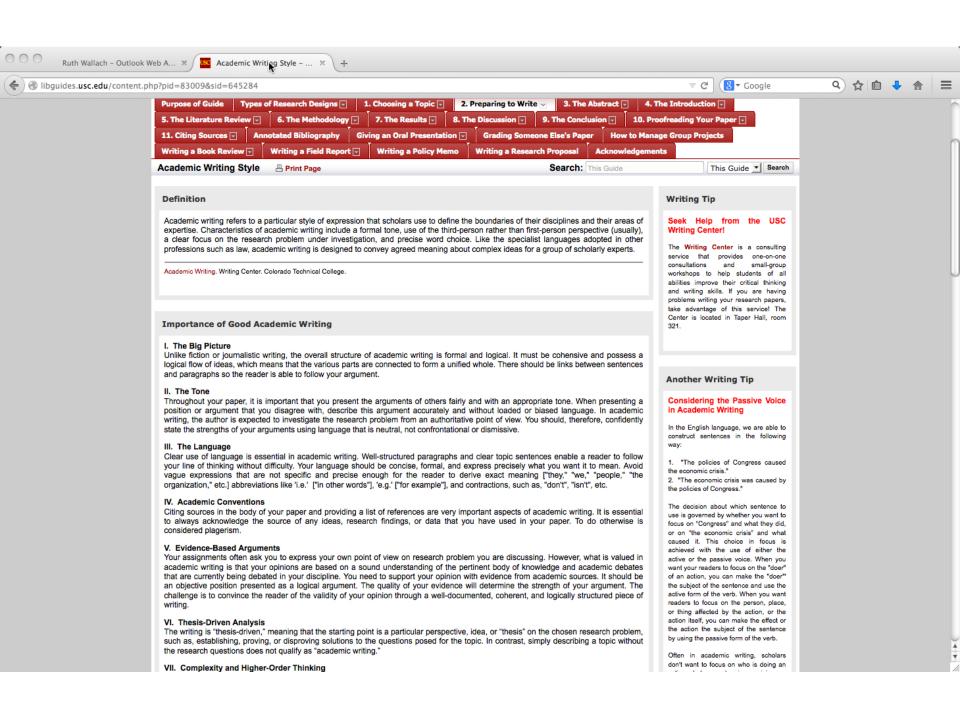
Prada Saffiano Lux Double Handle Mini Satchel



Merona Mini Satchel Handbag







Interviews

• What kind of qualitative advice, if any, do librarians provide?

• Do librarians feel comfortable giving qualitative advice?

• Do librarians consider themselves an authority? Local or global?

Interviews conducted in early 2014 with librarian colleagues in:

Professional education:

- communication arts and journalism
- social work

Basic and applied sciences:

- chemistry
- computer sciences

Social sciences:

- American history
- political science and international relations

Themes

Librarian Qualifications

- Chemistry: undergraduate degree in chemistry.
- Computer science: scientists refer each other to other scientists, not to librarians.
- Political Science/International Relations: PhD in a social sciences field.
- American studies: no relevant disciplinary degree. Expertise based on experience. Being a generalist is important.
- Communications and journalism: knowledge and ability to appropriately communicate with the researcher.
- **Social work:** graduate degree in social sciences is useful; experience with info needs is paramount.

Role of Librarian within Research Process

- Chemistry: undergraduate students use librarian as path of least resistance. Graduate students need help finding specific resources that their institution does not have.
- **Computer Sciences**: Undergraduate students use Google; graduate studies are laboratory and product driven.
- Political Science/International Relations: undergraduate students use Google; graduates students need specialized resources and consult librarian. Students ask for help in specialized writing.
- American studies: undergraduates want digital information or change topic; graduate students need help with specialized writing and topic conception. All need help with understanding where information resides and in what format.
- Communications and journalism: coach, trainer, therapist.
- Social work: give advice on where information resides and in what format.

Proactive/Reactive

- Chemistry: reactive.
- Computer Science: reactive.
- Political Science/International Relations: both.
- American studies: both.
- Communications and journalism: both, try to be proactive.
- **Social work**: both, try to be proactive.

Local and Global Authority

- **Chemistry**: Very uncomfortable with stating something that is broadly available.
- Computer Science: Unsure.
- **Political Science/International Relations**: Public-ness is part of the philosophy of creating a library guide.
- American Studies: No difference between being local authority and global authority.
- Communications and Journalism: importance of global exchange of information.
- **Social work:** public-ness means something is findable and can reduce the number of basic questions.

Additionally

- Social Sciences and Applied Social Sciences: Librarians mediate badly or rigidly designed research assignments
- Sciences and Applied Sciences: Librarians' function is to ensure that students know how to get to the correct resource.
- Undergraduate students generally don't want to do the legwork of research; graduate students are often more willing.

