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Review of the University of California at Santa Barbara's "Web of Science Tutorial"

University of California at Santa Barbara (1999). *Web of Science Tutorial.* http://www.library.ucsb.edu/tutorials/wos/index.html [November 28, 2000].

The University of California at Santa Barbara's "Web of Science Tutorial" is a good example of a simple interface that packs a punch. The tutorial designers managed to incorporate many features of active instructional design into this low-key tutorial, without adding superfluous bells and whistles that would only detract from the overall product. In particular, the navigation functions and interactive questions are very good in this tutorial. There are only a few features that I would like to see modified or added to make this a paragon of tutorials.

The first screen seen is the table of contents, which is clearly laid out in outline form. This is a nice (and standard) way to present the contents of the tutorial. Each topic is directly hyperlinked, so participants can go directly to a specific part of the tutorial rather than wading through each section. In addition, each screen has a navigation bar at the bottom with links to the previous and next pages, and the contents screen. This is also a nice feature for determining where you are in the tutorial. Unfortunately, the contents menu is not set up such that participants can tell what section(s) they have already completed; having the hyperlinks in a different color depending on whether they have been visited in that session or not would be a big help. In addition, this first screen does not have any indication of the time needed to complete the tutorial, which I would have liked to have known before starting it. There is also no indication of the target audience or objectives for the lesson. These last points are easy to fix, and I feel necessary so that participants understand what they are getting into.

The instructional screens are usually short, with boldface examples of search statements or options. It is nice to see a tutorial that focuses less on verbose explanations and more on showing examples. There are also a lot of multiple-choice test questions sprinkled throughout the tutorial. Choosing the wrong answer results in a new window opening up that has a big "Ooops!" and an explanation of the right answer. Choosing the right answer moves the participant along in the tutorial to a screen that says "Yes!" at the top, and the same explanation

of the right answer. This is a non-threatening way to test knowledge in the tutorial. I assume that statistics showing the number of users vs. the number of times a wrong answer is chosen could be used to tweak the tutorial in areas participants seem to find most challenging. The number of questions drops off dramatically in the last section of the tutorial, for unknown reasons.

In the first half of the tutorial, a new window automatically opens to display Web of Science screen examples, such as the opening menu, year options, etc. In the second half of the tutorial, the participant must choose to open this second window by clicking on a link such as "View the Search Results Summary screen here." This lack of consistency could be confusing to the participant. I prefer the second method, largely because it enhances the self-directed aspect of the tutorial, but also because it means that I control the window popping up, rather than being surprised (sometimes not pleasantly) by a new window opening on top of the screen I'm trying to read.

Lastly, it is nice to see that the designers were careful with their grammar, spelling, and hyperlinks. I did not notice glaring mistakes in any of these three areas. In addition, each page has a "last updated" date on it; most dates are from the first half of 1999. The pages were coded in HTML 4.0, according to a graphic on the bottom of each screen, which is nice to know though not necessary. All screens have the same fonts and layout, which adds to the consistent look and feel of the tutorial as a whole.

This is a very good tutorial; with a few modifications it could be great. In the meantime, however, I will direct my library users to this tutorial for using the Web of Science. With its simple and consistent interface, clear instructions, and active learning opportunities, this tutorial meets most of my criteria for adult learning.