# The Big Picture: Launching an Online Tutorial Project at Your Library

Overall Process  
*Setting direction and library mission for the creation of tutorials*

Embarking on an online patron tutorial project may feel a bit daunting to you. One of the best things you can do to prepare the way is to lay the foundation for success. If you intend to have an ongoing process of tutorial development, you may want to consider establishing a set of guidelines and procedures for developing online tutorials. This will ensure that even with staff changes there will be documentation available to maintain consistency of quality and design. Some libraries may even have the luxury of having an online tutorial team drawing on complementing staff expertise (technical, instructional design, promotion) to create the best possible product.

This quote from the San Francisco Public Library Strategic Plan exemplifies a library that is setting direction and purpose for the creation of online tutorials.

“*Ensure that the Library’s technological infrastructure and systems support the development of a comprehensive online learning environment in a variety of subject areas and incorporating the highest attainable quality of learning aids such as online tutorials, pathfinders, webcasts, and/or web links to tutorials in a variety of subjects that will facilitate users access and learning. To begin by June 2004 and ongoing thereafter. (p. 24)*

Reasons for Starting an Online Tutorial Project  
*We’ve never done it before – why should we start it now?*  
There are a number of reasons for starting an online tutorial project. In general, libraries have recently experienced a downturn in budgets resulting in layoffs and fewer staff. You might think this would be reason to not start another project, but in truth, online tutorials can provide patron assistance for routine processes which frees up staff time for more unique or in-depth patron assistance. So if you’re looking for a reason to start developing patron tutorials, here are a few to consider.

* Online tutorials reach more patrons because they are available 24/7
* Staff shortages necessitate finding additional ways to assist patrons without using staff time
* Increased interest and involvement in distance learning has created more media savvy patrons
* Screencasting software has improved and is more patron friendly
* More web-based resources provide additional opportunity for point-of-need assistance for patrons.
* Online tutorials provide consistent and available instruction for routine processes

Needs Assessment*Determine what the patron needs*

Putting a finger on the pulse of your patron’s needs is important and can be accomplished through a variety of formal and informal methods. No matter how whiz-bang your online tutorial is, if your patrons don’t have a need, your tutorial will only languish and eventually be discarded. Try to strike that balance between assessing patron needs and forging ahead by using a combination of formal and informal assessment tools such as the following.

* Formal and informal patron surveys
* Observation
* Usability testing
* Research and existing data (web site statistics)
* Focus groups (staff and patron)

Topic Selection  
*What is needed and what is important*?  
  
Deciding what topic you would like to address in your tutorial is a key ingredient in the process. For extended information on assessing needs, finding expertise and things to consider before choosing a topic read [Topic and Content Selection for Patron Tutorials](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114822894).

Format Selection  
*How can we make this happen?*

The number of choices to consider when determining a format for your patron tutorial seems to grow with each passing day. However, there is no reason to feel that you have to be on the cutting edge of technology in order for your tutorial to be effective. Consider what expertise your library staff already have, as well as how much time they will have for updating and review of tutorials. You will also want to keep in mind any general technology limitations that your patrons may have along with technology constraints in your library such as server space, bandwidth and hosting options. Last, but not least of course, you will have to consider budget and funding. Take heart though, you can start creating patron tutorials without spending big bucks. Find out how in the [Continuum of Tutorial Tools](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114510831).

Instructional Design  
*If you’re going to spend the time, make it effective*

Although it may seem like overkill, you will still want to determine what your learning outcomes are before creating even a short tutorial. It can be as simple as “After the patron completes this tutorial they will be able to successfully renew their library materials using the online form.” There – now you know where you’re headed as you start content development. In order to develop effective tutorials, use the following instructional design principles when possible.

* Determine learning outcomes – even for a short tutorial
* Chunk information into modules of 2 – 3 minutes if the content requires
* Be sure to write for the web using short, one concept paragraphs, and bullet points, avoiding jargon, limiting the number of words and chunking the content.
* Create a recognized and consistent design and navigation
* Provide printable parts if you can for a patron take-away
* Add audio and textual narration if possible to meet various learner styles
* Provide a feedback mechanism so that you know how it’s working

Software and Hardware Selection  
  
*There are many paths*

Selection of the software and hardware that you use for online patron tutorials will be determined by many things including the format you choose, budget, intended use, audience and staff expertise. Here are a number of tools to help in your selection process.

* “[Creating Online Tutorials at Your Library: Software Choices and Practical Implications](http://www.rusq.org/2009/11/28/creating-online-tutorials-at-your-libraries-software-choices-and-practical-implications/)”
* [Continuum of Tutorial Tools](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114510831)
* [Comparison of Screencasting Tools: screenr and jing](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114305329)
* [Video/Screencasting Hosting Options Side by Side Comparison](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114423388)
* [Camtasia Examples - Beyond Simple Screencasts](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114413487)

Scouting Available Tutorials(Free are marked with \*)  
  
*Don’t reinvent the wheel – it won’t get you any farther*

Leveraging all available resources is important in the current economy. Don’t head down the patron tutorial road until you have researched what is already available and accessible. Pointing patrons to existing quality resources can be just as effective as creating them from scratch. Check out software and database publisher sites for tutorial sections, browse tutorial repositories and explore some of the cooperative library projects for sharing patron tutorials. Here is a start.

* [Brain Fuse – Help Now](http://home.brainfuse.com/)
* [Tutor.com](http://www.tutor.com/)
* [Animated Tutorial Sharing Project](http://ants.wetpaint.com) (ANTS) \*
* [LION](http://liontv.blip.tv) (Library Information Literacy Online Network) \*
* [Learning Express Library](http://www.learnatest.com/LEL/index.cfm/)

Online Tutorial Evaluation  
*How is it working?*

It’s tempting to just walk away once a tutorial is in use. However, if you do, you will be missing out on the most important pieces of information – is the tutorial being used and is it accomplishing its intended purpose? Usage statistics, review, feedback and usability studies are all techniques that can help to answer this question and will inform next steps in additional development or editing of existing tutorials.

To statistically determine usage of a .swf tutorial you may want to watch this detailed tutorial called [Google Analytics and .swf Tutorials](http://buckrambeats.com/OCLS/Google_Analytics_and_screencast_software_demo.htm). For patron initiated feedback some libraries provide immediate feedback via a star rating or social networking style thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Surveys can also be embedded in tutorials using tools. Here are some sites with examples of tutorial feedback that you might want to emulate.

* [St. Louis Community College](http://guides.stlcc.edu/tutorials)
* [William Paterson University](http://guides.wpunj.edu/content.php?pid=127800&sid=1096786)
* [Patron Tutorial Samples](http://il.webjunction.org/il-pattut/-/articles/content/114462341)

Promotion of Your Online Tutorials  
*“If you build it – they will come..,” but only if they know about it*

Now that you have this wonderful tool, make sure that patrons (and staff) are fully aware that it exists and how to use it. Strategically place your tutorial on the library web site and consider both a repository of tutorials and placement at the point-of-need for maximum exposure. Developing a graphic that identifies your tutorials allows you to use it to promote awareness on the web site, in print materials and on library signage.

To leverage this great resource best, make sure that you raise library staff awareness of all online tutorials. You might even consider providing examples and scenarios of how tutorials could be used in typical patron interactions.

Best Practices with Online Tutorials  
*Some things to shoot for*

No tutorial is going to be perfect, but you can always strive for the best. Using this Big Picture view and additional resources such as these below will help you in your quest to create the best for your patrons.

General

* [San Francisco Public Library – Best Practices for Tutorials](http://webjunction.org/patron-training-research/-/articles/content/100431334)
* [Library Success Wiki – Online Tutorials](http://www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Online_Tutorials)

Screencasting

* [Best practice links from the Animated Tutorial Sharing Project (ANTS)](http://ants.wetpaint.com/page/Best+Practices+in+Screencasting)
* [Camtasia Step-by-Step](http://www.webjunction.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=100431341&name=DLFE-29320019.doc) – San Francisco Public Library

## Resources

Lib20. “Resource Pages: Screencasting and Online Tutorials.” http://lib20.pbworks.com/w/page/  
16753986/resources-screencasting (accessed March 16, 2011). List of resources and tutorial examples.

Slebodnik , Maribeth and Fraser Riehle, Catherine Guest Columnists (Nov. 28, 2009). “Creating Online Tutorials at Your Libraries: Software Choices and Practical Implications.” RUSQ v. 49 (Issue 1). Retrieved from <http://www.rusq.org/2009/11/28/creating-online-tutorials-at-your-libraries-software-choices-and-practical-implications/>

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Wonder, Valerie (March 2010) “San Francisco Public Library Needs Assessment: Report on Findings.” Retrieved from <http://il.webjunction.org/patron-training-research/-/articles/content/98311501>

San Francisco Public Library, Strategic Plan: 2003 – 2006, <http://sfpl.org/pdf/about/administration/statistics-reports/summaryreport.pdf>