One Way to Learn:  
A Web Tutorial
By Patricia Vander Meer

Searching for articles...scanning for books and monographs...scouting government reports...skimming for facts...surfing the sites of the World Wide Web...All of these and more challenge the user in this age of information overkill.

A special challenge was precisely defined when I was asked to teach, in a limited amount of time, "all" resources necessary for students to meet the objectives of an advanced criminology course. My prior experiences with using technology to further instructional goals had included spearheading the development of a multimedia self-instructional tutorial that provided basic library orientation to freshmen enrolled in University 101, a course defined and designed to help new students adjust to the many aspects of life and learning at Western Michigan University. First piloted in 1992, the multimedia program has been used by hundreds of beginning and transfer students who want to learn basic search techniques for locating articles and books in the University Libraries. This prototype experience has been supplemented by involvement in the creation of videos that promote library orientation and skills for students on Western's campus. Success in these user-friendly projects strongly suggested that technology could also meet the demands of the students of criminology.

The project that came about is the Criminal Justice Tutorial, and planning and development have taken eighteen months to complete and test. During the period, there were several distinctive steps. First, an outline of the subject content was drawn up; this was partially based on a library instruction class that I had taught for criminal justice students in previous years, since I have served as a liaison to that area of study for some time. Next, to make sure that the program would meet the needs of this particular group of students, I attended the first class session of Professor Ronald Kramer's Sociology 466: Advanced Criminology, and administered a questionnaire to determine the level of library skills that the students possessed. Then, I met with Dr. Kramer and Dr. Susan Carlson, who also teaches the senior level course, to review their perceptions of what skills the students would need to achieve the class research requirements.

Once the the content and areas of coverage were generally outlined, the next step was to consult with Jan Oliver, multimedia/web specialist in the University Computing Center. Jointly, we clarified the goals of the proposed project, what was known, and what had to be done. Along with two students, Jan and I began development of the tutorial during the summer of 1996. In particular, student designer Martin Burch can be credited with developing the tutorial's attractive, user-friendly graphical interface. However, credit also goes to student René Hinojosa for Web authoring, and student Srinivas Mantha for HTML authoring. Together, with Jan Oliver as co-producer, director, HTML author; Susan Carlson and Ronald Kramer, criminal justice consultants; and myself as producer, scriptwriter and content specialist, we seven produced a working draft of the tutorial. This preliminary draft was then tested with students enrolled in Associate Professor Susan Caulfield's class in advanced criminology. This was done by having the students work through the tutorial, critique it, and then respond to their questions.

The "final" project, the Criminal Justice Tutorial was mounted on the World Wide Web. The Web accommodates students' busy schedules and erratic working hours. However, the tutorial does not stand alone; it complements and supplements a library session that is especially tailored to a given class.

The tutorial is designed as the introduc-
Discriminating writers of English have long relied on H.W. Fowler’s *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (Oxford University Press) as a guide to proper writing and speaking. Henry Watson Fowler, 1858-1933, was a British schoolmaster with very decided opinions about linguistic etiquette. The first edition of this work was published in April of 1926. It was reprinted in 1937 (with corrections), and in succeeding years. Finally, in 1965, it was revised, with some recognition of how American usage differed from British, by Sir Ernest Gowers, 1880-1966. Gowers, however, still retains much of the authoritarian flavor of Fowler. One usually thinks of Fowler/Gowers as laying down rules and laws rather than providing flexible guidelines for reflection, discussion, and judgment.

But, in 1996, a third edition, boldly entitled *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage*, was edited by R.W. Burchfield. Burchfield is an eminent linguist who takes, on the whole, a contemporary descriptive, rather than a more old-fashioned prescriptive, view of usage. In other words, Burchfield is inclined to be liberal and permissive where Fowler/Gowers were conservative and forbidding. For instance, Fowler and Gowers both disapprove of the use of the adverb “hopefully” as a substitute for “it is expected,” (1965, p. 250) but Burchfield allows it (1996, p. 366). Fowler saw no problem with the word “disinterested” used in the sense of “uninterested,” (the 1926 edition has no entry on the latter), but Gowers is saddened by the recognition that the old sense of “disinterested” to mean “impartial” has been lost: “A valuable differentiation is thus in need of rescue, if it is not too late” (1965, p. 134). Burchfield, ever the discreet and discrete objective recorder of usage behavior, notes that the “noun [disinterest] has or has had three branches of meaning” 1 that which is contrary to interest or advantage…now rare or obsolete”…2 impartiality (recorded from 1658 onward and still current, but not in common use)…3 Absence of interest, unconcern...” (1996, p. 216).

As if anticipating objections from traditionalists, and not wishing to appear to be too liberal as compared to Gowers, Burchfield (depending on your point of view) either takes the long objective stance of the scholar, or “ cops-out” by commenting that it is more usual to hear the word “disinterested” instead of “disinterest” when impartiality is meant. But Burchfield ends his article on this controversial word by saying: “The best course is to avoid using the noun ‘disinterest’ altogether until it has reached safe shores.” (1996, p. 217) I can easily imagine Fowler bristling at this weak-kneed conclusion as well as calling attention to Burchfield’s lazy cliché in the phrase “safe shores.”

The University Libraries’ Central Reference Department officially takes no stand on controversies of this sort. As far as funds and selection can take us, we attempt to present all sides of “word” disputes. Fowler, Gowers, and Burchfield can all be found on the shelves of the University Libraries. While individual scholars may have their preferences among somewhat competing authorities such as these, we, as reference librarians, take an even more cautious approach than Burchfield. We provide the reference sources, but the patron, alas, must make the final choice as to his (or her) preference in word selectivity and usage.

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option or preface to the classroom session and should be completed prior to the face to face sessions. By the time that the class convenes for the library session, each student has been exposed to the basic databases and strategies that are needed to use the library and its resources. Then, when the classroom demonstration is completed, the students can move directly to terminals in the classroom and begin their research with a librarian available for guidance and to troubleshoot.

The tutorial consists of several parts. The first thing that each student must do is take a short survey that assesses his/her library skills. Survey questions cover use of the online catalog, selection of appropriate periodical indexes, and location of the actual journal article, government document, or book in the Libraries. Feedback from this initial testing is intended to give the students incentive to learn more about such resources. There are four instructional units in the main tutorial in which students (1) learn how to define their topics, including good and bad examples of research problems; (2) critically evaluate and choose information sources; (3) search WMU’s online catalog and databases, and (4) visit Internet sites relevant to their topics.

The Criminal Justice Tutorial was mounted, used by students, and tested during 1997. During its first year of implementation, simple observation of students or trial by colleagues uncovered numerous ways in which the design could be strengthened. Students irrationally clicking on icons that lead nowhere quickly informs a project director of errors and flaws. Written surveys were also used to determine reactions of the students to the tutorial’s “workability” and value. The results have been uniformly positive despite the inevitable first-time gliches, and modifications have been made. As a result of its existence on the Web, a highly regarded variable in its use, other instructors are also investigating similar tutorials for their disciplines. With appropriate staff and time, it is anticipated that, in a few years, a strong collection of tutorials for different areas of study will be available through the University Libraries to help students find their way through the web of information cyberspace.

*The Criminal Justice Tutorial can be found on the Web at URL: http://unix.cc.wmich.edu/libweb/vander/cj/index.html*