

# Website Usability Report

December 2019

Dragan Gill and Kieran Ayton

## Study Overview

We tested 19 members of the Rhode Island College community on their preference for an Everything search box and their preferences on Best Match vs Library sorting of search results.

The study was composed of:

- 7 faculty members
- 2 graduate students
- 6 undergraduate students
- 4 staff members.

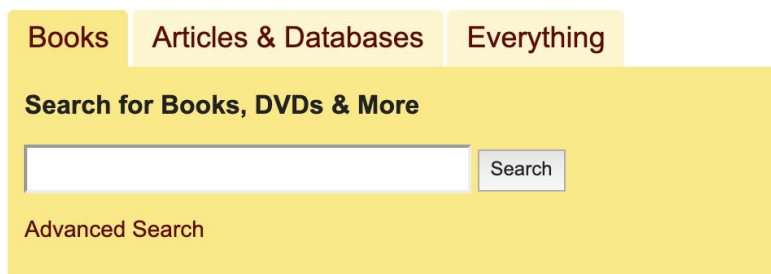
We held 4 different sessions in which participants completed the 3 tasks described below. After each task, discussions were held to hear and better understand their experiences using library search tools.

## Task 1: Everything Tab

In Task 1 of the usability testing, we asked participants to describe an assignment or research project where they needed to find one peer-reviewed journal article and one book on their topic.

We asked them to use a simplified Search Box with 3 tabs (screenshots below).

2 testing sessions had this configuration



The screenshot shows a search interface with three tabs: 'Books', 'Articles & Databases', and 'Everything'. The 'Everything' tab is selected and highlighted in yellow. Below the tabs is a search box with the text 'Search for Books, DVDs & More'. The search box contains a text input field and a 'Search' button. Below the search box is a link for 'Advanced Search'.

2 testing sessions had this configuration



The screenshot shows a search interface with three tabs: 'Everything', 'Books', and 'Articles & Databases'. The 'Everything' tab is selected and highlighted in yellow. Below the tabs is a search box with the text 'Search for Books, Articles, & More'. The search box contains a text input field and a 'Search' button. Below the search box is a link for 'Advanced Search'.

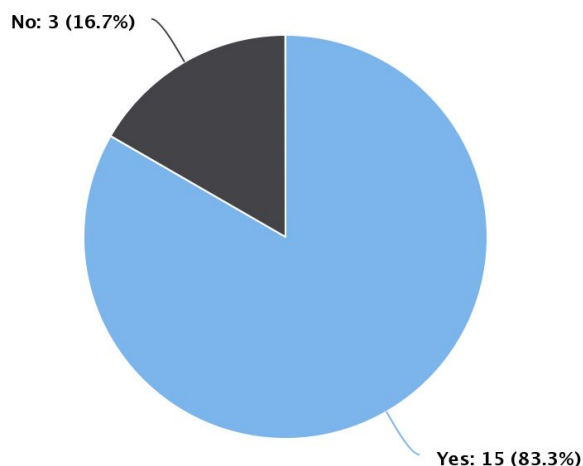
Of the 19 participants, 6 participants used the Everything search box first when performing Task 1. 3 of these participants were undergraduates and 3 were staff. Faculty participants overwhelmingly preferred using the item specific tabs first such as Books or Articles and Databases. The participants that used the Everything tab first were also more likely to continue searching in the Everything tab throughout the task, rather than switch to another search option, which suggests that while they had the opportunity to switch, they were able to find what they needed, for a limited task, in Discovery.

Participants were also cognizant that Discovery searching is more useful for novice researchers saying, “The more comfortable you are with research, the less you want [an] Everything [tab]”. During this discussion session following the task, many discussed the idea of Discovery/Everything as a launching point for first year students, while advanced students and faculty members will have learned to go directly to the relevant databases or tools. Because of this, we recommend leaving the Everything tab set to Library sorting so that users can find readily available materials and easily explore a topic further.

In the post survey, we asked participants if they thought the library should have a search box tab called “Everything” that finds books and articles together. The majority of participants were in favor of this. We also asked participants if “Everything” was an appropriate term and they pointed out that this term is potentially misleading, as not all library resources are being searched. We surveyed other RI Academic libraries.

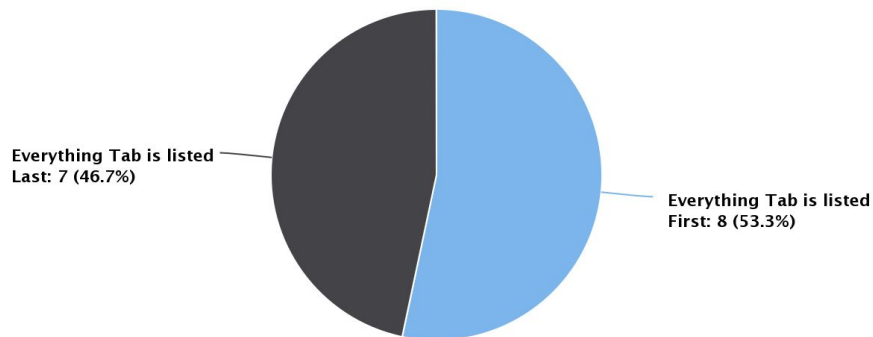
- Bryant uses “Everything”
- Johnson and Wales University uses “Everything”
- Roger Williams University uses “All”
- Wheaton College uses “Discover”
- The other academic libraries in RI do not use this type of search box on their homepage.

## 2. Should the library have a Search Box tab called "Everything" that finds both books and articles together in a single search?



If they said “yes”, we asked them if they “Everything” tab should be listed first or last. The results were split, with a slight majority preferring the “Everything” tab listed first. 1 faculty, 4 staff, and 3 students (2 undergrad and 1 grad) preferred the Everything tab to be listed first.

Should the Everything Tab be listed first or last? (See both ways below).



### Suggested Action Items

The majority of participants are in favor of an “Everything” tab on the library website that searches both books and articles. Over winter break, this tab can be implemented. We are recommending placing the tabs in this order:

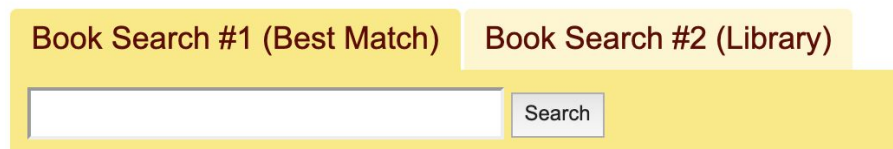


The participants that used the Everything tab first were also more likely to continue searching in the Everything tab throughout the task, rather than switch to another search option, which suggests that while they had the opportunity to switch, they were able to find what they needed, for a limited task, in Discovery.

## Task 2: Best Match vs Library Sorting for Books

For task 2, users were asked to find two different book titles in the Discovery Catalog and then to perform a topic search on Pope Francis. They were asked to perform these searches using each of the different search boxes below. The first search box sorted their search results by the “Best Match” filter in the Discovery Catalog. “Best Match” blends title, author, date and worldwide holdings with an emphasis placed on title in the search result list.

The second search box sorted their search results by the “Library” filter in the Discovery Catalog. “Library” gives preference to your institutional holdings first, then blends title, author, date and worldwide holdings into the search results list.



The image shows a screenshot of a search interface. At the top, there are two tabs: "Book Search #1 (Best Match)" and "Book Search #2 (Library)". Below these tabs is a search input field with a "Search" button to its right. The entire interface is highlighted with a yellow background.

When participants were asked to find an exact title, they overwhelmingly preferred the Best Match sorting. For a topic based search, participants expressed preference for Library sorting if our library holdings had books on the topic being search. For the Pope Francis topic search, our library did have extensive holdings, so participants were in favor of the Library sorting search so that they could retrieve what we had in-house.

During the discussion following this task, the majority of participants expressed their preference for Best Match sorting when searching for books. Most indicated that while they may search for books on a topic using keywords, they are more likely to search for a known title. Because best Match returned the title first, or within the top 10 results, more frequently than Library sort, Best Match searches the way users intend to use the catalog.

Notably, in one session, all the participants [5] agreed that Best Match was preferable. In another session one student summarized their experience with: “I preferred Best Match, it came back with the words you put in.” A few faculty members, thinking both about how they use the catalog and how they teach students to use it, thought that Best Match was a good default setting and pointed out that it was easy to find the facets to limit the search to RIC holdings only. This was also apparent during the first task, where nearly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of participants [6] limited their searches to RIC or Rhode Island Libraries holdings unprompted.

### Suggested Action Items

The majority of participants were in favor of the Best Match sorting feature for finding books. Over winter break, the default sorting from the Catalog tab could be changed from Library sorting to Best Match sorting.

### Task 3: Best Match vs Library Sorting for Articles

For task 3, users were asked to find two different article titles in the Articles & Databases search box and then they were asked to comment on the remote databases that appear at the top of the article search results. They were asked to perform these searches using each of the different search boxes below. The first search box sorted their search results by the “Best Match” filter. “Best Match” blends title, author, date and worldwide holdings with an emphasis placed on title in the search result list.

The second search box sorted their search results by the “Library” filter. “Library” gives preference to your institutional holdings first, then blends title, author, date and worldwide holdings into the search results list.

Article Search #1 (Best Match)	Article Search #2 (Library)
<input data-bbox="224 747 716 800" type="text"/> <input data-bbox="724 747 820 800" type="button" value="Search"/>	

Participants were asked to find specific article titles and for this task they often preferred the Best Match search. However, in the Task 3 discussions, several trends emerged.

The first was the need for immediacy. Participants in all 4 sessions expressed frustration with the length of time it took for articles to be delivered following a request. Sometimes an article might arrive in a day or two, other article deliveries might take more than a week. Student participants said delivery time of an article is directly related to its usefulness. It was not worth their effort to order multiple articles if arrival time was unknown. Often, the immediate availability of an article is paramount.

In the third test session, faculty insight was interesting. Faculty believed that most students perform topic searches when searching for scholarly articles, rather than find them with known citations. If they do need to search for specific citations there are other tools. Article Search tab #2, which filters search results according to library ownership might better meet students' immediate needs. This might be especially true for first year students. Upper level students often search specific databases.

This feedback brought to light an interesting fact: there are many ways to access articles. While patrons can use the Articles search box, they can also go directly to the databases using the A-Z list. They can also use Google Scholar. The Articles Search box on the homepage is useful for beginning users who only need a couple of articles. More advanced users, as the above faculty member indicates, often search specific databases.

When searching for book titles, however, the Catalog is the only point of entry and therefore a Best Match is preferred because if the user was to do a title search for a book that we do not own in the Library sort, they might not find that title listed until the 4th or 5th page! Participants

in the study tended to only view the first page of results rather than continue and click on the following pages. During Task 1, only 5 of the 19 participants clicked through to the second page of search results when performing a search.

### Suggested Action Items

Leave the Articles Search box on Library sorting.

Demographic overview (internal use only - remove from final report)

**Faculty #s:** 1, 3, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18

**Graduate Student #s:** 8, 21

**Undergraduate Student #s:** 2, 6, 7, 12, 19, 20

**Staff #s:** 4, 13, 14, 15