# Jargon-Free Librarianing: Speaking the Language of Our Patrons

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Libraries

## Examining Jargon at ODU Libraries

Librarians are notorious for speaking in jargon, often to the detriment of our own users. At Old Dominion University Libraries (Norfolk, VA), the Information Delivery Services Librarian, the Instructional Services Librarian, and the Education Reference Librarian have combined efforts to streamline terminology and eliminate the use of jargon, both in-person and virtually at all points of user interaction. Through collaboration across departments, we examined ways our University Libraries currently present itself to users on our website, in chat, in reference interactions, and during information literacy instruction sessions. By reviewing the literature and applying ideas to our individual situation, we have worked to improve the experiences of our users at all levels.

Subject Headings!
Facets!
Boolean!
OPAC!
lol, wut?

## Challenges

- Gaining buy-in from librarians and faculty
- Faculty desire for us to "teach the way they were taught"
- Providing consistency across platforms
- Updating all platforms as frequently as needed, for example videos created in-house, web pages, and LibGuides
- Finding balance between "dumbing down" and teaching users the terminology that they need to know

## Discovery Layer

Trends in user-centered design are moving increasingly toward simpler, cleaner interfaces. Additionally, web interfaces are visual mediums, and the sites users enjoy navigating through the most often borrow design ideas from advertisers and graphic designers, just as much from information architecture best practices.

Library discovery services have allowed for many libraries to bring together a variety of their information resources under one clean, simple search box. Optimizing for usability on the backend to ensure ease of use and accuracy on the front end can often be such a chore that many libraries ignore simple design changes they can make to enhance the UX of their results pages and give users—especially novices—a better sense of what they can expect to find.

As a tool designed to bring together a variety of proprietary subscriptions and information services and resources, discovery service results pages can sometimes look cluttered and confusing to the untrained eye by being overly specific. PDF Full Text, Available Through LexisNexis, Available through LinkSource, and HTML Full Text are all different ways of saying Read Now.

These different ways of saying the same thing not only clutter up the results page visually, but the descriptions are not meaningful to most users who care most about whether they can get something rather than the exact mechanics of "how." At ODU Libraries, we chose standardized language for our results list (with some media- or fulfillment-specific language when applicable) to give users an idea of what to expect. For example, databases that housed only videos produce results that say Watch Now, audio streaming databases say Listen Now, exclusively text-based content say Read Now, and anything that would produce mixed content says Get Now. Interlibrary Loan was changed to Request Now and links directly to our ILLiad request form. Results linked to notoriously buggy content (i.e. packages we only had partial subscriptions to, or databases that did not work well without a link resolver) became Check Availability.

### User Experience

Look — Credibility, Trust, Harmony, Interest
Feel — "Joy of Use", Interaction, Reaction
Usability — Functionality, Intuitiveness, Predictability

## Pretend You're 20 Years Old Again…

| | |
|---|---|
| Connector | Boolean Operator |
| Details | Article Record |
| Read Now | PDF Full Text |
| Rent | Check Out |
| Research Help | Reference |
| Narrow | Limits, Facets |
| Find Books | Catalog |
| #Hashtags | Subject Headings |
| Borrow | Interlibrary Loan |
| Search Plan | Search String |
| Library Guides | LibGuides |
| Google | Search Engine |
| Location | Dewey or LC |

Check Availability
Developments in Stem Cell R
Read Now
Differential impact of science
Read Now
Applications of carbon nanotu
Request Now

Search Results: 181 - 200 of 1,848,226

181. The Cure-All.
By: Graham, Tyler. Popular Science. Jun2015. Vol. 286
HTML Full Text   PDF Full Text (1.1MB)

182. Exploiting stem cell therapy: the 3rd meeting
(English) ; Abstract available. By: Di Bernardo G; Piva R; Liss; PMID: 22927167, Database: MEDLINE
Find Full Text

183. Editorial: 2013 - a year of clinical success and
(English) By: Nolta JA, Stem Cells (Dayton, Ohio) [Stem
Request this through Interlibrary Loan

*Access link language in the old EDS display was confusing to users and didn't accurately explain the "how" of getting to their information resource.*

*The new, jargon-free language for accessing items found in EDS provides a cleaner display and it's easy to understand the "how" of getting the desired resource.*

## Jargon During Reference Interactions
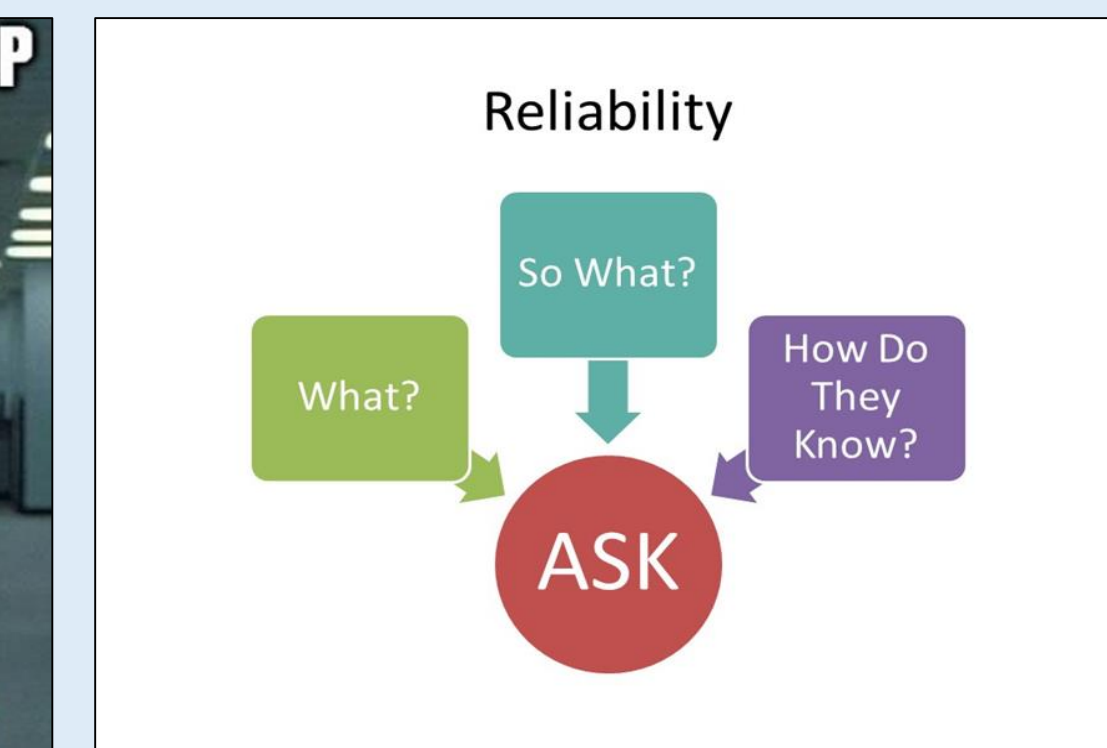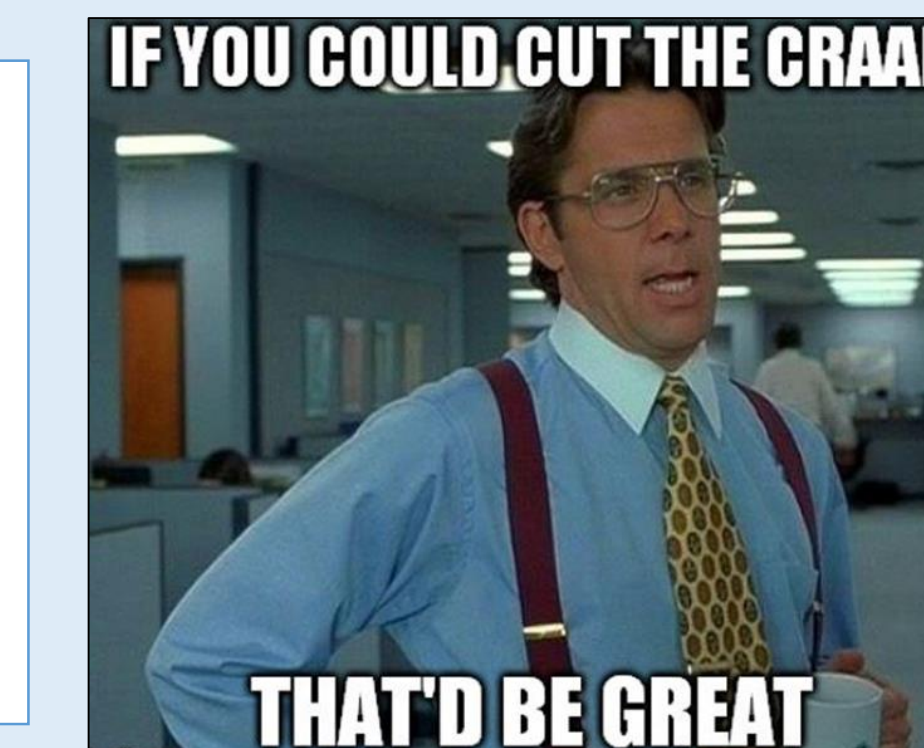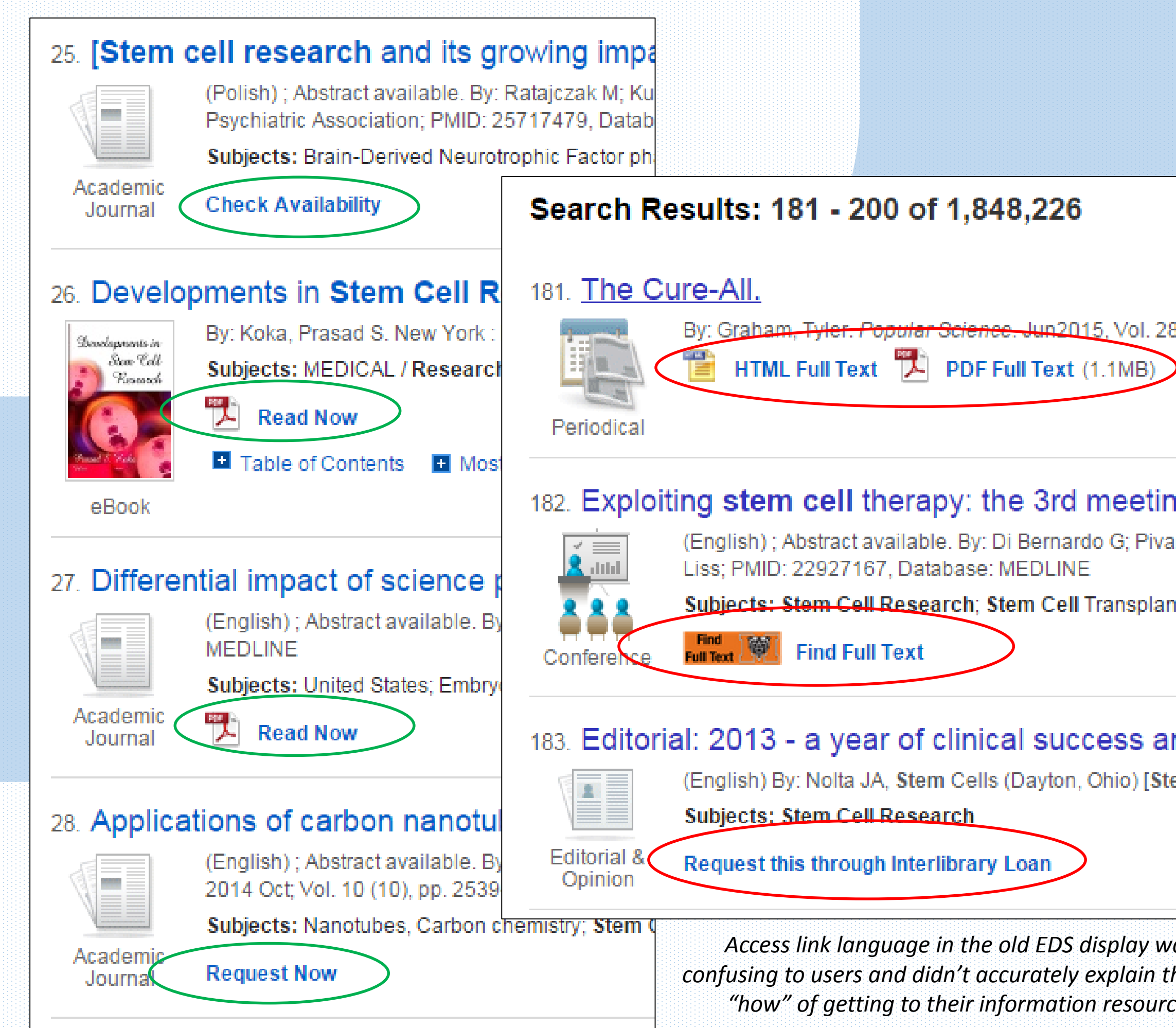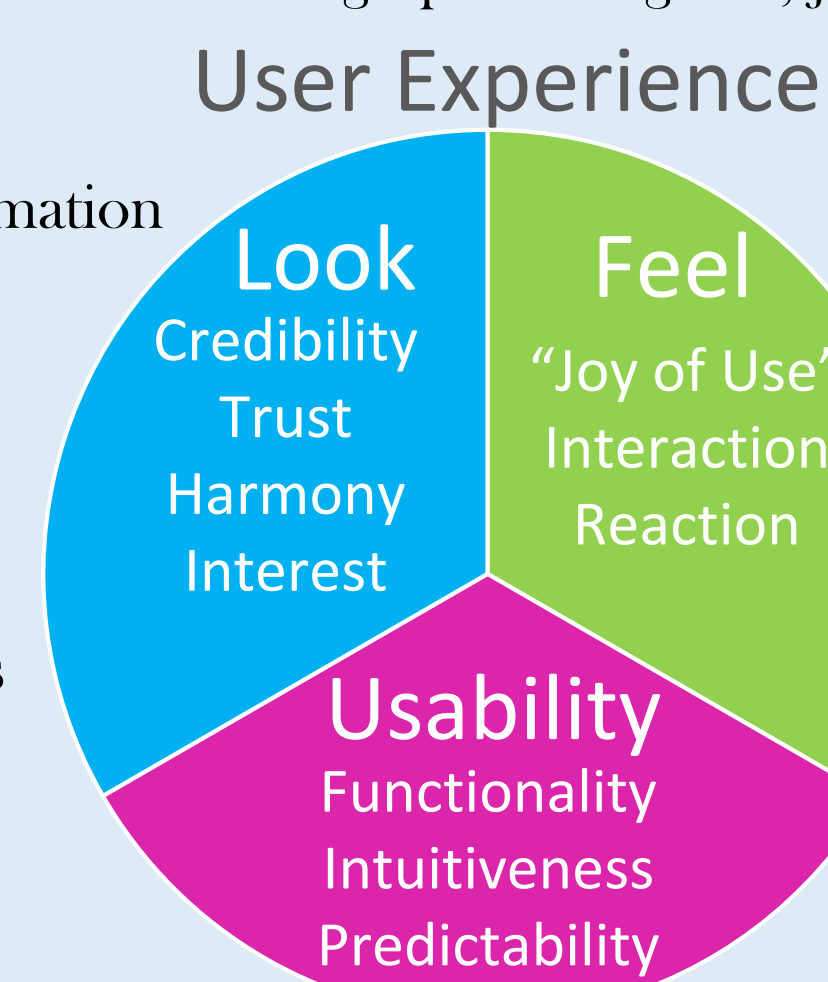
RUSA encourages librarians to refrain from using jargon during the reference interview and in our virtual presence (RUSA, 2011). But as in many fields such as healthcare, law, music, and pretty much any area of academia, our profession speaks its own language. Do we expect our users to learn our language, or should we adapt to theirs? Can we find a balance?

Use Subject Headings, not Natural Language!

Trying to think like our users and adapting to their language can be easily done in many circumstances and can cause less anxiety for the student. If a student wants to know if they can rent a book, is it really important for them to know that the common term used in libraries for that action is check out? Should we expect them to learn the difference between Dewey and LC, or can we just tell them the location of the book? As in the business and advertising world, getting inside the minds of our users can help them and encourage them to use our services again. Even simple changes can bridge the gap between librarian language and student language.

### Less is More, In Life and in Libraries

Students find librarians to be more approachable when they are friendly and jargon-free (Matteson, Salamon, & Brewster, 2011).

IF YOU COULD CUT THE CRAAP
THAT'D BE GREAT

Reliability
What?  So What?  How Do They Know?
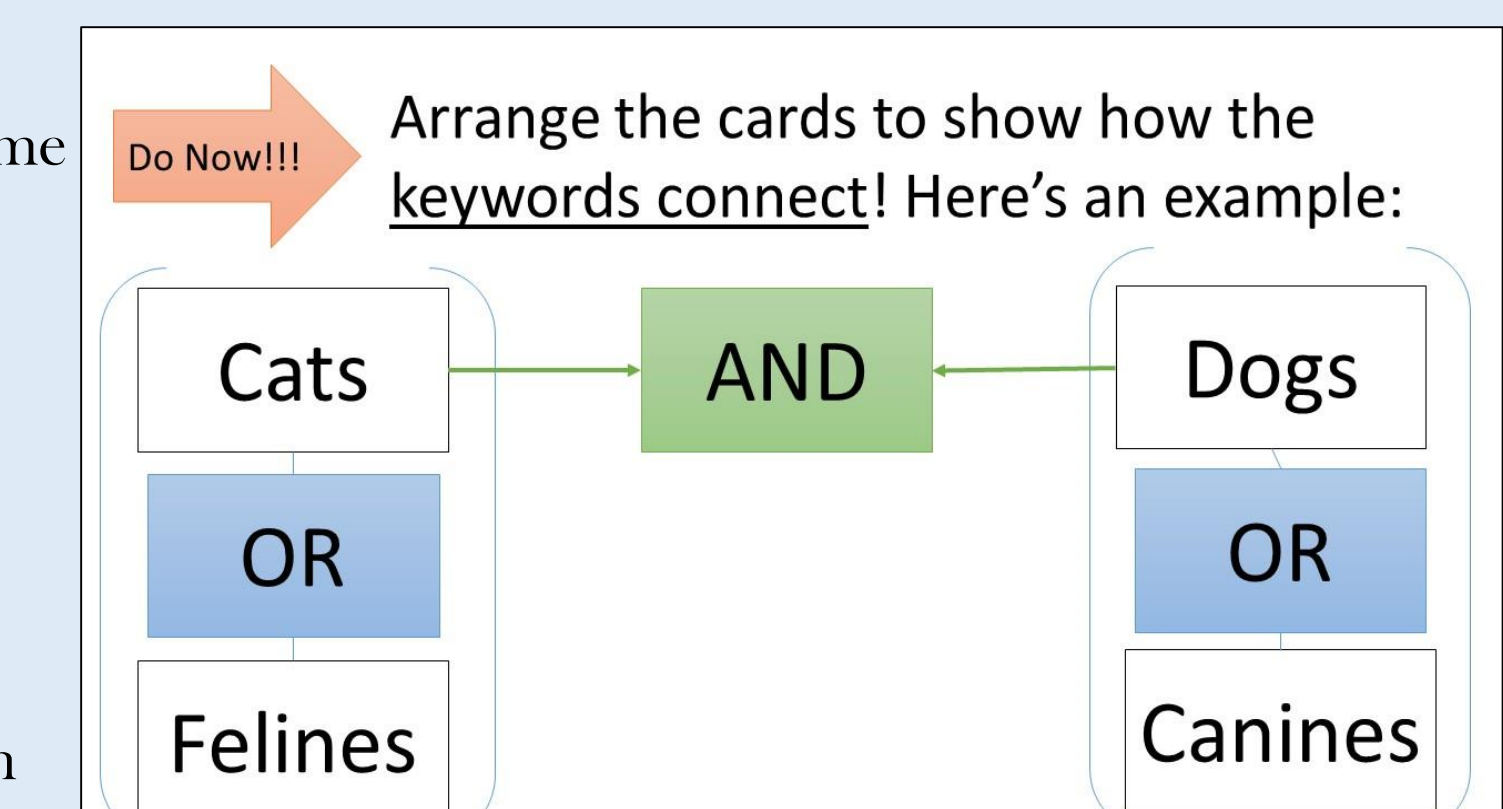ASK

## Jargon in Library Instruction

The majority of information literacy instruction at ODU Libraries happens in one-time sessions, where the content is focused around the students' research assignment for that semester. As we move away from teaching "point and click" skills toward point-of-need, authentic research experiences, typical library jargon seems even more out of place.

During the past four semesters, the library instruction team has made an effort to remove the most common jargon from the library instruction we provide for 100- and 200-level English composition and information literacy general education courses.

"Boolean" seemed like an obvious place to start—according to a 2004 Norman B. Hutcherson survey that tested 300 students on library jargon, only 8% understood Boolean. Based on anecdotal evidence in our own classroom experiences, that understanding has not increased in the past 10 years. We've replaced Boolean with connector, as it speaks directly to what AND, OR and NOT do in a search. Demystifying the process is more important than sticking to traditional terminology.

### Promoting Common Terms

- Get (and keep) librarians on the same page for the preferred terms:
  Example: Discovery Tool not EBSCO Discovery Service or EBSCOhost
- Be consistent on all branding, handouts, instructional material, and conversations
- Help students focus on the function of their search, rather then traditional wording

Do Now!!!
Arrange the cards to show how the keywords connect! Here's an example:

| Cats | AND | Dogs |
|------|-----|------|
| OR | | OR |
| Felines | | Canines |

*Example slide from an in-class card-sorting activity about connectors.*

### Remedies for Jargon Overload

- Consider students' authentic experience
- Pay attention to the words students are using
- Continually test jargon-free language for impact

| Keyword | Connector | Keyword | Connector | Keyword |
|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

3. Who is likely to publish articles about your topic? List the disciplines the professors, researchers, etc. might come from. (Example: medicine, business,

*Snippet of in-class worksheet for an ENGL 231 course.*