



From Zookeepers to Safari Guides: Adapting to Changes in the Information Environment

Margy MacMillan

Instructional Librarian, Mount Royal College

With Contributions from the
participants

<http://www2.mtroyal.ca/~mmacmillan/conf/tli2006.ppt>

mmacmillan@mtroyal.ca



In the old days, libraries were like zoos.



Everything in the library was carefully selected, brought in at great expense and well cared for.



Information was clearly labeled.



Gathering information was like following
safe, predictable paths.



But it wasn't always very exciting.



NOW... The information environment is more complex and diverse.



Differences between old and new info environments:

- No fences
- More species
- More vegetation
- More visible interaction
- Larger vistas
- Freedom
- Movement
- Not sleeping
- Breeding
- No handler
- More alert
- Natural
- Group work going on





Librarians are more like safari guides.



Students don't always know where to start.



The pathways aren't as clear and static as in the zoo.



Sometimes the information is in plain sight.

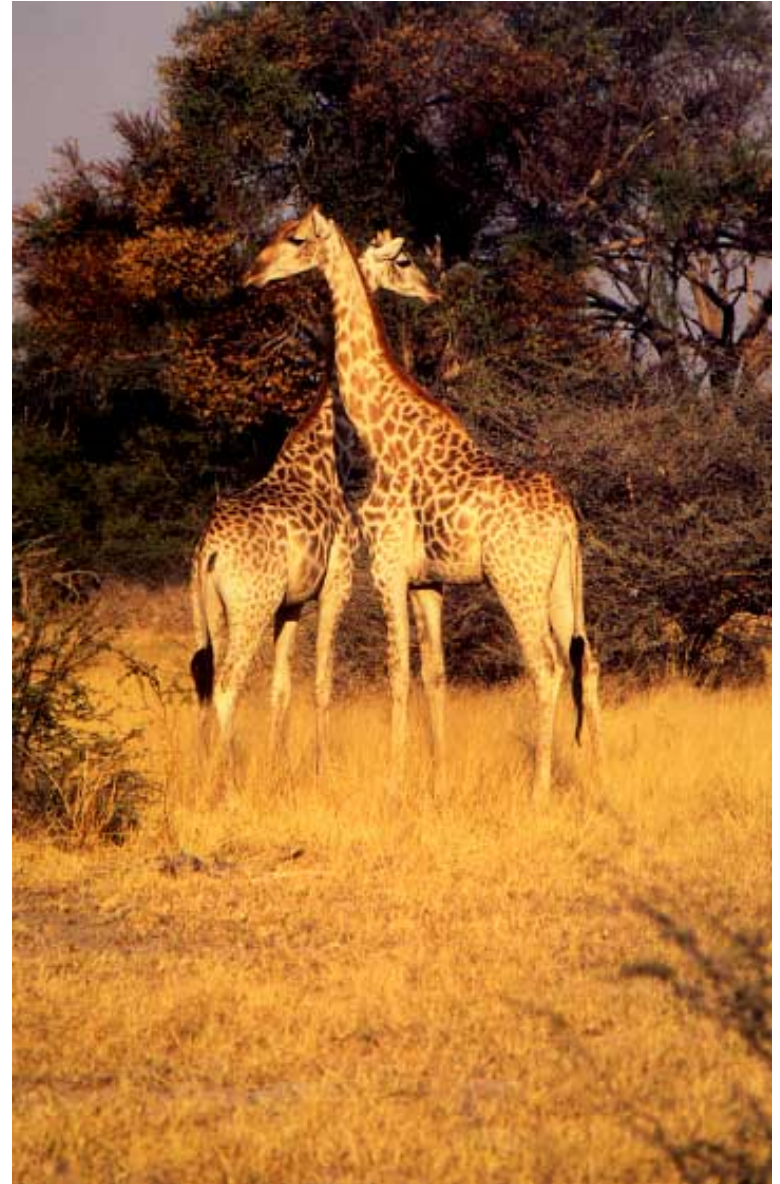


Sometimes it's a little harder to find.



Sometimes all that's available
is a sign that the
information was there
at some time,
and may be back in the future.

Sometimes
it's
x-rated!





What does this all mean for your students?

Students need:

New skill sets

Guidelines

Maps

Specifics

Critical thinking skills

Flexibility

Patience

Persistence

Helpful criteria – relevance, reliability

How to compose a question

Document/reading skills – skim, scan

Different relationship with library folks

Knowledge of other libraries

Clarification about resources



What does this all mean for you?

Students are creating their own paths – both students and instructors seek and follow familiar paths for new research quests

May need to flip how we teach – electronic first, then print archetype

We have less common ground with students – harder to develop metaphors

We don't view the internet the same way

Easy for both students and teachers to get lost

Need to model flexibility, patience, persistence

Need to encourage students to move beyond the simple answer – how?

See next slide

Tips for encouraging students to go beyond the first thing they find in Google.

- Ask for diverse sources, but beware the scavenger hunt – not all topics will have 5 good books, 2 good reference sources 3 scholarly articles, a microfiche and a slate.
- Encourage students to narrow topics using books
- Use staged assignments – start with an annotated bibliography.
- Have students compare what they find in google to other sources/databases as part of the assignment to demonstrate what they might miss.
- FIRST – ask why you want to go beyond the simple search before setting up more complex tasks.



Tips for Metaphors

Metaphors can be useful to help students conceptualize and remember complex topics or processes.

Other people's metaphors for information –

- Could be out on a branch – what's the rest of the tree like
- Could be an ocean, overwhelming, need to use the right bait to catch the info you want

For the research process

- Picture it as a map, with a destination and distances between stops, or a book, where you can see how far you've read, how many pages are left
- Picture a filing cabinet to organize your information into larger files – carry over with colour coding to connect parts of an essay with bits of research

There's a Swiss cheese metaphor for health and metaphors dealing with insulin and physiology

Ask students to create their own metaphors, e.g. "A library is like a _____, because _____."