



## Library Orientation: Maximizing Impact for New Students

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**Do you recall your library orientation experience when you were a first-year student?**

Most of us probably don't recall our first-year library orientation. As for me, the only memory I have is a librarian saying the library does not own textbooks for us to borrow. This gave me the impression I didn't need to visit or use the library until much later. Over the decade since then, however, libraries changed quite a bit, providing much needed services, resources, and support to students at all levels.



At the beginning of each academic school year, waves of new students arrive on campus and struggle to make sense of their surroundings and classes. For librarians, this presents an opportunity to introduce incoming students to various services that can support their needs during the academic year. Many research studies suggest that students, particularly incoming first-year students, have "library anxiety" and/or feel unsure of how to use the library or ask a librarian for help. Engaging with students in library orientations can help reduce the feeling of library anxiety and foster new relationships among students and librarians.

In this section, we will explore different types of orientations, and offer suggestions and examples of activities and best practices geared towards first-year students, international students, transfer students, and distance learning students.

### First-Year Student Orientations

As the saying goes, "first impressions are the lasting ones." So make a great first impression!

**10 FACTS**  
about the Henry Madden Library  
that you should know!

**What are some ways to engage with first-year students?** Some librarians will give in-person overviews of library services during summer sessions, such as summer bridge programs. Others may show videos (see Fresno State's library orientation video) that briefly introduce important services and resources for first-year students. Although a video may take time to create initially, it's a great resource for reuse with different incoming classes.



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### In-Person Orientations

If your institution requires in-person orientation for incoming students, check out the [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox](#) to find a wide range of activities, from making zines to teaching basic research skills. These lessons come from [The First-year Experience Cookbook](#) and can provide a creative ways to introduce library resources to your new first-year students.



### Interactive Games

In lieu of library tours, some academic libraries have used scavenger hunt games to engage students. [Long Island University Libraries](#) created [The Amazing Library Race](#) based on the popular reality TV show. In this type of activity, students work in groups through a series of challenges while exploring various spaces within the library to learn more about the services and resources. At the end, winning teams may receive prizes! To make sure your scavenger hunt is successful, try out the game with your colleagues first.



### Welcome Programs

“Welcome” programs are another way to orient your students for the new academic school year. For example, you can organize a photo booth in front of your library for anyone to participate in. This can be a nice way for students to feel connected to the library and to share their photos and thoughts on social media platforms like Instagram or SnapChat. For this type of activity, schools have either rented a photo booth from an outside vendor, or created their own DIY photo booth using digital cameras, props, and other technologies hosted in the library.



### School Swag, Prizes, and Giveaways

If you have a modest budget, consider investing in “swag” items for prizes or giveaways. Some popular items among students have been: microfiber cloths to clean surfaces of cellphones and eyeglasses, multi-charging cables for USB to Apple Devices, or phone wallets for storing cards. Some schools give out USB flash drives, t-shirts, sunglasses, and academic planners too. Adding your school logo on swag items can be a nice touch.

Engaging with first-year students is challenging but fun. To keep your students engaged and to continue promoting library services throughout their academic career, it helps to have some outside-of-the-box activities!

**Do you know what percentage of your student population are first generation college students?**

Sometimes first generation college students find the adjustment to academic culture to be particularly challenging. Orientation can be especially helpful to acclimating this group to college life.



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### International Student Orientation

Orienting students who come from different parts of the world can be challenging. **Have you thought of creative ways to introduce “American-style libraries” to your international students?** Some academic libraries have organized a series of workshops on this topic, while others have partnered with their international student office to provide a general orientation and tour. Below are some examples of activities to use with new international students.



#### International Student Tours

Offer tours that cater to international students, highlighting the services and resources your international students might really need:

- Does your library have a prayer/meditation room for those who are religious?
- Is there a section for foreign-language collections in your library?
- Where are the tutoring or writing centers located?
- Are there quiet study spaces available to use?

These are some questions you may want to go through in your tours with international students.



#### Alternative Language Orientation

Some academic libraries offer library orientation in different languages. The University of Pittsburgh Library System for example, has orientations in [Chinese-Mandarin](#) for new Chinese students. If you have colleagues who can speak other languages, ask them to present in those languages at orientation. This can help create meaningful conversations and presentations for students for whom English is a second or third language.

### Transfer Student Orientations

Students transferring from another institution may struggle to figure out their new campus environments, and may be reluctant to ask for assistance when looking for necessary resources. Collaborating with your school's office of transfer-student services by attending their events, workshops, and fairs is a great way to begin to think about outreach toward transfer students.

**Here are some additional ideas from institutions that provide orientation services for this often-overlooked population:**



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### University of North Carolina at Wilmington

Tammy E. Ivins, Transfer Student Services Librarian, [has a deep involvement](#) in several programs surrounding transfer students. She hosts office hours in the campus' Military Resource Lounge, provides outreach workshops, and visits some of the feeder community colleges to meet with incoming transfers in order to provide better library sessions for these students.

### University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This university created a “personal librarian program” for transfer students to support their academic development. When their [case study](#) suggested a more personalized approach could offer an effective way for libraries to better support transfer students, they began connecting subject librarians with transfer students majoring in similar fields.

### University of California, Merced

The University of California, Merced's library created this [LibGuide](#) covering ten important things transfer students need to know. The LibGuide is a quick and easily accessible resource to acclimate transfer students with their new environment.



## Online Distance Learning Student Orientations

There are some students you may never see or interact with. **How do you orient them with library resources and services when they may not be close to the university at all?** Many academic libraries use LibGuides to offer library orientation through videos and tutorials. If you don't have access to LibGuides, there are some alternative ways to engage and encourage participation.

### Here are Some Creative Examples:

#### Hillsborough Community College

Hillsborough Community College Libraries created an [online library orientation for their students](#). The LibGuide allowed librarians to connect with students through a straightforward, simple, and clear introduction to library services and resources.





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### Penn State University

Penn State University Libraries [created a LibGuide](#) featuring digital badges, a very popular trend in higher education today. Students are encouraged to attend online orientation, and in doing so, earn a badge. If your university has a badging system, this is a creative way to incentivize students to learn more about library services online.

### California State University, Fresno

This library created an online [library orientation game](#). While this type of activity may require some in-person components for those who live nearby, it can help online students develop a sense of belonging with the library. If you are considering this approach, it is helpful to design a game that connects closely to library orientation services. Some mobile apps to consider using for design are [Social Scavenger](#) or Eventzee.

### Additional Options

If you don't have access to LibGuides, some alternative options include [WordPress](#), [Weebly](#), or [Wix](#), or using your university's existing learning management system, such as Canvas, Blackboard, or Moodle.

You can also browse YouTube for [library orientation videos](#) to adapt to your institution's needs or gather inspiration!

## Conclusion

An orientation program that fits your institution's needs can come in all shapes and sizes. From in-person tours and presentations to online activities, there are so many resources to experiment with as you setup your orientation. Not all orientations are alike; events can be hosted throughout the fall semester and in different settings. When you're planning an orientation event or activity, be sure to alert your campus partners and teaching faculty to get the word out to the new students!

