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### Beyond Clip Art: Free Online Tools for Graphic Design in Libraries

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# Beyond Clip Art: Free Online Tools for Graphic Design in Libraries

BY AMBER WILLENBORG • ONLINE LEARNING & DIGITAL MEDIA LIBRARIAN • UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, EKSTROM LIBRARY

## INTRODUCTION

In her 2015 study on the graphic design responsibilities of librarians, Diana Wakimoto notes that “librarians are in the business of graphic design, even if they have not been formally trained in design” (172). Many librarians with no background in graphic design regularly create signs, posters, handouts, flyers, brochures, and a litany of other instructional and promotional content. Professional graphic design tools like those available in Adobe Creative Cloud are ideal, but at a relatively high price per user they are not an option for many libraries, and librarians who do have access to these products might find the learning curve discouraging. Online graphic design tools can provide a free alternative to these paid products for creating visually appealing content, with the added bonus of design templates and easy-to-use interfaces for novice designers. While visually appealing content is aesthetically important to grab users’ attention, thoughtful graphic design also allows librarians to communicate the message and values of the library and enhance the library’s relationship with its users (Douglas & Becker 460). This article highlights three free, online graphic design tools that librarians can use to create content that accomplishes these goals, and points librarians to resources for graphic design inspiration and best practices.

## ONLINE GRAPHIC DESIGN TOOLS

*Piktochart (piktochart.com) – Images 1 (infographic template) & 2 (infographic created from that template)*

Piktochart allows users to create a variety of content types including presentations, posters, and reports, but it is best known and used for creating infographics. Infographics provide a way to represent information visually, something that Sarah Maudlin posits is essential for library patrons today: “Your patrons, especially those who have grown up in the age of the Internet, will expect to see data presented to them in a visual format, the easier to enjoy on a tablet or smartphone and the better to use on the go than a chart or page of prose” (110). Piktochart allows librarians to design this visual content with more than thirty free templates to choose from. Templates can be edited as much or as little as needed, from simply adding new text to completely changing the layout, background, and icons. Piktochart’s extensive collection of icons and pictures are searchable and can be dragged and dropped into a chart, then moved and resized as needed. Guide lines appear when moving objects to keep them centered or in line with other objects, and librarians can keep text and icon colors on-brand for their library using the hex color code. Perhaps Piktochart’s best feature is the variety of options for sharing content online, with links to share on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest and an embed code for integrating the piktochart right into a webpage or LibGuide. Unfortunately, the free subscription does not include high-resolution downloads, so quality will suffer slightly when printing content. Librarians who are in the market for a relatively inexpensive graphic design tool and are affiliated with an educational institution can upgrade to the Pro account at a

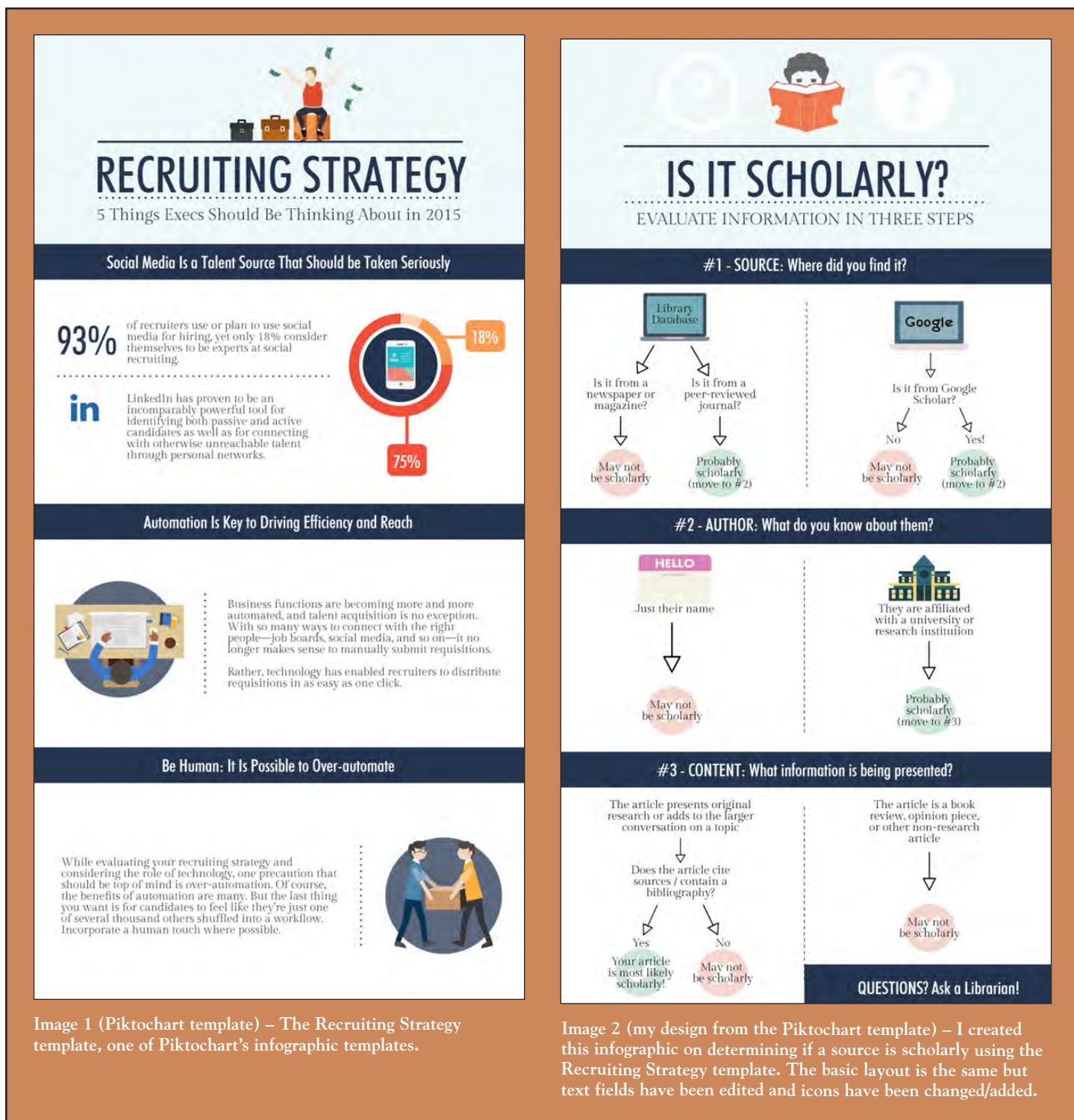


Image 1 (Piktochart template) – The Recruiting Strategy template, one of Piktochart’s infographic templates.

Image 2 (my design from the Piktochart template) – I created this infographic on determining if a source is scholarly using the Recruiting Strategy template. The basic layout is the same but text fields have been edited and icons have been changed/added.

discounted price for educators, to enjoy high-resolution, PDF downloads and all 400+ templates. With either the free or paid account, Piktochart is a useful tool for librarians to engage today’s library patrons who want quick access to visually appealing information (Maudlin 110).

#### Canva (canva.com) – Images 3 (Instagram post) & 4 (Facebook post)

Canva’s layout is similar to Piktochart, but the site offers an even more abundant collection of content types to choose from

such as posters, presentations, brochures, flyers, banners, and infographics. What sets Canva apart from Piktochart, though, is the site’s usefulness in creating social media posts. Social media is a popular avenue for marketing library services and fostering engaging relationships with library patrons (Burkhardt 10), most of whom use some form of social media (Perrin). Canva offers sleek design templates for sharing content specifically formatted for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, or Pinterest. Like Piktochart, users can choose a template or start designing from scratch by dragging and dropping photos, shapes,





Image 3 (Canva Instagram post) – I don’t post on my library’s social media accounts, but I created this example of an Instagram post promoting research appointments in Canva using one of the social media templates.

and lines into the design area. Canva has over one million of these drag-and-drop elements and more than 8000 templates. Not all of these elements and templates are free but unlike Piktochart, Canva allows users with a free subscription to access paid content for \$1 per element or template. For those who are new to design or want to improve their skills, Canva’s blog, [designschool.canva.com](https://designschool.canva.com), offers freely accessible interactive tutorials, tips, and articles on design. While Canva is great for sharing content on the web via social media, it does not provide users with a code to embed content in a webpage. Marketed as a design tool for teams, Canva’s paid plan allows collaboration from fifty team members and the option to set up a brand kit: color palettes for the library’s brand, custom brand fonts, and quick access to library logos. As the rate of social media use continues to rise (Perrin), librarians taking advantage of this powerful form of communication can use Canva to stand out.

***Lucidpress (lucidpress.com) – Images 5 (Publisher handout) & 6 (Lucidpress handout)***

From instruction sessions to faculty meetings to marketing events, handouts are often a necessary part of distributing library information. A desktop publishing tool like Microsoft Publisher has the capability to create professional, eye-catching handouts and is more user-friendly and less expensive than similar publishing software like Adobe InDesign. However, for libraries that do not have access to the full Microsoft Office suite, Lucidpress is a free alternative to desktop publishing that offers many of the same design options as Publisher. The Lucidpress site does not look as clean as Piktochart or Canva, but it’s simple to use, especially for those who have experience with Office products. On the left side of the design area, users



Image 4 (Facebook post) – Another example of a social media post, this one for Facebook and detailing the library’s holiday hours, that I created using a Canva template. Each of these designs took only about 15 minutes.

will find drag and drop elements similar to those in Piktochart and Canva, while the right side is similar to the Office ribbon with editing options for text, shapes, and layout. The most impressive feature of Lucidpress is its integration with Google Drive, which allows users to keep all of their documents in one place to share and edit collaboratively in real time. Content created with the free subscription looks great online, but a paid subscription is required to download at print quality. The Basic paid subscription allows users to generate print-quality PDFs and access the premium template library. Even with the free subscription, users have access to a wide variety of templates for content types like posters, magazines, and social media posts that go well beyond the scope of Publisher.

**GRAPHIC DESIGN INSPIRATION & BEST PRACTICES**

The abundance of templates available when using these online tools makes it possible for anyone to create visually appealing content, but it is important for librarians as designers to seek inspiration outside of the tools they use regularly. The free templates available are limited and do not always provide the best means of conveying information. Even the most creative professional designers continually seek inspiration (Ruiz 41) and doing so will help librarians keep their designs fresh. Browsing templates from other online graphic design tools like Venngage, Easel.ly, and Snappa can provide inspiration, as can content sharing sites like Pinterest. Librarian Design Share is a blog community where librarians from all library types share their designs, from public library displays and posters to academic library infographics and instructional materials. Users can browse by design type or software type and share their own finished designs, or ask for feedback on works-in-progress.

# LIBRARY SERVICES FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

**Research Librarians By Subject Specialty**

Limit by Specialty -

- Anthropology & Archaeology
- Art
- Biology
- Business
- Chemistry
- Classical & Modern Languages
- Communications
- Criminal Justice
- Dentistry
- Education
- Endnote (Citation Management)
- Engineering & Technology
- English
- Film
- Geosciences
- Government Resources
- Health Sciences
- History

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**Research Consultations**  
Meet with a librarian individually or with a small group for research consultations



**Information Literacy Instruction**  
Information resources and active learning tailored to your course's research assignment



**Citation Management Software Instruction**  
Need to organize your citations? We hold classes once a month on EndNote

**Biology 104 Lab Online Library Module**  
Critical Evaluation of Scientific Information

Page: Module | Brochures | Activity | Info | Evaluate | Sources | Activity | Review

**Module Overview**

Help! Biology 104 students! This module is designed to help you critically evaluate scientific information. We will use a question as an example throughout the module: Does the evidence support the claim that the MMR vaccine causes autism?

**How to Navigate through the Module**

Use the section headings (e.g., Intro) at the top of the page; previous page links at the bottom of each page; related resources section to view the recommended computer device content in the module.

**Learning Outcomes**

**Blackboard-Embedded Online Modules**  
Engaging modules designed to teach course content that you want students to interact with in depth

**Political Science Guide : Find Articles**

Find Articles | Primary Sources | Data & Statistics | Books

**Recommended databases**

- Congressional Universe [UL](#)
- CQ Researcher [UL](#)
- PAIS Index [UL](#)
- Political Science Abstracts [UL](#)

**Custom Library Research Guides**  
Tailored to your course's research assignments for your students' research needs



**Collection Development**  
Collection concerns? Contact us for questions and requests regarding the Political Science collection at Ekstrom

## Contact Information

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Amber Ballinger, Online Learning & Digital Media Librarian  
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## Political Science Examples

Dave Buckley's Political Research guide:  
<http://louisville.libguides.com/POLS390>

Laura Moyer's American Constitutional Law guide:  
<http://louisville.libguides.com/moyer313>

For more information: Research Assistance & Instruction website—<http://uofl.me/libs-research>

Image 5 (Publisher handout) – I created this handout in Publisher for library liaisons in my department to quickly edit and distribute at faculty meetings.



# LIBRARY SERVICES FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

**Research Librarians By Subject Specialty:**

**Library Specialty:**

- Architecture & Technology
- Art
- Business
- Chemical
- Classical & Modern
- Computer Science
- Criminal Justice
- Dentistry
- Education
- Engineering & Technology
- Environmental Science
- Health Sciences
- History
- Law
- Life Sciences
- Medicine
- Music
- Nursing
- Physical Sciences
- Social Sciences
- The Arts
- Veterinary Medicine

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## Research Consultations

Meet with a librarian individually or with a small group for research consultations



## Information Literacy Instruction

Information resources and active learning tailored to your course's research assignment

**EN**

**Citation Management Software Instruction**

Need to organize your citations? We hold classes once a month on EndNote

**Biology 104 Lab Online Library Module**  
Critical Evaluation of Scientific Information

**Module Overview**

This module is designed to help you develop the skills you need to evaluate scientific information. It includes a series of interactive activities that will help you understand the scientific process and how to evaluate the credibility of scientific information.

**Learning Outcomes**

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Identify the components of a scientific argument.
- Evaluate the credibility of scientific information.
- Apply critical thinking skills to scientific information.

## Blackboard-Embedded Online Modules

Engaging modules designed to teach course content that you want students to interact with in depth

**Political Science Guide : Find Articles**

**Find Articles** | Primary Sources | Data & Statistics | Home

**Recommended databases**

- Congressional Universe
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Image 6 (Lucidpress handout) – I replicated the faculty handout using Lucidpress, and the tool allowed me to create a design almost identical to the one created in Publisher.

In addition to seeking inspiration, librarians who regularly create graphic design content can benefit from familiarizing themselves with the basics of best practices for graphic design. Books like *Graphic Design for Nondesigners* and *The Non-Designer's Design Book* outline best practices for those with little to no design experience, while Miguel Ruiz's article, "Graphic Design in Libraries: A Conceptual Process," offers tips on the design process specifically for librarians. Ruiz emphasizes key concepts of design like having a clear message, using sans-serif font, and developing consistency, while also outlining the basic design process and encouraging librarians to develop a process that works for them. For a brief, informal overview of best practices, librarians can look to Christopher Gimmer's blog post "The 17 Graphic Design Tips All Non-Designers Need to

Know" for practical tips on choosing fonts and colors and using white space.

Librarians have access to a wide array of free, online tools for creating promotional and instructional content that communicates with library patrons and represents the library's services to the community. With graphic design basics in mind, librarians can use these tools to create visually appealing materials that send the right message to patrons and encourage them to utilize the variety of resources the library has to offer.

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