



Solve the digital divide with one neat trick!

(okay, maybe three tricks...)

<librarian.net/talks/nhla16>

Hi thanks for having me, you can see cites to my talk as well as the slides themselves at this URL. This talk starts out a little rambly and then gets very concrete.

0

Front matter

How this talk & ideas came to be

I know it can sound a little woo but I find that "positive self talk" is actually one of my most useful digital divide strategies. Offering positive options and the only thing you're allowed to say negative things about is the technology.

one trick

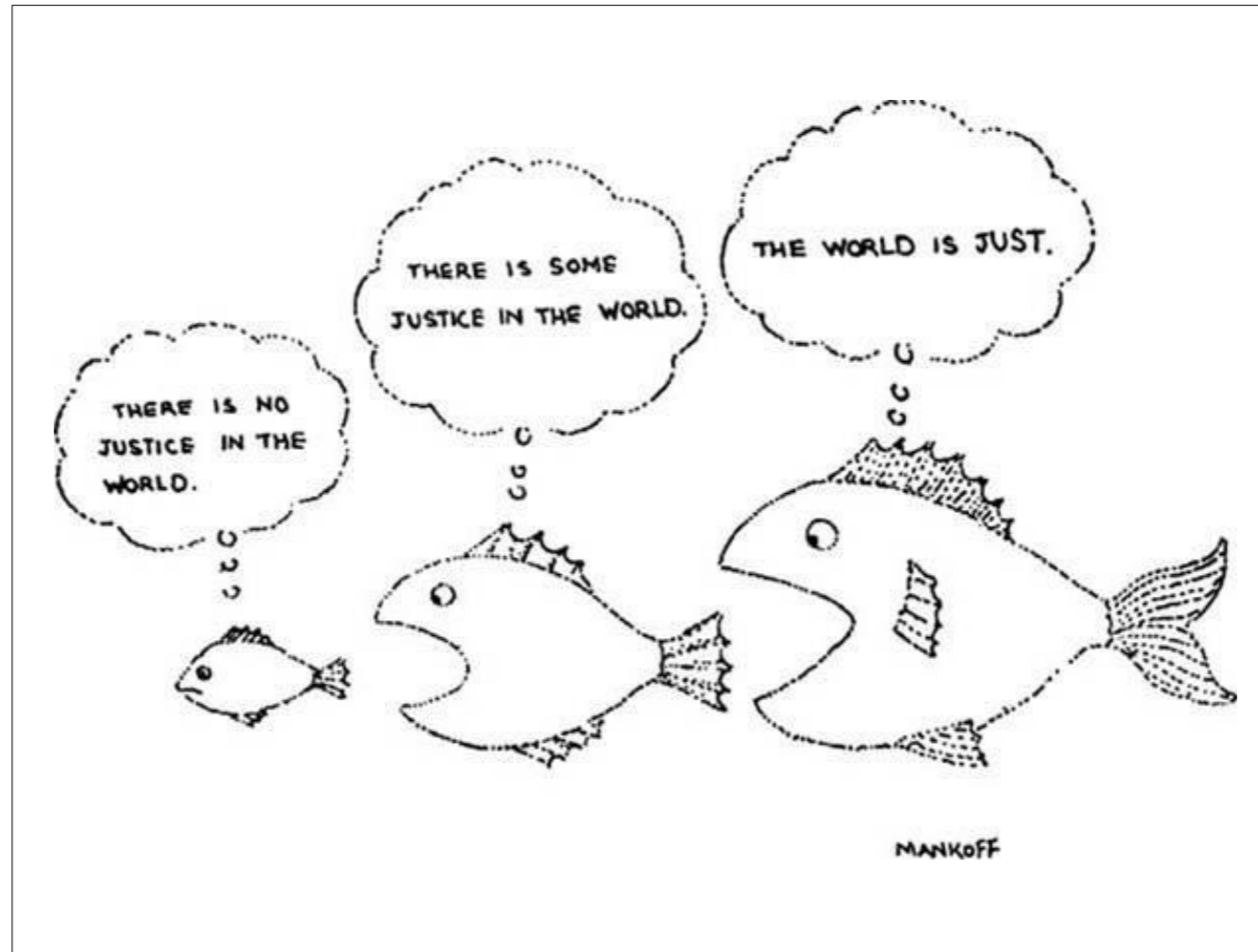
How to help someone use a computer.

Computer people are generally fine human beings, but nonetheless they do a lot of inadvertent harm in the ways they "help" other people with their computer problems. Now that we're trying to get everyone on the net, I thought it might be helpful to write down in one place everything I've been taught about how to help people use computers.

First you have to tell yourself some things:


- * Nobody is born knowing this stuff.
- * You've forgotten what it's like to be a beginner.
- * If it's not obvious to them, it's not obvious.

This is a document written by Phil Agre, a computer science professor. Twenty years ago. It's still some of the best advice out there. If I was giving this talk in five minutes, all I'd do is read you this document. Librarians can mitigate this.



People in tech, or business generally, can sometimes get to a point where they believe in a "just world" fallacy. That is, if people have hardships like poverty or grappling with sexism or racism, there is a sense in which it is a comfort to believe that maybe those people DID something to get the negative treatment they are getting. The reason this is comforting is because if you can blame the person, you can remove your own responsibility for addressing the problem. We see this with the digital divide. If you can blame people for not getting online or learning to use computers, you can remove your own responsibility for helping. Librarians have this problem less than the general population and *significantly* less than people who work in technology.

title origin story...



The screenshot shows a Wikipedia article page. At the top left is the Wikipedia logo and the text "WIKIPEDIA The Free Encyclopedia". Below this are several navigation links: "Main page", "Contents", "Featured content", "Current events", "Random article", "Donate to Wikipedia", and "Wikipedia store". At the top right, there is a user profile for "Jessamyn" with icons for notifications and a mobile device, followed by links for "Talk", "Sandbox", "Preferences", "Beta", "Watchlist", "Contributions", and "Log out". Below the user information is a navigation bar with "Article" and "Talk" tabs, and a "Read" section with "Edit", "View history", a star icon, and a "More" dropdown menu. To the right of this is a search box labeled "Search Wikipedia" with a magnifying glass icon. The main content area has the title "One weird trick advertisements" in a large, bold, serif font. Below the title is the text "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The article text begins with "One weird trick, or 1 weird old tip, or one weird old trick and other variants are a form of [clickbait](#) advertising that has been ubiquitous on the internet since around the late 2000s. The formula used in the advertisements was first applied to [weight loss](#) products but has since been extended to cures for problems including [hair loss](#) and [diabetes](#).^{[1][2][3]} In 2011 the [Federal Trade Commission](#) launched legal action against the promoters of the advertisements, who they said had conned millions of people out of their money.^{[4][5]}

The title for this talk comes from old internet scams. I mean they're not really scams but they're basically advertisements posing as news articles. This is where the term "clickbait" comes from, you'd recognize them if you saw them. And the reason I include them is because you read these headlines and you'd believe that ALL of society's ills can be solved with one neat trick. To be fair, I learned better ways to eat cupcakes and fold fitted sheets this way, but realistically, we're not one neat trick away from solving the digital divide.



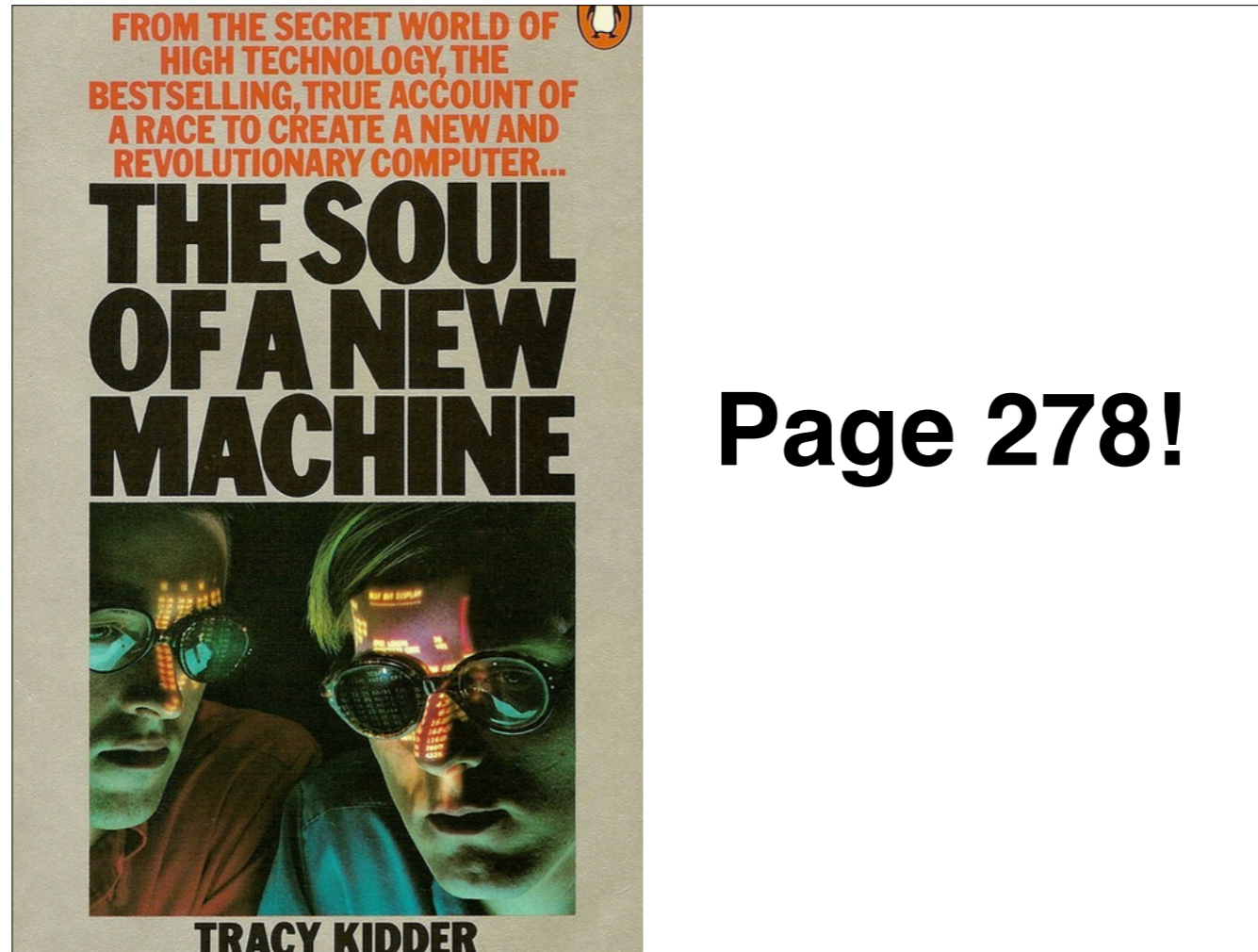
And I have a confession to make. I sort of did a clickbaity thing with the "digital natives" note in my talk description. Because while I think kids who have grown up with computers have a different idea of "this is normal" concerning technology, that doesn't actually mean that they have the ingrained "deep knowledge" to make use of it as more than a passive entertainment device, absent some good guidance, instruction and stewardship.

1

Technology is now personal

We no longer have the choice to not "get involved" with people and their technological decisions

so it used to be this stuff was optional. You could help someone log in to a dating site but then you just wandered off and let them do their own thing. Now they're worried they have viruses, they need to vote or get health care, etc. The library is the place people who need help get help, sometimes the only place.



So I'll talk a little bit about my background but I should mention this. Librarians like books. This is one which was about building a computer in 1980. It won a Pulitzer. Tracy Kidder just came out with a new book this year called A Truck Full of Money, subtitle One Man's Quest to Recover from Great Success. I mention this because I'm in this book, as an eleven year old on page 278. My dad "did computers" in the 70s 80s and 90s so I'm unusual for my generation in that I grew up with as much technology as there was at the time. I describe myself as a second generation technologist. For me computers feel like video games. More on that in a bit.

my origin story...



Open Library

I help people borrow free ebooks via the Internet Archive



RTCC

I do a Drop-In Time for digitally divided folks in Central Vermont



UH/VTC

I teach college, graduate school, write for Computers in Libraries magazine and do public speaking like this.

I work mainly in or with public libraries but I think these ideas have wider applicability. And I mention all these disparate jobs because I think backgrounds in all of them help me understand the bigger picture. I'll outline what those are. You know how people say the personal is political? (I PROMISE not to talk about politics today) I think how we manage our own personal tech lives can affect how we interact with people who are learning.

pieces of the puzzle



Open Library

I learn about how tech people think about the digital divide and user experience.



RTCC

I learn what digitally divided people care about and how they operate.



UH/VTC

I interact with courseware and online instruction and see how non-tech people try to solve problems with tech.

I'll break these down even more.... (read slides) People are not just needing technology to find a book to read or a form for the IRS, they are using it to manage their LIVES. And that becomes the latest thing for us to manage. Help people live, because living in 2016 includes technology.

Open Library is yours to borrow, read & build.

Books to Read The World's classic literature at your fingertips. Over [1,000,000 free ebook titles](#) available.

Books to Borrow Here's a sample of recently returned books from the [eBook lending library](#).

So Open Library is this cool project of the Internet Archive, the people who brought you the Wayback Machine. We lend ebooks worldwide for free. I am the only librarian on the project and I work part time. Do people here know the Internet Archive? How many consider them a library? They consider themselves a library, but at the same time, don't see the usefulness in distinguishing a book's "work" from a book's "edition." They do no user testing, preferring their own "this is what the users want" approach. It's an uphill battle.



Here are two women who come to computer drop-in time. This used to be me helping people get email accounts and learn to use a mouse. Now people have more complex problems, but not necessarily a better skillset for dealing with them. Diane wants to print business cards. She is cheap and uses Open Office. She wants to do two things: print mailing labels and make business cards. She is used to doing this with Word. It's different in OO. I Googled how to do it and found a howto page that explained it but basically said "The procedure is horrible for non-technical users." Well then. This is Wendy, she upgraded her iPad and Duolingo didn't work anymore and we troubleshooted that. Fixed it!

		SLO 1				SLO 2					SLO 3				SLO 4			SLO 5					
Assignments		Performance level		1a	1b	1c	1d	2a	2b	2c	2d	2e	3a	3b	3c	3d	4a	4b	4c	5a	5b	5c	
id	name	score	level																				
1	Final	4	exceeding			6	8				8	4								6	9		
		3	meeting			5	4				4	8								4	3		
		2	approaching			1	0				0	0									2	0	
		1	not meeting			0	0				0	0									0	0	
2	Discussions	4	exceeding			8	3					10					10			7	9		
		3	meeting			4	7					2					2			5	3		
		2	approaching			0	2					0					0			0	0		
		1	not meeting			0	0					0					0			0	0		
3	Responses	4	exceeding			3											12			12			
		3	meeting			8											0			0			
		2	approaching			1											0			0			
		1	not meeting			0											0			0			
4	Infographic		exceeding			4					6			4			8	8					
			meeting			5					4			6			2	4					
			approaching			1					2			2			2	2					
			not meeting			2					0			0			0	0					
5	Bibliography		exceeding											8							6		
			meeting											4							6		
			approaching											2							0		
			not meeting											0							0		
6	Statistics		exceeding							5	7			8				9					
			meeting							5	5			3				3					
			approaching							2	2			1				0					
			not meeting							0	0			0				0					
7	Profile		exceeding							6	9										8		
			meeting							4	3										4		
			approaching							2	0										0		
			not meeting							0	0										0		

And then there's teaching. I loved UH very much but being an adjunct (and distance) is always a challenge. After I taught for six weeks and did my grading, I had to fill out this matrix (in Excel) talking about how many students (I had 12) were performing for all SLOs (strategic learning objectives) for each assignment. With 12 students, seven assignments and nine SLOs that was... quite a bit of assessment. And I am ok not great with Excel but I can tell you this was difficult for me, both in doing it but also in WANTING to do it.

2

What is the divide *now*?

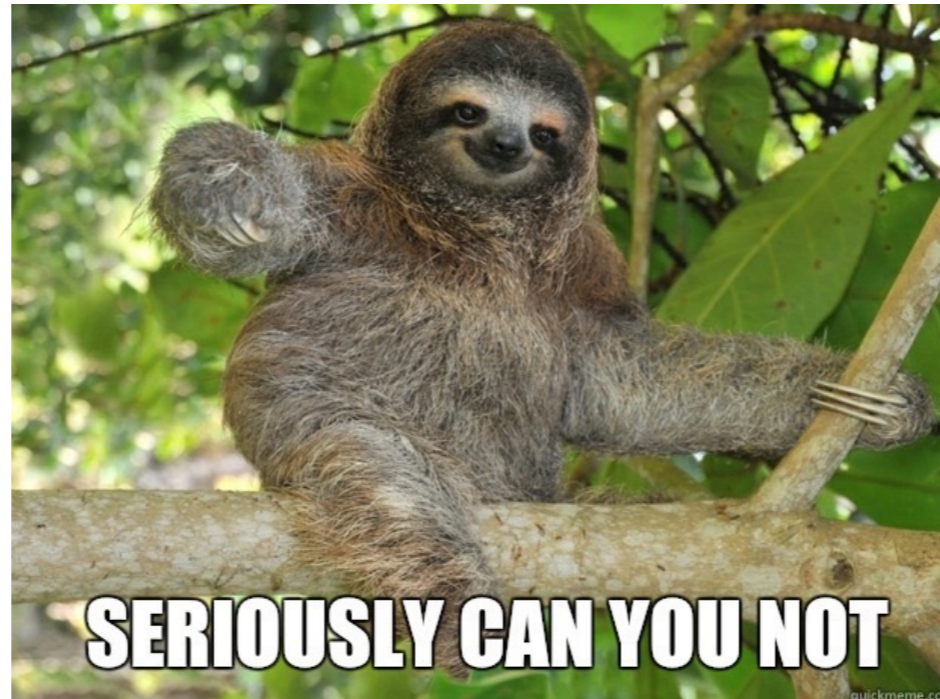
We can't "fix" it if we don't know what it is.

***Knowledge lives in
communities, not
individuals.***

- Phil Agre



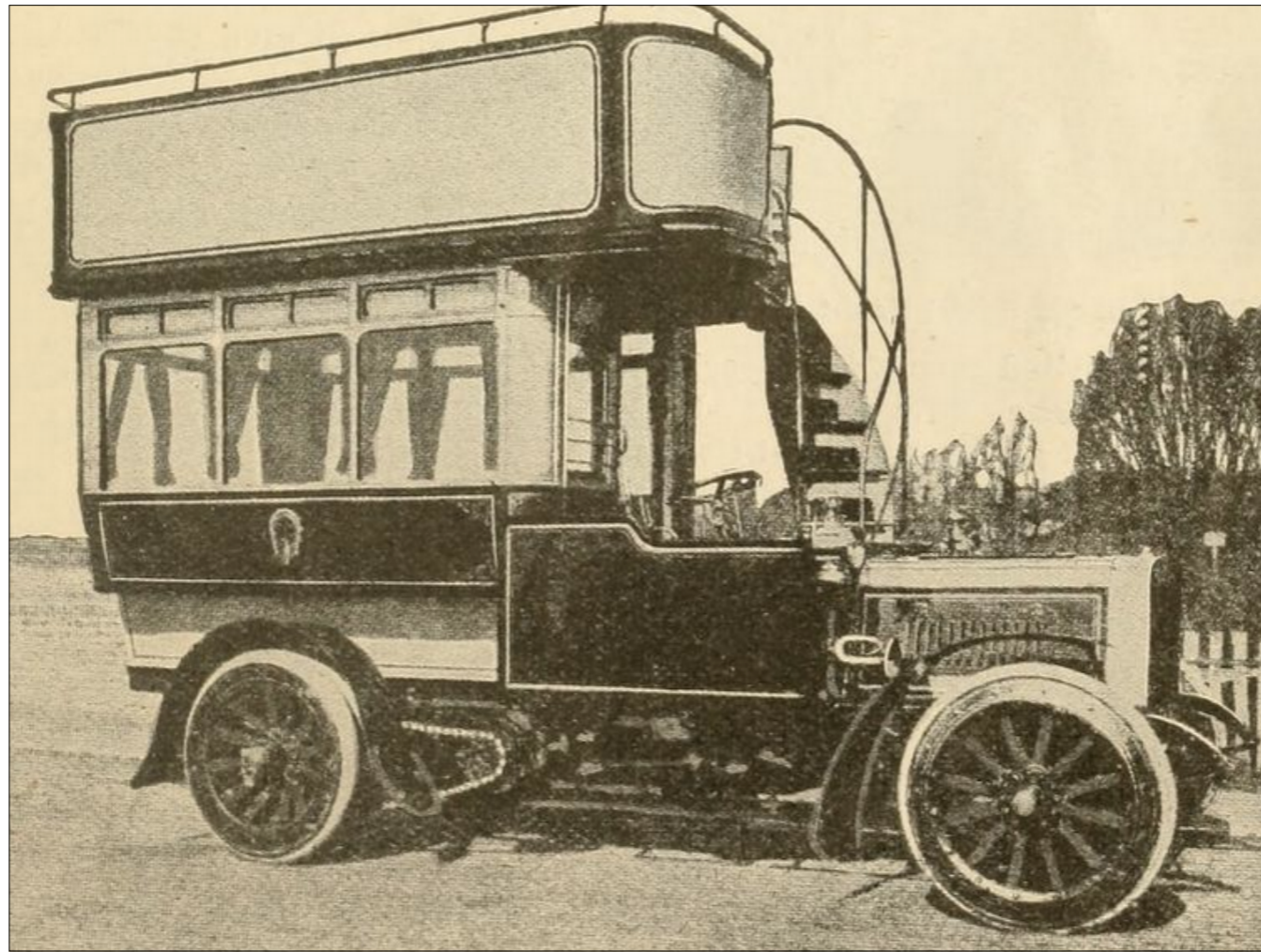
**When someone tells me
the digital divide is over.**



People like to be all "Oh hey aren't libraries so last century?" and I'm all "No, no way, not really at all, nope." But the problem has shifted as have the challenges that come along with those shifts. I'll outline a few key points here.



This is how we get internet in Vermont. This is people laying fiber in the woods in 2012. With draft horses. It's very evocative at a time when (again, see just world talk) talking about offline people is sometimes not. It helps get the point across. But let's also talk numbers.



My feeling about the digital divide is like this.... it's fine if you don't want to use a computer. But it's like not driving a car. The person who can't drive understands the realities of using public transportation or asking other people for rides. They understand the costs. This is not the same for people not using computers. The costs of remaining offline are hidden, or at least they are right up until your town floods and the only way to interact with FEMA is through a web page. Awkward. So part of what we do is we help "prime the pump" for people to get these skills before they desperately need them.

15%

15% of American adults do not use the internet at all.
Additionally, 9% of adults use the internet but not at home.

PewResearchCenter

Let's start here. This is a true fact. And what's weird is I've been doing variants on this talk for a decade and the number which was a little over 20% used to move and it doesn't anymore. Those 15% are staying put. So my question is ...

Really?

Don't they want to see their grandchildren, get cheap printer ink, send people endless selfies, and apply for health care?

No? No.

The question many people ask is this one.

Three digital divides



Financial

People couldn't afford computers or broadband.
Some still can't but libraries have filled that gap for most Americans.



Usability

Websites are hard to use and people have issues (cognitive and physical challenges) that make this harder than it needs to be.

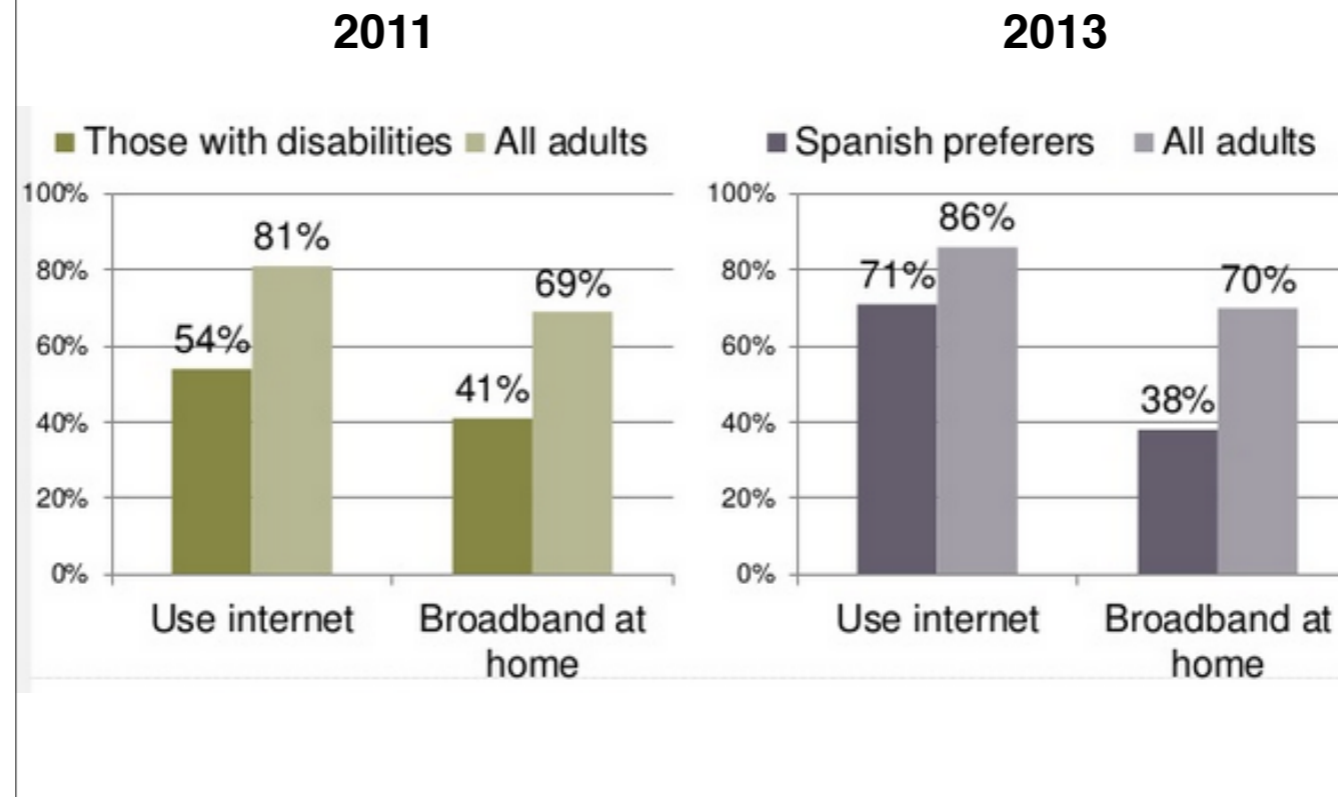


Empowerment

People don't "see themselves" in online spaces and don't see it as a place where they belong.

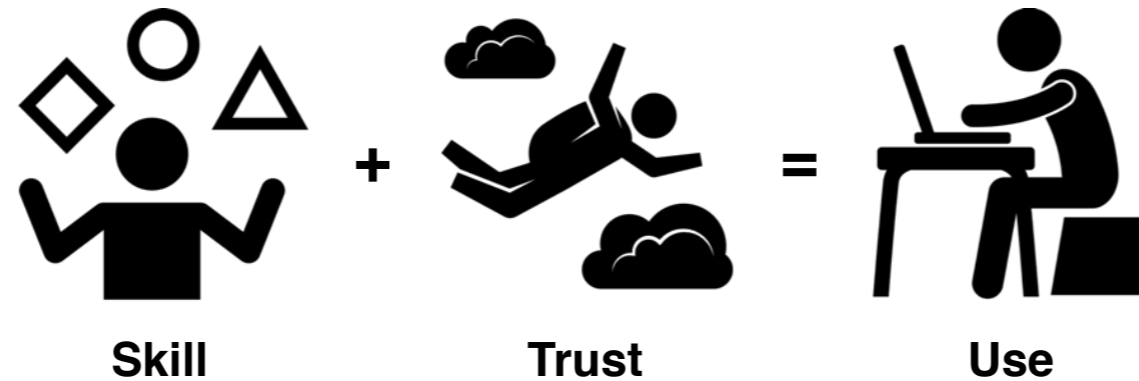
Really we are seeing three separate issues. The first one we've done a good job on. Yay us. The second one we're working on. Better websites. UX all the way. The third one is the challenge because ****inclusion is difficult in general**** and because some of **US** don't feel included already. It's hard to try to work on inclusion when you are feeling excluded yourself.

Who is left offline?



When we look at the numbers—the numbers barely anyone is counting because they don't like the story they tell—we realize that the people who are getting left behind are the people with all the other challenges - economic, education, mental, physical. And if we know this, isn't it our responsibility to make sure they can live the good life too? The hardest to serve have always been the hardest to serve, and they are society's responsibility.

Digital readiness



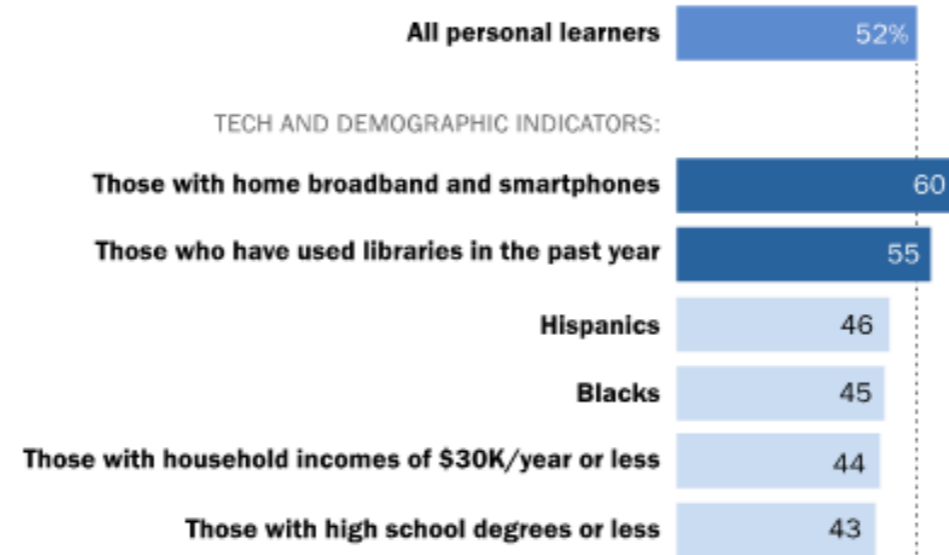
*digital readiness: whether people have the **skills** to use information technology, as well as the **digital literacy tools** to help people determine whether the online information they access is trustworthy.*

But even that is shifting. So yes we still need to worry about who isn't online yet, but there's another indicator that matters and is maybe more important. Are people PRIMED TO LEARN? With lots of learning opportunities shifting to online spaces, people need digital readiness to take advantage of other opportunities. We should understand this issue.

library usage as indicator

Library users and the highly wired are more likely to use the internet in personal learning

% of personal learners who use the internet for learning among ...

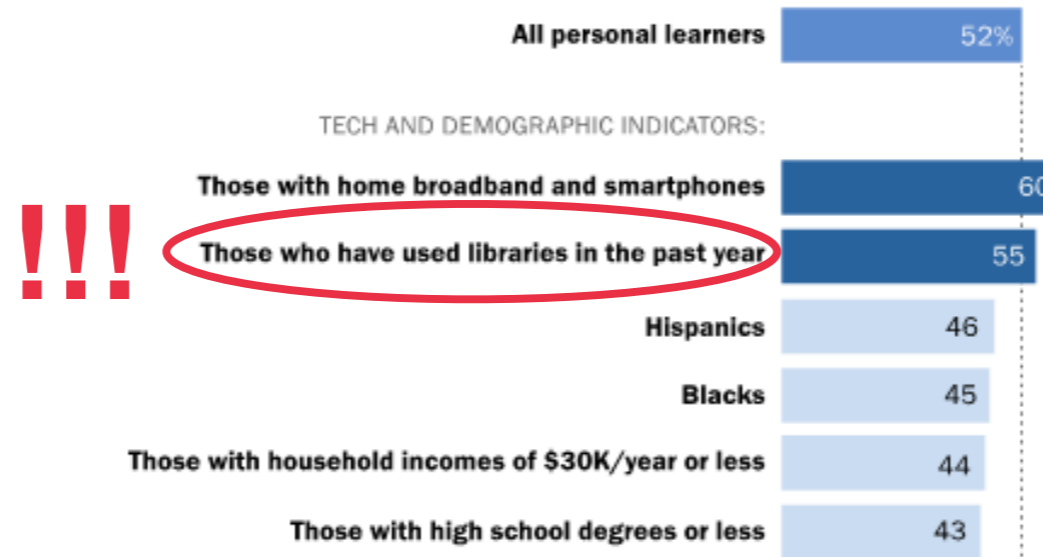


Turns out people who use the library are already more likely to be digitally ready. Cause/effect thing.

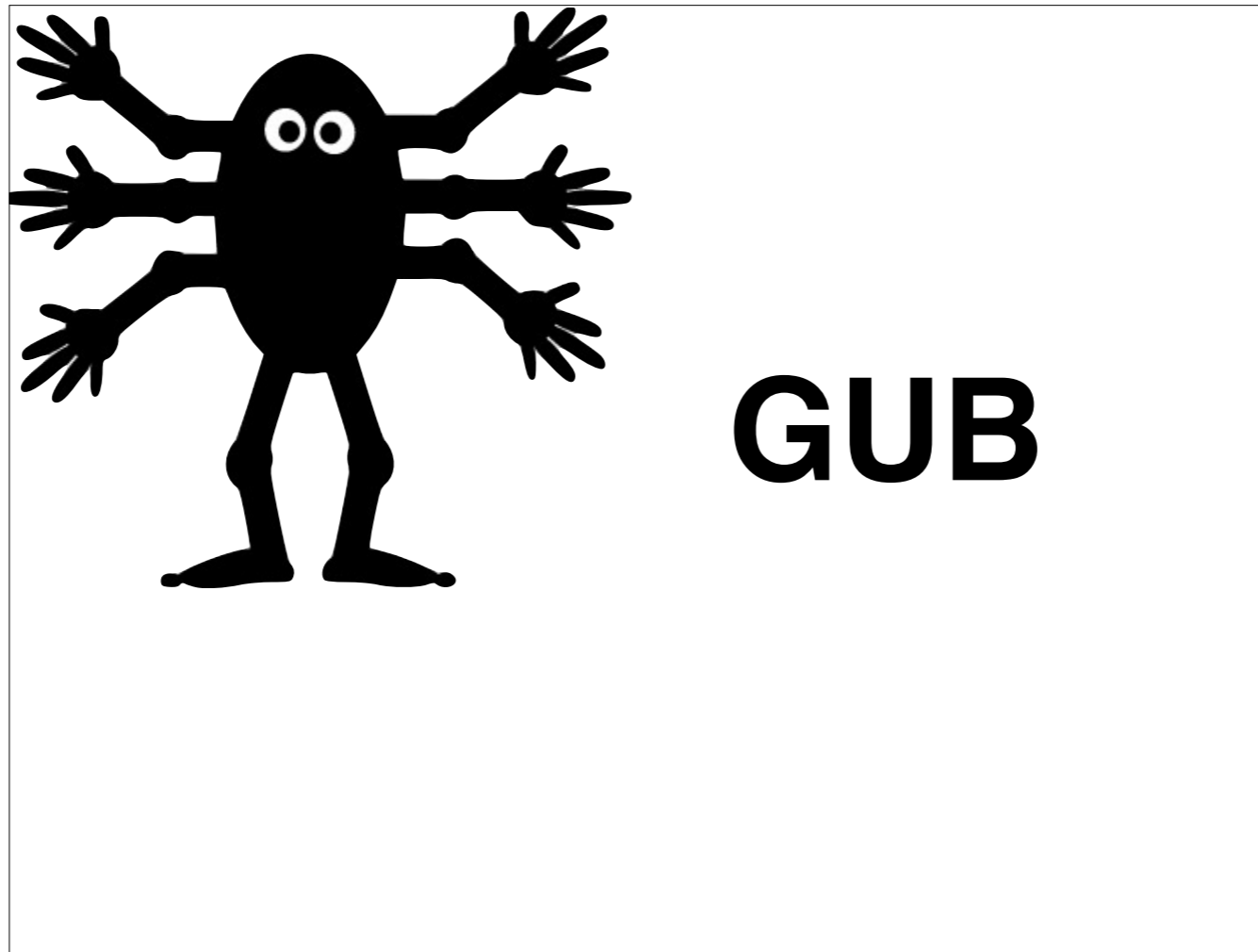
library usage as indicator

Library users and the highly wired are more likely to use the internet in personal learning

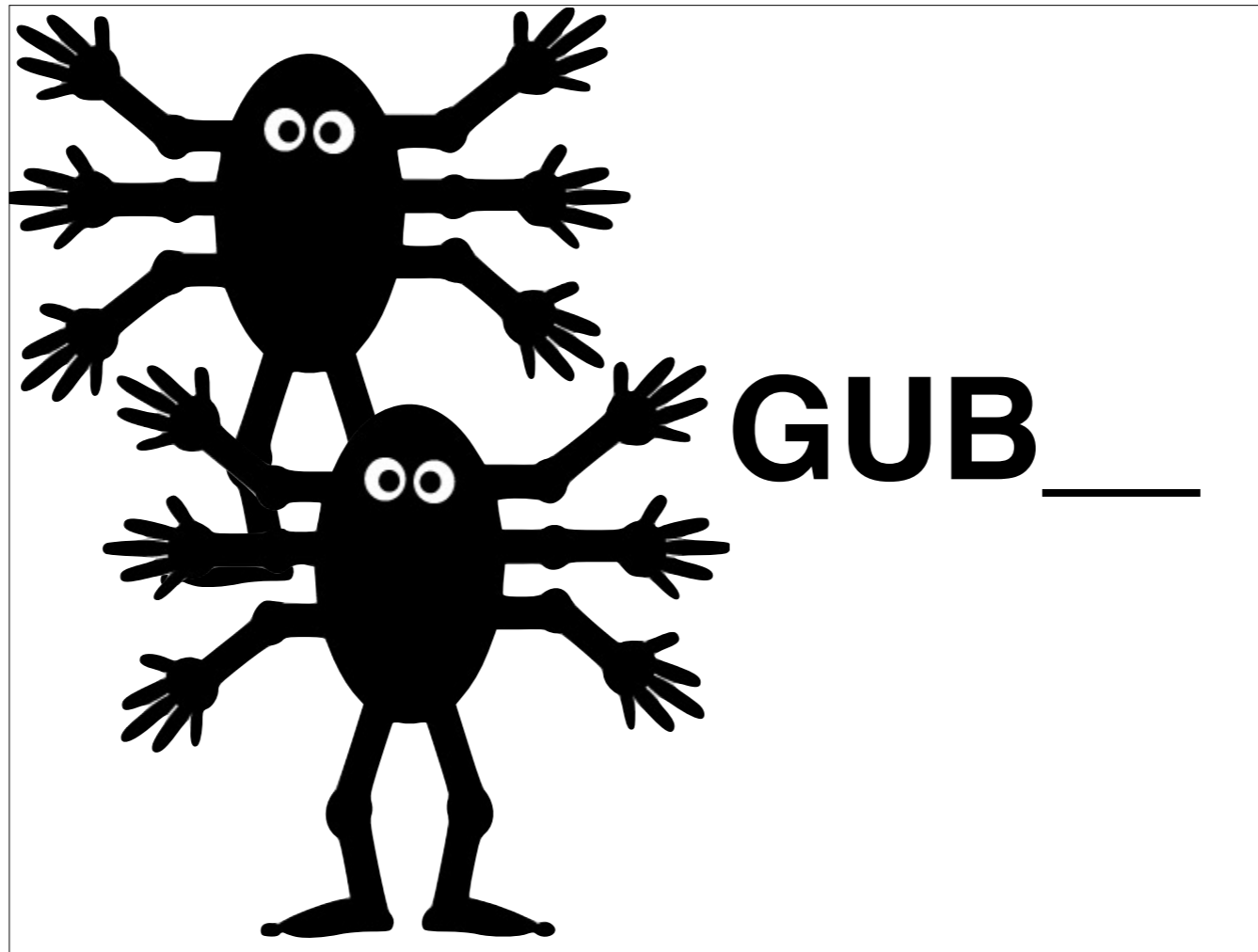
% of personal learners who use the internet for learning among ...

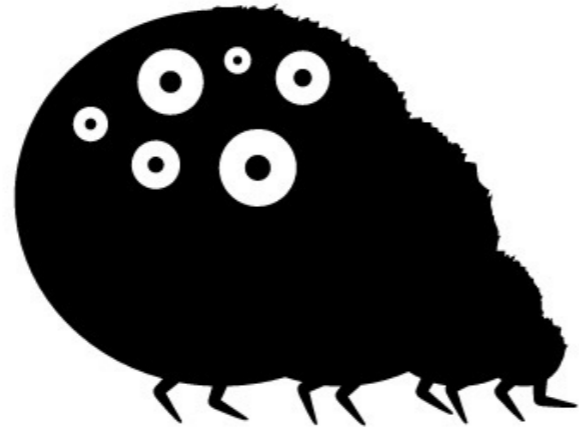


Turns out people who use the library are already more likely to be digitally ready. Cause/effect thing.



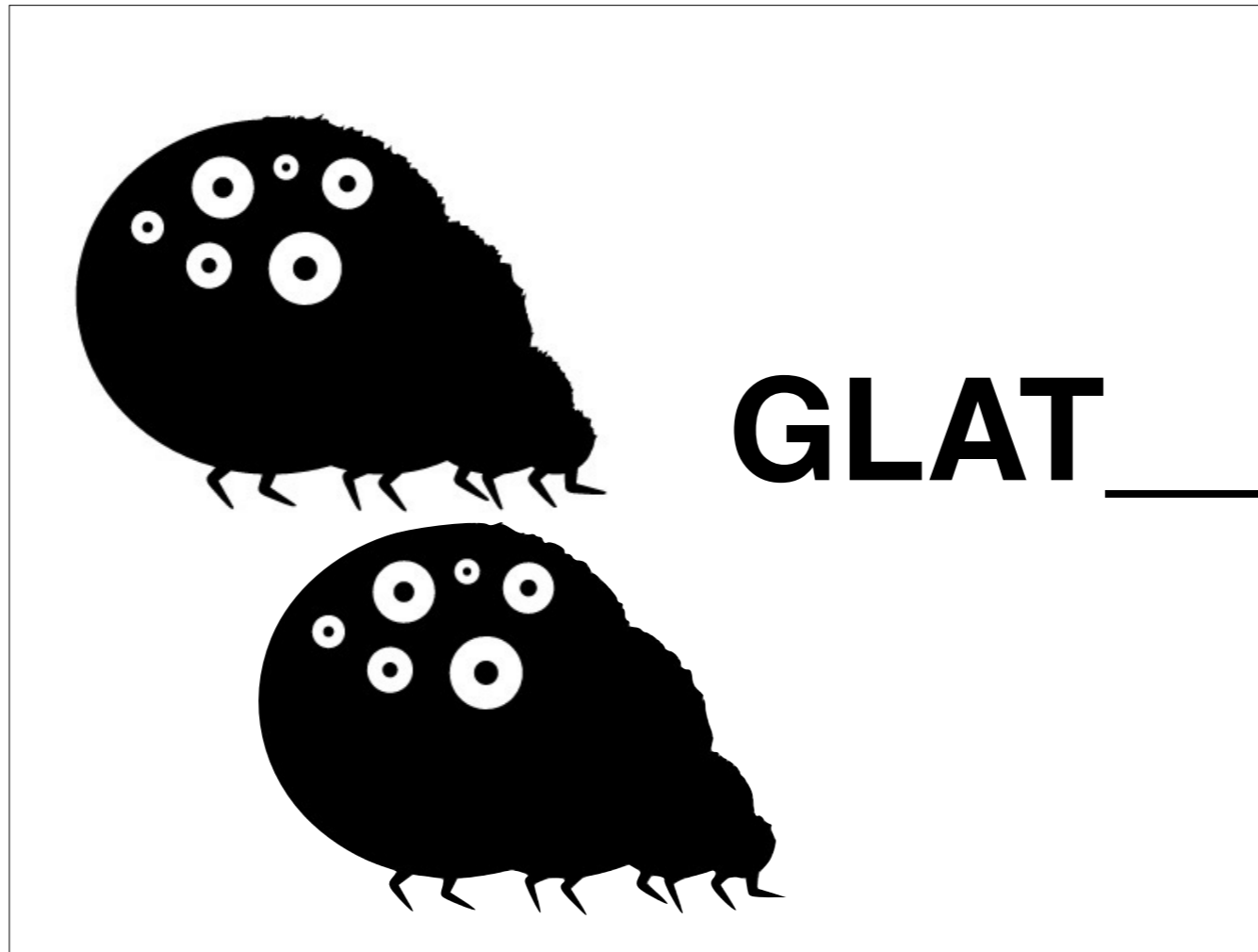
So I think about things we know innately. My undergrad is in linguistics and this is a thing we talk about. So like you have a nonsense word right? And yet still you know how to pluralize it.



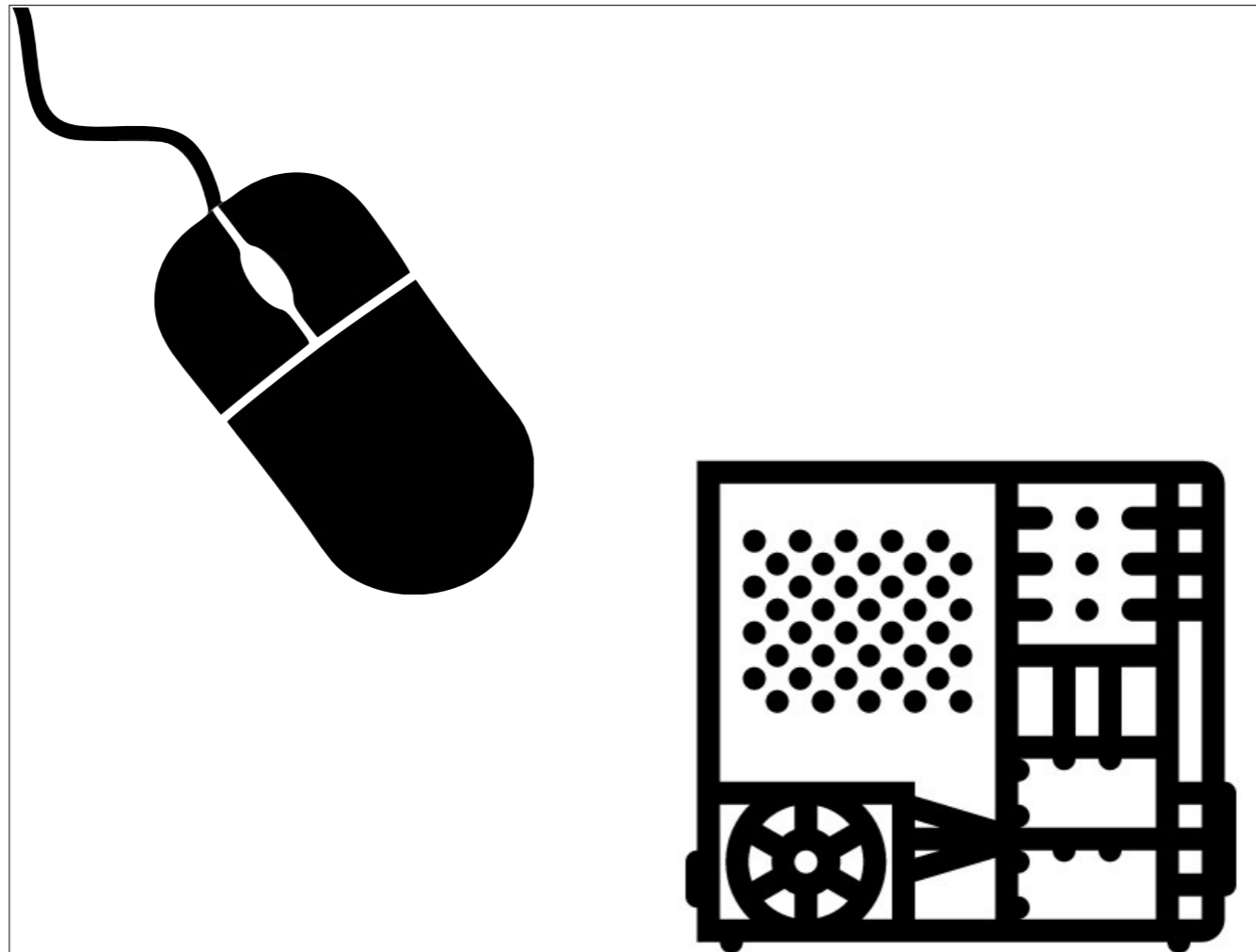


GLAT

Here's a different word.



And two of them is...? How do we know one has an S sound and one has a Z sound?



That kind of native knowledge about language can, for some people, transfer to whatever their other interests are. For me it's technology, I just know how to ... puzzle things out. People assume I know things like you'd know a language but it's really about having the toolkit (and an understanding of the people who put them together) to troubleshoot. I'll outline some of what's involved with that.

10,000

Amount of "deliberate practice" it takes
to become an expert

Malcolm Gladwell in Outliers

Everyone in your community has something they are an expert in. Moose hunting. Tractor repair. Baseball statistics. Part of this process is building self-esteem that if they can learn a thing, they can learn another thing.

3

How do we help?

People get ready. Let's talk about the problem.

And a lot of it, more than you would think, is about how you say what you say.

Whenever they start to blame themselves, respond by blaming the computer... in a calm, authoritative tone of voice. If you need to show off, show off your ability to criticize bad design.

- Phil Agre



32

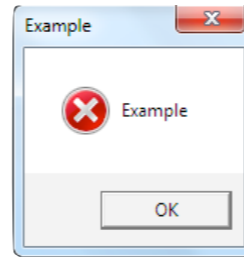
So a lot of this is how we communicate the messages surrounding technology. And how you team up WITH the user and AGAINST the computer. Empathize.

Language upgrades



Sucks

Things are merely suboptimal, for now.



Computer hates me

"The computer is a dumb calculator who does what other people have programmed it to do"



I am stupid

"You are not a bad person; this is a bad website"

So I work on my language, and how I phrase things. A few examples. And this is not just with patrons this is with the public, with the media (who I speak to as often as possible, we seem to have a problem with promotion of our institutions and our values and suspicion of those who do this)

The words you use matter.



jessamyn west
@jessamyn

US libraries: 146 million unique visitors in the last year. PBS says "People aren't using them." #mathishard [pbs.org/newshour/rundo](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundo) ...



People love public libraries, but they aren't using them

Most people say public libraries provide communities with essential resources for literacy and education, but the number of people who actually take advantage of ...

This is from a while ago but I think it's still useful. There was a Pew report. PBS ran a story. Look at the way PBS CHOSE to spin this. Really PBS? I thought we were friends...

"Why you need a bazillion character password."



People have a lot of things that they are upset about, I try to explain without over-explanining, why some things are like this.

"Why you don't recycle passwords."



Yahoo blames "state sponsored" data hackers for their recent hack, but either way they lost 500,000,000 passwords

"Why you can't copy that DVD."



A little bit of this, I will admit, is in what I call the the Blame the Big City category. I mean we have the MPAA and RIAA and APA to thank for DRM and all those threats you have to sit through before you watch a DVD. Hollywood! There's a subtlety in being able to tell someone that a thing is technically possible but practically speaking illegal.

"Why you have another update."

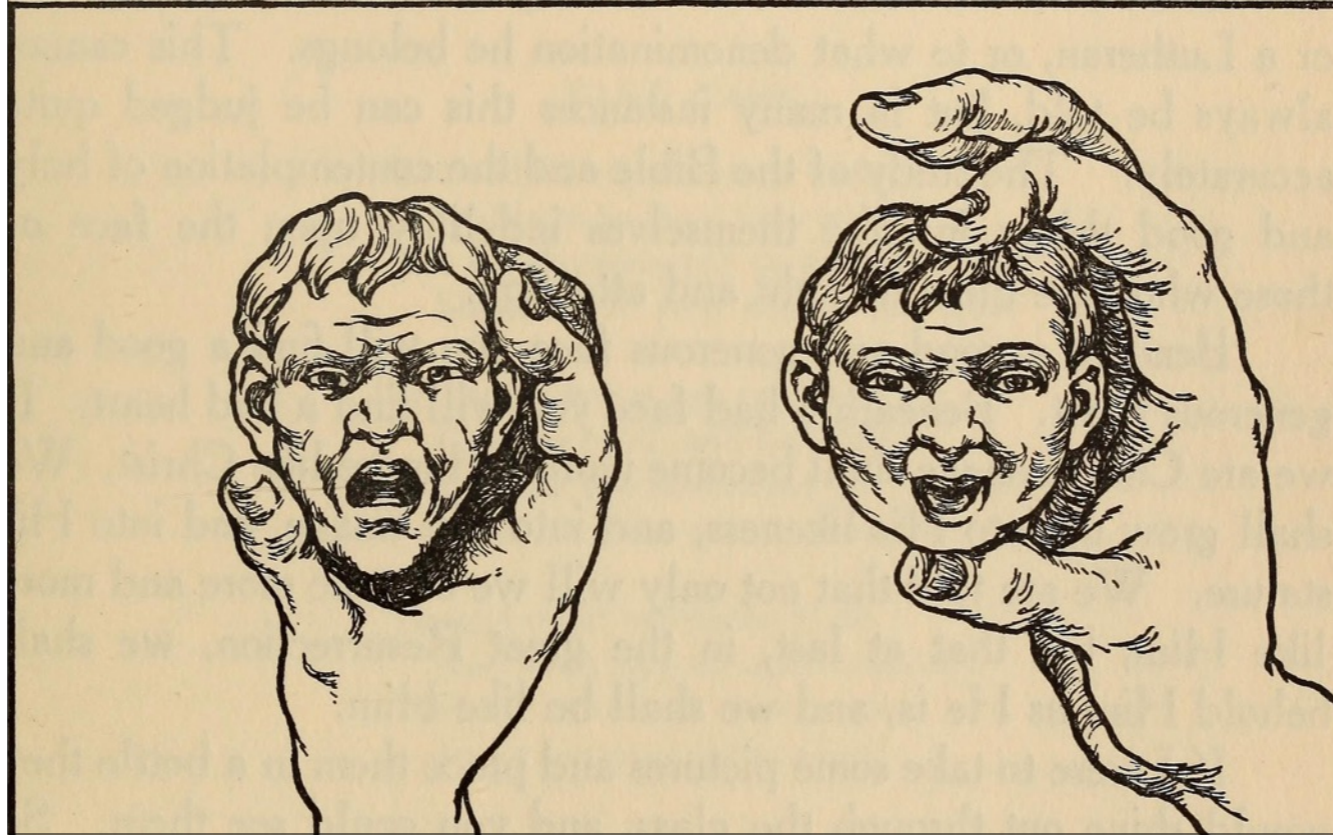


I taught an iPad class in the spring and one day we had class and I told everyone "Hey we're going to learn about software updates because you all have updates to do..." They looked at me like I was a magician but sure enough they did. Why? Because the Apple Watch had just come out. Explaining the Apple Watch to my neighbors is a bit like trying to explain Uber.... But in short it's Blame the Big City

Teaching to learn

- "What were you expecting would happen?"
- "Here's what you say to tech support."
- "I am going to Google the answer to that and send you a link."
- _____(your answer here)_____

Reframing the narrative.




I don't want to be all "turn that frown upside down" but just finding better ways to talk about tech that aren't all as if you were in a bad relationship with it can go a long way. Computer don't have issues, they don't hate you, they are big calculators that are only as good as the flawed humans who made them.

Attitude upgrades.




Put another way: You don't tell your patrons when you are fighting with your partner, why do you tell them when you are fighting with your computer? I can't think of a single time I have called an online support person (for anything, magazine subscriptions, health care, newspaper subscription) where some of our phone call did not involve blaming the computer.

public/private stances are OK

 **jessamyn west**
@jessamyn Follow


“Did Amazon Just Replace the Public Library?”
Spoiler alert: no. But thanks for making so many librarians laugh.
theatlantic.com/entertainment/...

9:20 PM - 3 Nov 2015

 **The Atlantic**

Amazon's New Seattle Bookstore Feels Surprisingly Familiar

It's a place to sit. And read. And be part of the community. Where have we seen this before?



It's also important to have a narrative for your patrons and one, maybe a different one, for your professional peeps. Atlantic, did you just say that? We all had a good laugh here. I don't bother trying to explain this sort of weird stuff to patrons.

“

Yeah I know Twitter seems stupid when you read about it in the paper, but here's what I like about it.

- Me



Acknowledge their feelings. Share your own experiences. Illustrate using accessible examples.



Afterword.

One notch more capable. And so on.

And a lot of it, more than you would think, is about how you say what you say.

***Your primary goal is not
to solve their problem.
Your primary goal is to
help them become one
notch more capable of
solving their problem
on their own.***

- Phil Agre



45

We're not trying to fix people's computers, we're trying to fix their relationships with computers.

Internet



Because really, the internet for me is a lot of good things. It's people to talk to when my town is asleep. It's places to get free photos for my talks. It's a way to keep up with my professional development. It's where I can look for a book in a thousand libraries. Or where I go to work in my (California) Library.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.

Library Internet



And the library scene on the internet is sort of amazing. I loved just looking at every single amazing and earnest set of costumed librarians during halloween. I could have done it all day and then some. It's a nice place that we've helped to build and I'd really like it if it could be available for everyone.



A screenshot of a tweet from Greta Van Susteren (@greta). The tweet text reads: "Colleges should stop building vanity projects like huge libraries and billing students-full libraries are on our smartphones!" followed by a link to "twitter.com/yahoo/status/7...". The tweet was posted at 7:28 AM on October 31, 2016, and has 159 retweets and 503 likes. A "Follow" button is visible in the top right corner of the tweet card.

 **Greta Van Susteren** ✓
@greta Follow

Colleges should stop building vanity projects like huge libraries and billing students-full libraries are on our smartphones!
twitter.com/yahoo/status/7...

7:28 AM - 31 Oct 2016

← ↻ 159 ❤️ 503

... so that the next time someone gets up in your face (or in public) talking about why we need libraries when the internet has all the things, you'll be ready and up there with an informed and compassionate (or not) response.



jessamyn west ✓
@jessamyn

Follow

@greta This is a common misconception. The digital divide and disparity in digital readiness mean libraries are more important than ever.

11:43 AM - 31 Oct 2016

20 157



Jason Griffey ✓
@griffey

Follow

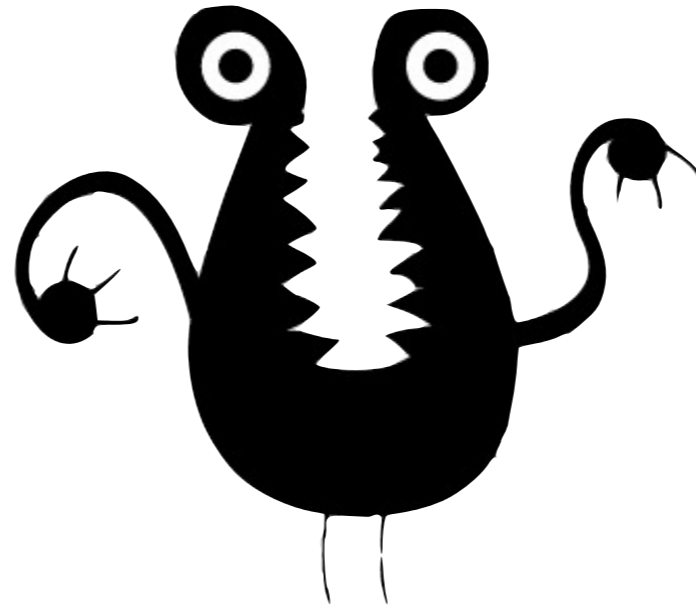
@greta @Yahoo A remarkably ignorant statement that shows you've not actually been in a library recently. Also you don't understand learning.

10:01 AM - 31 Oct 2016 · Tennessee, USA, United States

21 191



... so that the next time someone gets up in your face (or in public) talking about why we need libraries when the internet has all the things, you'll be ready and up there with an informed and compassionate (or not) response.

Thanks!



Jessamyn West

librarian.net/talks/nhla16
jessamyn@gmail.com

 facebook.com/jessamyn
 @jessamyn