Library Instruction Lite: When is 10-15 Minutes Enough?

Jeffrey M. Mortimore
Bennett College, NC, jmortimore@georgiasouthern.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gaintlit

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Information Literacy Commons

Recommended Citation
Library Instruction Lite: When Is 10-15 Minutes Enough?

Jeff Mortimore, Reference Librarian
Thomas F. Holgate Library
Bennett College
Greensboro, NC
Obligatory Statistics

- One of 11 HBCUs in N.C.
- 736 Undergraduate FTEs (AY10/11).
- High percentage of first-generation students.
- 114 library instruction sessions during AY 10/11.
- 1,300 session attendees.
- Average 60 reference transactions per semester week.
### Service Gains

- **Service gains since AY08/09:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>AY08/09</th>
<th>AY10/11</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>Rank among N.C. HBCUs per FTE*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction Sessions</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session Attendance</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Weekly Reference Transactions</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rankings based on dividing indicator by FTE per 2010-2011 UNC Statistical Abstract.*
Less Is More?

Why offer shorter, 10-15 minute instruction sessions?

For Faculty
• Vitiates the “we don’t have time” defense.
• Increases perception of session’s purpose & goal-directedness.
• Gateway to collaboration.

For Students
• Respects attention spans & reduces session “burnout.”
• Replicates research context & research preferences.

For Services
• With the right assignment, drives students to the reference desk.
• “Embeds” the librarian without interfering with library staffing.
“Library Instruction Lite”

Goals for short instruction sessions...

• 10-15 minute maximum instruction time,
• Hosted in classrooms with projection but without student workstations,
• Lecture focused on website navigation with keyword searches and item views in 2-3 resources,
• Pursuant to a discreet graded research task or scaffolded assignment.
“Library Instruction Lite”

Target courses for short instruction sessions...

Large freshman- and sophomore-level general education lecture courses with:

- Pre-existing research-writing components,
- Full curricula,
- Students of varied (and generally low) engagement, and
- Historically low participation in library instruction.
Test Case: HI 203

- African American history lecture course.
- Two sections per semester.
- +/- 100 freshmen and sophomores per year, the majority of whom are *not* history majors.
- Long-standing final research paper assignment, traditionally due at the end of the semester.
- No history of library instruction prior to Fall 2009.
Original Assignment:

“Research and write about any Civil Rights Hero or Heroine of your choice. In addition to introducing the reader to the major events, activities, and accomplishments of your hero or heroine’s life, your paper must clearly address the following points:

• Why do you consider this person your hero/heroine?
• What are some of the short-term consequences of your character’s heroic accomplishments?
• What do you consider to be his/her most enduring legacy?
• What is the relevance of his/her legacy to the on-going struggle of African Americans for racial justice and equality?”
Outcomes

• Last-minute research.
• Poor source quality.
• Poor use of sources.
• Rampant plagiarism.
• Poor to non-existent formatting.
• Poor to non-existent citations.
Revised Assignment

Exact same paper prompt, but...

- Multiple-stage portfolio project.
- Three-part scaffolding, including...
  - Preliminary bibliography (8 sources)
  - Annotated bibliography (6 sources)
  - Final paper (4 sources)
- Preliminary & annotated bibliographies *marked* by the librarian for source quality & formatting.
- All components *graded* by the professor.
Assignment Sequence

**Week 1**
- Professor presents the assignment
- Professor provides supporting handouts

**Week 2**
- 10-15 minute library instruction session
- Librarian reviews assignment & her role in grading

**Week 3**
- Preliminary bibliography due
- Librarian marks, professor grades

**Week 5**
- Annotated bibliography due
- Librarian marks, professor grades

**Week 8**
- Portfolio with final paper and revised preliminary & annotated bibliographies due
- Professor grades
The HI 203 Instruction Session

1. Introduce self.
2. Review assignment, timeline, and supporting handouts.
4. Navigate to library website.
5. Navigate to subject guide.
6. Search name in encyclopedia (e.g., *Credo*). Look at article, hyperlinks, and example citation. Note additional keywords.
7. Search name or alternate keyword in periodical or ebook database. Look at article, hyperlinks, & example citation.
8. Display example print resource(s).
9. *Reiterate marking/grading role of librarian & encourage students to visit library.*
10. Answer questions and leave!
Experiences

- Lots of questions about reference hours & appointments.
- Considerable confusion about source types & authority, especially with “open web” resources.
- Ambivalence about page formatting, but lots of questions about formatting of bibliographic entries.
- Fewer questions about in-text citations (because less well emphasized in assignment scaffolding).
- Varied response to feedback on assignments:
  - ~30% quick & consistent
  - ~50% eventually
  - ~20% little or none
Outcomes: HI 203 Portfolios

Improved...

• Resource Quality
  
  (marked & graded twice before final paper)

• Resource Use
  
  (marked & graded once before final paper)

• Formatting and Bibliography
  
  (marked & graded twice before final paper)

...and less evidence of plagiarism to boot,

  although in-text citations remain dicey...
Outcomes: Library Services

**Week 1**
- Professor presents the assignment
- Professor provides supporting handouts

**Week 2**
- 10-15 minute library instruction session
- Librarian reviews assignment & her role in grading

**Week 3**
- Preliminary bibliography due
- Librarian marks, professor grades

**Week 6**
- Annotated bibliography due
- Librarian marks, professor grades

**Week 8**
- Portfolio with final paper and revised preliminary and annotated bibliographies due
- Professor grades
Benefits

• Less time in class, which matters with a small staff!
• Opportunity to engage new or hard-to-reach faculty, departments, or courses.
• Less faculty resistance, especially if you are offering to help improve assignments & grade papers while taking up less class time.
• Opportunity to highlight librarians’ curriculum & instructional design role.
Benefits

- The session is too short to fall asleep.
- Reduces abstraction, especially for students with limited research experience.
- The librarian may be approachable even when the professor isn’t.

And with the right assignment,....

- Produces plenty of assessment.
- Makes using library resources & services a necessity.
- Embeds the librarian, if asynchronously, but *in spite of* one-shot instructional limitations.
- Drives use of other services, especially reference transactions.
Benefits to Info Lit Pedagogy

With the right assignment, time-limited instruction...

• Moves problem solving & information seeking out of the (artificial) instructional environment.

• Encourages personal and/or group responsibility to engage resources, research tools, and professional means & modes of communication.

• Emphasizes use of reference services, which are more relational and better replicate lived information seeking.
Costs & Considerations

- Contingent on quality of assignment, which may be contingent on quality of collaboration.
- Contingent on student awareness & understanding of assignment prior to instruction.
- Limited resource coverage.
- No guided practice.
- Coordination between instructional & reference staff.
- Time to mark assignments & paper management.
- Librarian may be drawn into grading disputes.
Candidate Courses

Good Candidates:

• Lower-division lecture courses with a research component already in place.
• New, disengaged, skeptical, or time-pressed faculty
• Neophyte and/or disengaged researchers working outside of major

Weaker Candidates:

• No pre-existing research component
• Highly specific research needs or expectations for instruction
• Advanced researchers working in major
• Seminars (?)
Thank You!

Questions?

Jeff Mortimore, Reference Librarian
Holgate Library, Bennett College
900 E. Washington St.
Greensboro, NC 27401
jmortimore@bennett.edu
336-517-2149