Library Instruction for Freshmen: Avoiding Repetition or the Inevitable "We've Done This Before."

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Library Instruction for Freshmen: Avoiding Repetition or the Inevitable “We’ve done this before”/Learning Across Multiple Class Sections

Do your students complain of repetition in library instruction classes? This presentation will show how the Instruction/Reference librarians at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga lessened this problem by creating flexible outlines for freshmen English classes. The outlines not only reduced repetition, but also freed up time for the librarians to work on higher-level research classes.

I. Background

A. We have seven Reference librarians, and five of us are also Instruction librarians
B. We teach library instruction classes for many departments, from simple introductions to the library to more complex research methods classes
C. When I began about 3 years ago, the department already had a strong relationship with the freshman English classes, ENGL121 (usually in the Fall) and the second half, ENGL122 (usually in the Spring). Each class has a library instruction session, usually connected to a writing assignment.
D. Although we had basic outlines for the English classes, we did not always follow them, and allowed the English instructors to determine what was covered in each class.
   1. This, of course, meant a lot of planning for each class. With increasing enrollment, the number of these English classes has also increased each year; this Fall semester we will teach around 78 ENGL121 sections; as of September 2008, we have around 100 other classes and workshops on our schedule as well.
   2. It caused repetition for the students. We might cover something in ENGL121 that the instructor wanted, and turn around and cover it again in ENGL122. Students often complained that they “had already done this before.”
   3. Most of the Instruction librarians have attended ACRL’s Immersion Program within the past three years. This increased our knowledge of class planning, teaching techniques, and assessment and helped spark our desire to reevaluate the concepts covered in each class.
   4. We wanted to develop stronger and more consistent relationships with research methods classes. We see most students as freshmen, but not all instructors of research methods or higher-level classes schedule a library instruction session. To ensure more time to work on these types of classes, we needed to streamline the freshman English classes.
E. To alleviate these problems, we created standardized, yet flexible outlines for ENGL121 and ENGL122 that we vowed to follow.

II. The Previous Way of Doing It

A. So, as I said before, whenever we had an ENGL121 or ENGL122 class, we often recreated each class, although we did have outlines for each. We would receive an
assignment from the instructor, and basically ask them what they wanted covered. I have provided the outlines, so you can see what we intended to teach. You will notice in the examples that there were numerous learning outcomes, probably too many to cover in a 50-minute class, especially for ENGL122.

ENGL121 example:

Goals

- Provide the students with the necessary library experience to complete their library research assignments for English 121
- Serve as a base for the English 122 sessions
- Provide a foundation for students completing research for other courses.

Learning Outcomes

- Navigate portions of the library webpage including the online catalog and be familiar with the subject layout of the electronic index page
- Find and use (depending on the given assignment) InfoTrac OneFile or Lexis-Nexis database on campus or at home. Translate the topic terms (separately or in combination) into the words of the database
- Locate the journal title by using the online catalog and then find the desired issue in the library
- Use a citation appropriately and identify its key components (e.g. periodical title, article title, author’s name, page numbers, volume and date)

ENGL122 example:

Goals

- Gain a broader understanding of library resources, with emphasis on selection and evaluation of resources, as well as selection of appropriate access tools.
- Review of basic search strategies and introduction of enhanced techniques for focusing or broadening a topic.
- Overview of Internet research, with emphasis on evaluation of Internet resources.
- Overview of library services, highlighting important and recent changes to library operations.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will understand the publishing timeline in order to select appropriate resources for their research.
• Students will understand the difference between scholarly, trade, and popular publications, and understand the concept of refereed publications.
• Students will be able to navigate the library’s website to select appropriate tools to help them with their research.
• Students will become more proficient in identifying keywords from their research questions and identifying words to narrow or broaden their research results.
• Students will become more proficient at using Boolean operators AND, OR.
• Students will have broader knowledge of using the Internet for research and will be able to evaluate Internet resources using basic techniques.
• Students will understand the importance of citing the work of others and become more proficient in identifying citation elements, including those necessary for citing electronic resources.
• Students will have a better understanding of library services, including recent changes or enhancements to those services.

III. New Outlines
A. Unlike the previous outlines, we developed techniques that all the instruction librarians would use to teach the concepts. This included active learning activities. We also decided on only three outcomes for both ENGL121 and ENGL122. This way the students were not overwhelmed, and if we wanted to assess, we would have three clear, measurable goals.
B. We met with the English instructors to explain our new plan, and the reasons for it. We tried not to use the word “standardized,” and stressed that there was still flexibility within the classes, which I will explain in a bit.
C. ENGL121
   1. For ENGL121 we identified the following concepts as the most important:
      a. Internet evaluation – in this class, students are usually allowed to use Internet sources; we use the Opening Activity in the example below as an active learning activity
      b. Library sources – what they are and how they are different from Google; we realized students often do not understand the difference
      c. Academic OneFile – how to develop keyword searches in this database; we use the keyword exercise in the example below as an active learning activity

ENGL121 example:

- **Opening Activity: How do you decide what you need?**

  Analogy: When you buy a cell phone or laptop, what things do you consider?
Discuss model, price, manufacturer, features (camera, mp3 player, DVD, email). When searching for information, what things do you consider? Have them do a Google search on their topic Discuss the results, which ones are best and why? [domain, date, authorship, intent]

• Finding library sources for your paper (as opposed to websites):
  Show how to get to the Library website from www.utc.edu
  Show how to get to the database page and Academic OneFile
  What is a database? How is it different from the Internet?
  Academic OneFile is an easy way to find articles for a paper
  Academic OneFile looks different than Google and searches different content
  Includes full text of articles from magazines and newspapers

• How do you search Academic OneFile (with all these boxes!):
  Distribute keyword exercise on a printed form (example below),
  Have them fill in their ideas, then switch with neighbor
  Explain how to use their keywords in search boxes on Academic OneFile
  Have them try searching on their topics using their new keywords
  Discuss features of the results lists (date order, full text notation, How to Cite)
  Show marking items and print and email functions

• Closing Activity / Challenge:
  Find at least one article on your topic and email it to yourself

Keyword exercise example:

What words do I use to search?

1. Write your topic in the form of a question:
2. Circle the most important Keywords in your sentence. Write them in the boxes below:

| AND | AND |

3. Brainstorm for synonyms for the Keywords you listed in #2. Write them in the boxes below:

| OR | OR | OR |

2. Differences from previous outline:
   a. Navigate portions of the library webpage including the online catalog and be familiar with the subject layout of the electronic index page – folded in to “Finding Library Sources for your Paper”
   b. Find and use (depending on the given assignment) InfoTrac OneFile or Lexis-Nexis database on campus or at home. Translate the topic terms (separately or in combination) into the words of the database – became “How do you search Academic OneFile (with all these boxes)
   c. Locate the journal title by using the online catalog and then find the desired issue in the library – really no longer necessary because of our link resolver
   d. Use a citation appropriately and identify its key components (e.g. periodical title, article title, author’s name, page numbers, volume and date) – this is usually covered by the English instructor
   e. Added Internet evaluation – again, in this class, students are usually allowed to use Internet sources and we noticed that many can not differentiate good sites from bad

3. Flexibility:
   a. Internet evaluation – we will focus on specific websites, such as Wikipedia
   b. We usually try to cover Academic OneFile, but will add a database, such as Lexis-Nexis, if the instructor wants the students to find newspaper articles
   c. We try to not discuss the concept of peer-review until ENGL122, but if the instructor asks, we will discuss it briefly and show students how to limit to peer-reviewed articles in the database
   d. We will still take the instructors’ assignments and try to use topics/issues relevant to a particular class

D. ENGL122
   1. For ENGL122 we identified the following concepts as the most important:
a. Scholarly (peer-reviewed) vs. popular sources - we developed a video that we show in class to help illustrate this concept [http://www.lib.utc.edu/Podcasts-and-Tutorials.html]; we also use the Opening Activity in the example below as an active learning activity
b. How to find a scholarly article; we use the activity under “Finding Scholarly Articles” in the example below as an active learning activity
c. Wilson Omni File Full Text Mega Edition – how to develop keyword searches in this database; review of the keyword exercise; we can be assured that this is a new database to them, and was not covered in ENGL121

ENGL122 example:

- **Opening Activity:**
  Distribute sets of articles to groups
  (We can use pairs when teaching in 209 or groups of 3, 4 or 5 when teaching in 208).
  Each set will have one scholarly and one popular article on the same topic.
  Have each team determine which is academic and which is popular
  Have them list ways they can tell the difference
  Go over as a group, covering criteria the students used

- **Finding Scholarly Articles:**
  English 122 requires that you focus your efforts on locating scholarly articles.
  You have 5 mins. to locate a scholarly article on your topic using any means you prefer.
  Do not give any instruction. Let them look wherever they want.
  Discuss where they looked and have them share what they did (or did not) find.
  If they use Google Scholar, ok to go briefly into Textlinker

- **Using a Database to find Scholarly Articles:**
  OK, Google is one way. How about others?
  In 121 you got pretty good at using Academic OneFile.
  Here’s another database choice: Omnifile
  Show how to get to the database page and Omnifile
  Remind about keywords in boxes (just as in Infotrac in 121)
  Demonstrate the limit to peer reviewed check box (and the limit to full text box)

- **Time to Search:**
  Have them spend 5 minutes searching for their topics
  Compare results – better than searching Google
  Easier to focus on known scholarly articles (with limits box)
  Content is full text and free
  Emailable and printable (just as with Infotrac)
  Results list is smaller (than Google!)
Gives you choice of formats (MLA, APA)

2. Differences from previous outline:
   a. Students will understand the publishing timeline in order to select appropriate resources for their research – we did not have time to explain this in class
   b. Students will understand the difference between scholarly, trade, and popular publications, and understand the concept of refereed publications – covered in Opening Activity and Finding Scholarly Articles
   c. Students will be able to navigate the library’s website to select appropriate tools to help them with their research – we will review briefly, but this is covered in ENGL121
   d. Students will become more proficient in identifying keywords from their research questions and identifying words to narrow or broaden their research results – we will review briefly, but this is covered in ENGL121
   e. Students will become more proficient at using Boolean operators AND, OR – this is not covered “officially” but may be mentioned by the individual librarian
   f. Students will have broader knowledge of using the Internet for research and will be able to evaluate Internet resources using basic techniques – covered in ENGL121
   g. Students will understand the importance of citing the work of others and become more proficient in identifying citation elements, including those necessary for citing electronic resources – not covered since English instructors usually do
   h. Students will have a better understanding of library services, including recent changes or enhancements to those services – we try to review services at the beginning of all classes

3. Flexibility:
   a. We usually try to cover OmniFile Full Text Mega Edition, but will add a database, such as Lexis-Nexis, if the instructor wants the students to find newspaper articles; also, if a large portion of the class did not take ENGL121, we will review Academic OneFile
   b. May cover link resolver depending on research capabilities of students (some classes stronger in this regard than others)
   c. We will still take the instructors’ assignments and try to use topics/issues relevant to a particular class

IV. What didn’t work
   A. Some of the Instruction librarians did not feel comfortable with the Opening Activity in ENGL121. So, this year, we are trying something new, which seems to be working quite well. Instead of evaluating websites, we use coffee cans labeled with different names of databases, including one for Google. Inside each can are examples of sources you can
find in each particular database. The students work in groups to determine what the
databases could be used for, and their reliability compared to sources they can find on
Google. So although we are not evaluating actual websites, we are covering the concept
of reliable information, and where to find it. This was created by our Department Head,
Virginia Cairns, and will appear in the *Library Instruction Cookbook*.

V. Assessment
A. As I mentioned before, most of our Instruction librarians have attended Immersion, so we
are aware of the importance of assessment. We have made a huge step by purchasing
software that will allow us to conduct in-class assessment easily. As of now, we are
collecting one-minute papers for each class – students list one thing that they learned, and
one that they are still confused about.