

BACKGROUND: WHY THERE ARE LIBRARY  
RELATED ASSIGNMENTS IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH

In a fall 1975 General Libraries survey of faculty opinion regarding the importance of student library skills, 79% of those teaching undergraduate courses rated their students' abilities to use library resources for term papers or other research projects as fair to poor. Tests administered to students in English 306 and 307 have confirmed that students lack many of the rudimentary library skills most of us take for granted. For example, half the students tested had misconceptions about the order in which call numbers are arranged on library shelves. More than half thought the Readers' Guide indexed either all magazines and journals in the U.S. or all those on campus.

In order to find and communicate information more effectively, students must become familiar with university library facilities and procedures, learn how to plan and carry out a library search strategy, and be able to select and use appropriate reference works. Assignments intended to accomplish these objectives span both semesters of the freshman English curriculum.

In this unit of the course students will take a printed self-guided tour of the Undergraduate Library, complete an exercise based on it, and begin research for a 6-8 page informative term paper due at the end of the semester. In addition to perfecting the finger exercises of abstracting, note taking, and footnote and bibliographical form, students will be applying the concepts and techniques covered in the rest of the syllabus. In the weeks prior to the date their papers are submitted, students will learn to move with ease from the card catalog to the book they want, from a periodical index to the articles they need, and from reading a chapter to

taking notes on it. As a result students should leave English 306 with a mastery of the basic writing and library skills necessary to locate and organize a large body of information, induce a form from it, and present it so as to enlighten and interest an audience assumed to have no extensive knowledge about it.

The library objectives in English 306 fall into two categories: library orientation and library skills. The objectives are based on demonstrated student needs. They provide a basic foundation on which library instruction in upper division courses can build. In the future our colleagues in other departments can make assignments based on the assumption that students will have mastered the orientation and library skill objectives in this unit.

#### SELF-GUIDED TOUR: THE ASSIGNMENT AND ITS OBJECTIVES

The first step in teaching students to make effective use of library resources is to acquaint them with the facilities and services of the library they will be using most often during their first years at the University. This is the purpose of the Self-Guided Tour of the Undergraduate Library and the exercise that accompanies it. They are designed to help students master the following objectives:

##### Library Orientation Objectives

1. Lower division undergraduates are familiar with the physical location of essential areas and resources within the Undergraduate Library.
2. Students know the basic procedures for checking out books, using the reserve collection, and finding periodicals. They are aware of their responsibilities as library borrowers.
3. Students know that there are many other libraries and collections available for their use. They know that the reference staff, the Main Library catalog, and the Serials List can direct them to material elsewhere on campus.

A self-guided tour was chosen as the method for accomplishing these objectives because it allows students to orient themselves at their own convenience and spend as much time as they like in each area described. Evaluations conducted in previous semesters have shown that students prefer a printed, individual tour to the more familiar guided (or herded) tour.

Tell your students to pick up a copy of the tour at the Information/Reference Desk on the first floor of the Undergraduate Library. Explain that becoming acquainted with the library and its procedures is an important first step before they begin the research for their papers.

Two assignments have been prepared to reinforce the information presented in the tour. You may choose the one you prefer, either a self-graded in-class quiz or an instructor-scored exercise students complete while they are taking the tour. Susan Burton from the Undergraduate Library will send you copies of the assignment you prefer.

After students have completed the self-guided tour and quiz or exercise, work on the informative term paper begins. The objectives and materials necessary for the assignment are described in the following section.

#### INFORMATIVE TERM PAPER: THE ASSIGNMENT AND ITS OBJECTIVES

When students start their studies at the University they are still wedded to the library habits they used in high school where simplified classification and cataloging systems, small collections and less demanding assignments made sophisticated skills unnecessary. Most students have never been in a library using the Library of Congress classification system. They don't yet realize the complexity or limitations of the Subject Catalog. The vast majority are unaware of any index other than the Readers' Guide, which includes only a small fraction of the journals in the University libraries.

Although students may claim they learned how to use the library and write term papers in high school, university librarians and faculty know otherwise. In addition to applying the basic composition skills associated with the preparation of any paper, students writing the 6-8 page paper assigned in this unit should demonstrate mastery of the following library skills.

Library Skills Objectives

1. Students can plan and implement a "search strategy" that will lead them efficiently to the information they need in a logical progression from background to recent developments.
2. Students can find background information on a given topic in appropriate general and specialized encyclopedias or news digests. When using encyclopedias, they use the index to locate all references to a topic.
3. Students can make effective use of the card catalog.
  - (a) They can locate material in the catalog by author, title and subject.
  - (b) They are familiar with those elements on a catalog card that enable them to assess the value of a book for their research. These include author, title, publisher, place and date of publication, number of pages, notes regarding the presence of illustrations or bibliographies, and subject tracings at the bottom of the card.
  - (c) They adapt their own terminology to that of the subject catalog by using the Library of Congress Subject Headings list and the subject tracings on catalog cards.
  - (d) They are able to find books arranged according to both the Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal Classification systems, and use location charts to find on which floor specific call numbers are shelved.
4. Students can locate articles on a given subject using appropriate general and specialized periodical indexes.
  - (a) They can interpret those elements in an index entry which will enable them to find the articles they need. These include author, article title, periodical, volume, page, date, and other abbreviations.
  - (b) They use the Serials List to locate periodicals in campus libraries.
5. Students consult librarians and instructors for assistance and suggestions whenever necessary.

## THE LIBRARY MATERIALS

Classroom copies of the materials described below are available upon request from the Undergraduate Library staff. If you have any questions about the materials or if your students are having any problems, Susan Burton, Ann Brooke, or Ann Neville want to hear from you. Call them at the Undergraduate Library (PAX 2031 or CTX 5222) or drop by.

1. Ideas for topics. Students may choose a topic from lists of ideas suggested by librarians on the basis of the amount and quality of published material available on various subjects. A student wishing to work on his own topic should be encouraged to do so. In this case the instructor will need to discuss the topic with the student to ensure that it is amenable to library research. The student should also talk to one of the UGL librarians to make sure there is sufficient material available on the topic.

Whatever topic is chosen, instructors will need to work with the students to help them in defining and narrowing their area of concern. One of the comments made most frequently by instructors teaching this unit in the past has been that students have a problem clarifying and restricting the subject of their research paper and that this is something that needs to be emphasized in class.

2. Study Guides. Librarians at the Undergraduate Library have prepared a series of thirteen Study Guides which are designed to introduce students to library research procedures and resources. 306 students use the first four basic Study Guides in this sequence:

USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH  
FINDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION  
FINDING BOOKS  
FINDING ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS

USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH discusses the processes involved in writing a paper, including topic choice, topic definition, steps in the research process, note-taking, and bibliographic form. The other three basic Study Guides guide students in finding most of the information they will need to write their papers.

(Supplementary materials: Supplementary Study Guides (described on pages 7-8 of USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH) are available if students need further information. These will lead them to resources such as newspapers, statistics, book reviews and government documents. The supplementary Study Guides can be picked up in the UGL Reference Area, together with worksheets which can be used to find the sources described in each Study Guide.)

3. WORKSHEET. Students fill in a worksheet as they work through the basic Study Guides. They will record
  - (a) their preliminary topic
  - (b) the sources consulted for background information (encyclopedias and/or news digests)
  - (c) their revised, narrowed topic in the form of a topic or thesis statement
  - (d) the subject headings checked to find material in the Subject Catalog and the number of relevant books found
  - (e) the titles and dates of the periodical indexes checked and the number of relevant articles found.

### NOTE CARDS

In addition to the worksheet, students will keep bibliography cards, recording specific articles found in background sources, books, and periodical articles, and note cards recording the relevant information found in each.

Instructors check the worksheet twice, once after (c) above and again after the worksheet has been completed, about a month before the paper is due. You may want to check the note cards when the worksheet is handed in the first time to make sure students have mastered the technique (described in the USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH Study Guide and on pages 412-421 of the Harbrace College Handbook). Unless you want to make other periodic checks to determine whether students are completing the steps in the research process by the dates assigned, note cards don't need to be submitted until the paper is turned in at the end of the semester. In addition to helping students organize their papers, the note cards are instructors' insurance against plagiarized papers.

### EVALUATING TERM PAPER RESEARCH

Some teachers prefer to give students two grades on their term papers, one for research and bibliographical form and another for mechanics and composition. Other teachers assign the term paper one grade since they consider the paper an organic whole. Regardless of the method you choose, students need feedback on their research.

One book and two citations from Reader's Digest or Time does not constitute an acceptable bibliography. (Nor, for that matter, does a bibliography of two pages of books - that is more material than is appropriate for a paper of 6-8 pages and ignores a major source of material, journal articles.) The student will not know what is acceptable unless you make it clear. Although there are guidelines for evaluating bibliographies, there is no standard number of citations that should be included in the bibliography for this term paper. Each topic will have unique factors: for some topics, few books but many periodical articles will be available; for others the reverse will be the case. For some topics specialized periodical indexes will be most helpful; for others the Readers' Guide will be a more fruitful source.

For these reasons, your analysis of the students' research will have to be based on your own knowledge and good sense. A notebook in the Freshman English Office and the Undergraduate Library Office contains "source sheets" for the topics on the lists of ideas for suggested topics (described on page 17e). Compiled by the Undergraduate Library reference staff, the source sheets list appropriate background sources, card catalog subject headings, and periodical indexes for each topic. You can use them to determine if students have chosen appropriate sources. If you suspect that a student could have found more information, the source sheet notebook may: 1. suggest sources the student has overlooked, or; 2. confirm that the student has indeed consulted all appropriate sources. The librarians at the Undergraduate Library invite you to call or visit them if you have any problems evaluating students' research. (471-5222 or PAX 2031, ask for Susan Burton or another user education librarian.)

#### GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING THE WORKSHEET

The worksheet will show the student's sources for basic information, the subject headings used in the card catalog, and the number of relevant books found under each, and the titles of the periodical indexes consulted and the number of relevant citations found in each.

When evaluating the worksheets (about five weeks before the paper is due so students will have time to act upon your suggestions), check for the following:

1. Background Information (Encyclopedias and/or News Digests)
  - (a) A record that the student tried at least one specialized encyclopedia listed in the Study Guide FINDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION .
  - (b) A record that the student used a general encyclopedia if either no information or unsuitable information was found in specialized encyclopedias.
  - (c) For current topics, a record that the student used one of the news digests listed in the Study Guide .



N.B. For all suggested topics on the lists prepared by the UGL staff, at least one of the above is appropriate. Check the notebook of source sheets in the Freshman English Office and Undergraduate Library Office or call the UGL reference desk.

(d) An appropriate topic or thesis statement .

## 2. Card Catalog

(a) A list of subject headings marked to indicate the number of books (if any) for which students prepared bibliography cards. Since at this point students are compiling a working bibliography, they should have cards for at least five to ten books because on closer examination some of these books will probably not be useful .

(b) An indication that students consulted the Library of Congress Subject Headings List for subject headings .

## 3. Periodical Indexes

(a) A record that students did not rely wholly on Readers' Guide, but also consulted other appropriate indexes...for most topics at least two years of each index should have been searched .

(b) Next to each index, a record of the number of articles for which students made bibliography cards... A total of eight to ten articles, not all from Readers' Guide, is suitable for a working bibliography.

### SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING FINAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES

When term papers are submitted, check the final bibliographies for the following:

#### 1. Format

Bibliographies should be prepared in the format suggested in the Harbrace College Handbook.

2. Range and number of sources

- (a) At least 8-10 citations
- (b) Encyclopedias or news digests, books, and periodical articles should be represented.
- (c) There are no absolute numbers for each type of source, but in general you should expect the greatest number of citations to be from periodicals, the next greatest from books, and few from encyclopedias. This may vary from topic to topic, but there should be a balance represented that indicates no over-reliance on a single source or type of source.
- (d) Publication dates of the material cited should reflect an awareness of the currency (or timelessness) of the topic. A paper on life on other planets shouldn't be based entirely on information published in the 1960's, while a paper on a historical topic could be.

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE FOR RESEARCH PAPER

While you are not restricted to a specific time frame, experience in previous semesters has shown that you cannot wait until the middle of the semester to make the term paper assignment. This puts unwarranted pressures on the students and militates against the students' learning to spread their research over the course of the semester.

The following suggested schedule allows the students sufficient time to perform the prescribed research satisfactorily. (It also gives you time to work with the students.)

By Third Week

Assign Self-Guided Tour of the Undergraduate Library and quiz or exercise. (See pages 17b and c)

Fourth Week

During the first class meeting of the week, distribute the list of IDEAS FOR TOPICS and the Study Guide USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH.

The students' assignment is to read the Study Guide for an overview of the research process they will be following and to select a tentative topic.

During the second class meeting distribute the worksheet and the other three Study Guides, FINDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION, FINDING BOOKS, and FINDING ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS. Assign the due date for the term paper and the dates by which students should complete various sections of the worksheet. (A space has been left in each section for the student to fill in the due date you assign.) Talk about bibliography and note cards and the bibliographic form you expect students to use. This is the time to make expectations known.

Discuss the formulation of topic or thesis statements and the importance of restricting the topic based on background information found in encyclopedias or news digests. The section of the worksheet on finding background information should be handed in the next week.

Fifth Week

Collect worksheets and evaluate according to criteria on page (17f). Some students may need help refining their topics. Return worksheets.

Seventh Week

Students should have completed the section of the worksheet on FINDING BOOKS. Encourage them to begin reading and taking notes, since books are difficult to locate at the end of the semester.

Ninth Week

Students should have completed the section of the worksheet on FINDING ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS. Collect and evaluate the worksheet according to the criteria suggested on page 17h of the syllabus. The notebook of source sheets can simplify the task of evaluation. Encourage students to continue reading and taking notes from the items on their bibliography cards.

Tenth Week

Return the worksheets with comments. Suggest that students use some of the additional Study Guides from the wall mural near the Undergraduate Library Subject Catalog if they need extra details for their papers. These supplementary Study Guides are described in the first Study Guide they received, USING THE LIBRARY FOR RESEARCH.

Fourteenth Week

Term papers are due. The worksheet, bibliography cards, and note cards should be turned in as well. See page 17i for criteria for evaluating final bibliographies.

PROBLEMS?

We hope the library paper will be an interesting and profitable experience for you and your students. If you encounter any problems relating to the research aspect please contact Susan Burton at PAX 2031 or Centrex 5222. Suggestions on ways to improve the Library Paper assignment are always welcome.