

Lesson Plan: John Hernandez and Jeannette Moss, Northwestern University

Topic:

The research assignment in this College of Arts & Sciences first-year writing class involved starting with the estimate of total costs of drug addiction in the U.S. as presented by a government agency (<http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics>). Students were asked to work in groups to trace source notes back to original research, strategically read those documents, and identify the methods used in order to determine those costs. Then, each group presented their findings to the rest of the class a week after the instruction session and topic introduction.

Learning Objectives:

1. To critically evaluate statistical information rather than just accept it at face value.
2. To strategically and efficiently read scholarly research articles for method and other important details.
3. To citation search backward to original research.

Materials:

- LibGuide including videos on reading scientific articles, select library databases, and citation guides (<http://libguides.northwestern.edu/drugsdrama>)
- Group presentation prompt from course instructor (can include as a handout)

Lesson Outline:

- Introduced ourselves and course guide to class (5 min.)
- Showed a short video outlining the sections of scientific research articles and how to strategically read for most important information. Followed up video with some comments to reinforce (10 min.)
- Met individually with each of 4 pre-assigned groups. Two librarians each met with two groups (15 min. each):
 1. Tobacco methods group
 2. Alcohol methods group
 3. Illicit drugs group
 4. "Place these numbers in broader context" group
- Topics covered in groups:
 - How to track backwards from source notes and references, search by citation, and find original sources and articles
 - How to scan articles for methodology and other relevant information
 - Criteria to consider in evaluating sources and information
- Demo for whole class, in searching select databases such as PsycInfo, introducing keyword and subject searching, and limiting to peer reviewed articles. Also introduced Statistical Abstract of the United States for finding additional statistics to add broader context. (15 min.)

Assessment of student learning:

Librarians were invited to class the following week to observe group presentations. Informal

assessment data came from the presentation prompts that the group answered, which generally (but not explicitly) corresponded to the learning objectives above.

Presentation prompts addressed by groups:

1. Provide the sources, methods, key assumptions, researchers, currency of data, populations surveyed, etc. that underpin the figures investigated.
2. Gaps unfilled or questions remaining after investigation.
3. "Lessons learned" from this exercise
4. A final slide of sources consulted, or bibliography

Framework knowledge practices or dispositions:

Research as Inquiry

Knowledge practice= Formulate questions for research based on information gaps or on reexamination of existing, possibly conflicting, information.

Knowledge practice= Monitor gathered information and assess for gaps or weaknesses.

Scholarship as Conversation

Disposition= Recognize they are often entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation and not a finished conversation.

Disposition= Suspend judgment on the value of a particular piece of scholarship until the larger context for the scholarly conversation is better understood.