

A New Adventure?

*Collaborating with
First-Time Writing
Instructors on
“Teaching Research”*



UNC GREENSBORO
University Libraries

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UNCG's College Writing Program

New GTAs start each fall

- PhD & MFA students
- program orientation in August
- take ENG 747 (Teaching College Writing) during fall semester
- teach one section of ENG 101
 - no research paper requirement



Library Instruction Orientation for New GTAs

New GTAs have a 15-30 session with librarians to

- receive a brief intro to the ACRL Framework and basic information literacy concepts grounding library instruction
- go over logistics of library instruction (how to request a session, options for LI sessions, what info we need from them to design an instruction lesson plan)
- ask us questions about the relevance of library instruction to their students and whether it is a requirement

“Researched Writing”

Rebecca Moore Howard & Sandra
Jamieson in *A Guide to Composition
Pedagogies* (2014)



Problems with “the research paper” in FYW

Faculty want research paper assignments to:

- familiarize students with the library, online databases, and conducting research;
- engage them in developing an argument written in conversation with the voices and research of others;
- include an emphasis on integration of the voices of others through summary, paraphrase, quotation, and synthesis (232)

Problems with “the research paper” in FYW

However, research paper assignments very often:

- focus on mechanics instead of the purpose of research
- don't build upon previous opportunities for students to engage in research practices (finding, evaluating, reading, comprehending, synthesizing lengthy, complex sources)
- construct research as "close-ended, informative, skills-oriented" (235)

Problems with “the research paper” in FYW

As a result, students see the research paper assignment as:

- not a process of inquiry and exploration, or occasion for critical thinking and analysis
- “an exercise in information gathering’ that demonstrates their skills using the library and documenting sources”
- satisfied by patchwriting from sources they don’t evaluate, read deeply, comprehend, or synthesize (234)

First-time Instructors

What happens when you don't yet have experience to learn from?



Surveys of First-Time Writing Instructors

UNC Greensboro:

- All (11) new GTAs invited to participate via email
- 7 responses total
- 5 first-time instructors of first-year writing eligible to complete survey
- Held follow-up interviews with 2 instructors

Open Survey:

- Participation solicited via WPA-L listserv
- 13 responses total
- 10 first-time instructors of first-year writing eligible to complete survey

Surveys of First-Time Writing Instructors

Overall findings

- Every respondent assigned a research paper
- (For some in the open survey, this was a requirement of their college writing program rather than their own choice)
- All respondents said they were satisfied, overall, with their students' final research papers
- 13/15 said they will change how they will teach researched writing in subsequent semesters

Most instructors articulated learning goals that stress evaluation, comprehension, and synthesis

“What should students know about research by the end of a first-year writing course?”

“Students should know how to evaluate sources for credibility, identify key concepts and arguments in academic writing, and be able to converse (both orally and in writing) about those ideas and their understanding and views regarding those ideas.”

However, research paper parameters emphasized identifying source format over critical evaluation

“What types of sources could not be used in the research paper, and why?”

“Popular, because they don’t present cogent and peer-reviewed arguments.”

“What types of sources were required in the research paper, and why?”

“Books from the library were required because the library is a valuable resource for on campus research.”

Infolit is sometimes defined as learning specific tools rather than research practices or dispositions

“What is your definition of information literacy in the context of teaching first-year students?”

“Knowing how to find the information pertaining to an argument. So learning and knowing how to use the particular databases that the library offers. The MLA International Bibliography, ProQuest, and JSTOR. Those are the three main ones that I make my students use.”

Despite satisfaction with final products, they perceive students are not fully engaging in inquiry or evaluation

“What information literacy skills or habits of mind do your students still struggle with?”

“I still see a lot of evidence of them just going to Google and using whatever pops up. Like kind of that plug and chug where, instead of going into it with a research question, even though we worked at getting them into a research question, they still wait until they've kind of written the paper. Or they search for articles that reinforce their own ideas.”

Don't Go It Alone!

Proposing collaboration with
librarians on assignment design



Revised “Orientation” for New GTAs

August orientation

- Go over (new!) library instruction program information literacy SLOs
- Go over logistics of library instruction (how to request a session, options for LI sessions)

ENG 747 class meeting

- Discuss teaching novice researchers as advanced disciplinary researchers
- Get a pitch about librarian assignment design consultations and course-integrated instruction

*The research paper
assignment requirements*
may have unintended consequences.



If you want your students to fold paper airplanes so they learn about designing something that flies using engineering principles and creative thinking...

Giving them a sheet of paper and asking them to fold it a certain number of times in order to make something that flies may result in *final products that technically satisfy your requirements, but not your goals.*



Backward Design

Model adapted from
Understanding by Design by
Wiggins & McTighe (2005)

Step 1: Define learning goals

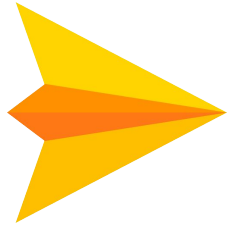
- What do you want students to know and be able to do?
- What “big ideas” do you want them to understand?
- What questions should guide their inquiry?
- What concept knowledge and skills will they need to acquire?

Step 2: Determine acceptable evidence

- How will you know that they know what you want them to know?
- What evidence of learning will you accept?
- How can students produce that evidence?

Step 3: Design instruction/learning experiences

- What teaching strategies & activities will prepare students to achieve results & transfer learning?



Reflect on Outcomes, Goals, & Frameworks

- Look at required student learning outcomes for ENG 101
- Think about personal experience with researched writing as a novice researcher
- Read over the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education and the WPA Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing; examine overlapping concepts

Collaborate on Design

Step 1: Define learning goals

- What course and gen ed learning outcomes do you want to focus on?
- What do *you* think is important for students to know about the process of researched writing?
- What concepts from the ACRL & WPA frameworks apply?

Step 2: Determine acceptable evidence

- What final product can students create that will demonstrate evidence of learning?
- Can the steps students take to create that product be scaffolded?
- How will you assess the evidence?

Step 3: Design instruction/learning experiences

- How can we work together to create lessons that will prepare students to achieve results?

Step 2.5

What parameters are reasonable for this kind of final product?

Step 2.5

The final product

does not have to be a research paper!

But if it is...

Length/page count

Type of sources

Number of sources

Topic choice

Librarian consultation

How can assignment parameters best support what we want students to know? How can we align the assignment to effective pedagogy? How can we avoid creating requirements that detract or distract from our learning goals for students?

Example of Alternate Assignment Approach

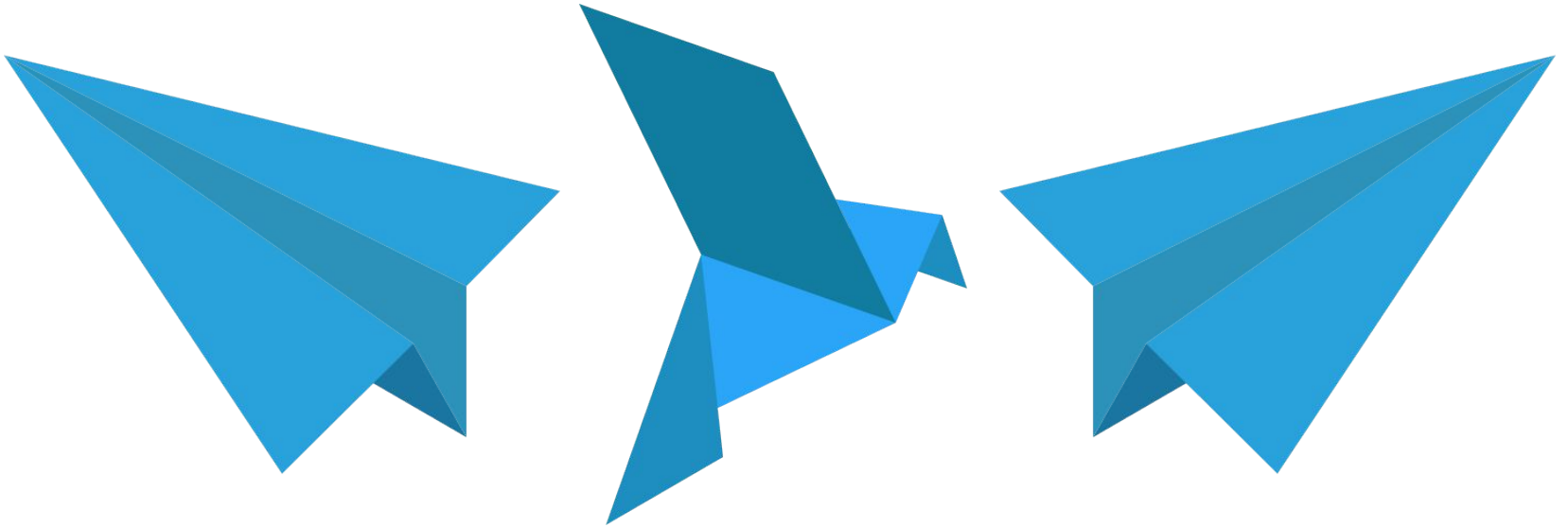
The first step is to write a research paper, without finding sources.

- The librarian and course instructor collaborate on developing 4-6 sample topics for the class.
 - Each sample topic comes with a set of 6 sources in different formats.
- Librarian and course instructor teach students the BEAM method of source use. Students discuss creation process for different formats.
- Students write a paper on a sample topic, focusing on comprehension, synthesis, and integration, not locating sources.

The actual final product is an annotated bibliography.

- After writing and receiving feedback on the first paper project, students receive instruction on locating and evaluating sources.
- Students develop their own research question, then find 4-6 sources that help them examine the question and understand the conversation.
- Students write an annotated bibliography in which they evaluate each source's authority and creation process, and articulate what role the source would play in a final paper.

Questions?



References

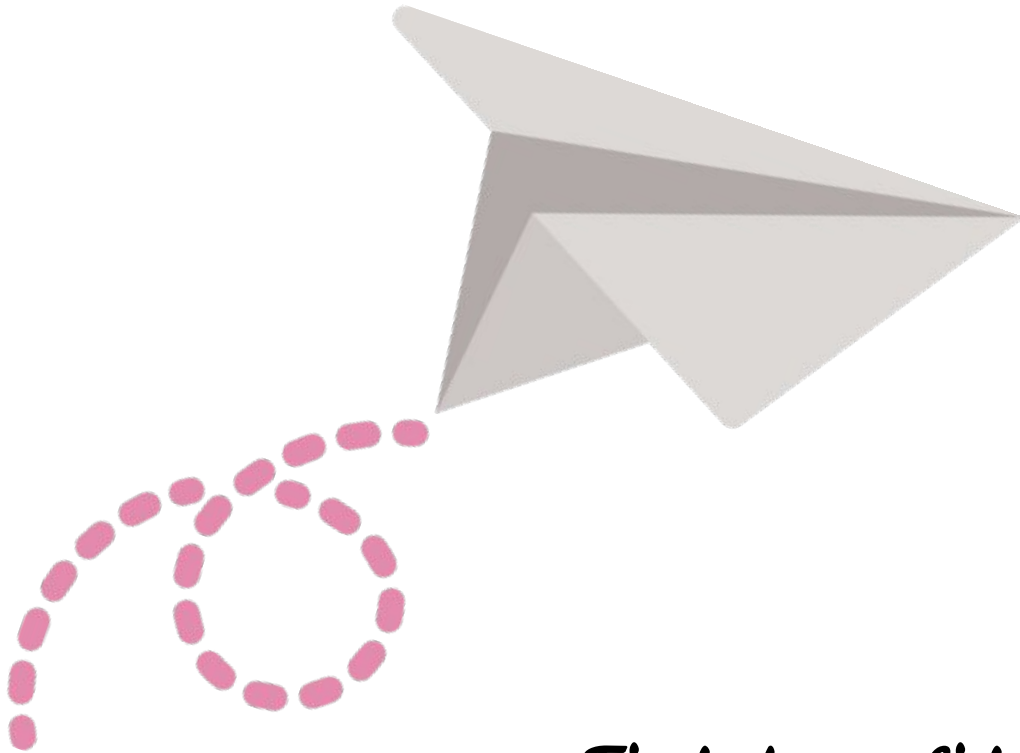
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Thank you!

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Find these slides: go.uncg.edu/LIW18