Designing Research Assignments

for Supporting Students to Become More Critical Consumers of Information

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Recap from Part 1

- Information Literacy, how we define it, how it's evolved
- What students do well and what struggles they have with research
- How librarians and libraries can be useful to you and to your students
- Example activities to address IL competencies

Information Literacy "is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning." (ACRL Framework)

Focus of Today

- Re-examine students' strengths and weaknesses and discuss learning goals
- Effective research assignment design
- What we see from our perspective that can improve assignments, student learning
- Scaffolding and sequencing assignments
- More classroom activities!
- Checklist for effective research assignments

What are your main goals for students when creating a research assignment?

Characteristics: Effective Assignments

- Has learning outcomes, tied to course outcomes
- Clearly outlines what is expected and how it will be evaluated
- States what citation style should be used & provides resources or guides for that style
- Defines any terms that may be unclear
- Was "tested" by you or by a librarian
- Focus more on the process not on the product

Pitfalls to Avoid

The Mob Scene -- sending the entire class to look for the same information, book, or article; use a variety of resources, give students different assignments/topics

The Shot in the Dark -- inadvertently giving incomplete or incorrect information

The Scavenger Hunt -- sending students to search for information without a defined set of possible sources

The Old Curiosity Shop -- assigning use of outdated reference sources: make sure your links are current and the library has recent editions

The Elusive Topic -- assuming students will be able to select a manageable topic without faculty or librarian assistance

Lost in Space -- sending students off to begin their research without demonstrating how to approach the assignment: provide some hands-on time to try the assignment when the faculty member is available for consultation

Other Tips and Ideas

- Provide model papers from past years
- Consider having a librarian …
  - come to your class (timing is important!)
  - create a research guide or video
  - provide research consultations or hands on searching help
- Don't assign "scavenger hunts"
- Discuss the assignment in class!
- Ask students for feedback about assignments in order to improve them for the next semester
- Don't restrict students to only "print" sources, or not to use "online" sources

Alternatives to the Research Paper

- Research log

- Everything but the paper

- Poster session

- Concept map

- Research press release

Scaffolding

- Scaffolding = skillbuilding
- models how to approach a research question and effective time management
- gives students the opportunity to focus on and master key research skills
- provides opportunities for feedback
- encourages reflection and metacognition
- can be an effective deterrent to plagiarism

See example of sequenced or scaffolded research assignment on handout

Scaffolded Activities

Developing a Topic

Activity Description: In this activity, students learn how to turn a vague research topic into a more narrowed topic by finding effective keywords through brainstorming activities and searching Google.

IL Concepts:
-Students continue to define their topic by breaking it down into major concepts and brainstorming related terms, broader terms, and narrower terms on the major points of their topics.
-Students can use prior knowledge skills to find keywords on Google/Wikipedia.
-Students narrow their topic by identifying which keywords they want to search.
-Students learn they can search their keywords in library databases for reliable information.

Developing Keywords to Search

1. What do you know about your research topic? What do you *want* to know?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Once you have some ideas written down, circle the words that you think are the most important.

2. What are the major concepts of your topic? (think about what you circled in Question 1) Write down 2-4 major concepts. (Note: There's no perfect number ☺)

Concept 1:	Concept 2:	Concept 3:	Concept 4:

Research Topic:

I want to find information on how higher education institutions promote effective and equitable distance learning for students.

Research Question:

Higher Education

College

University

Education institution

Ohio college

Distance learning

Virtual

Elearning

Remote learning

Alternative learning

Extended learning

Effectiveness

Effective teaching

Successful teaching

Transformative

Efficacy

Teacher evaluation

Inclusive teaching methods

Return on investment

retention

Using the Right Search Terms (i.e. "What is this thing?")

Activity Description: In this activity, students write down terms to describe an unnamed children's toy. Students are then asked to search with their terms to find out the name of the brand on Amazon.

IL Concepts:
-Students are required to come up with descriptive keywords.
-Students see that it is okay to have unsuccessful searches; the trick is to keep trying new keywords until they find the ones that make successful searches in a given database.
-Students learn how to "speak the same language" as the database they are searching.
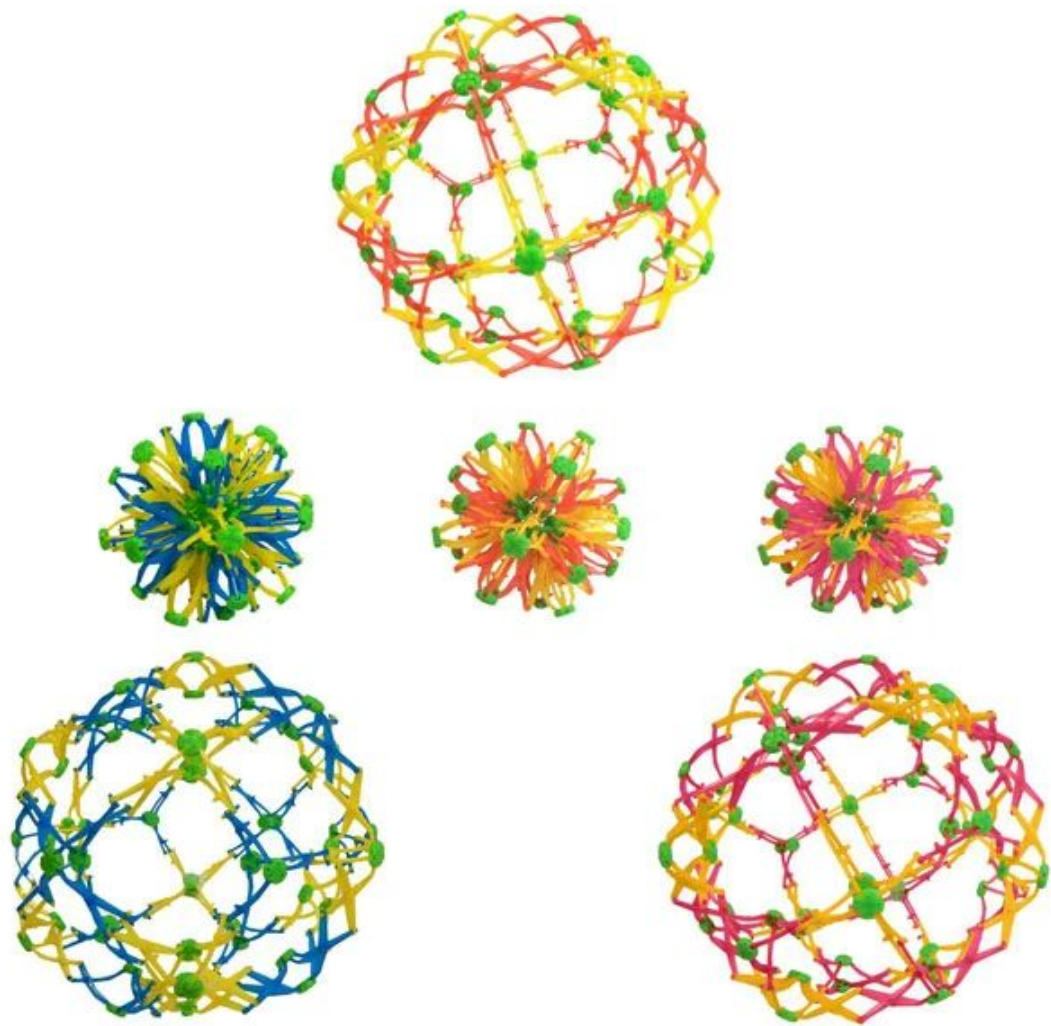
Reversibly expandable doubly-curved truss structure

Abstract

A loop-assembly is disclosed which is comprised of at least three scissors-pairs, at least two of the pairs comprising:
two essentially identical rigid angulated strut elements each having a central and two terminal pivot points with centers which do not lie in a straight line, each strut being pivotally joined to the other of its pair by their central pivot points,
each pair being pivotally joined by two terminal pivot points to two terminal pivot points of another pair in that,

Classifications

➤ **E04B1/3441** Structures characterised by movable, separable, or collapsible parts, e.g. for transport with hinged parts with articulated bar-shaped elements

Choosing a Database

Activity Description: In lieu of a librarian or faculty-led database demo, groups of students are assigned a database or resource to explore. After exploring as a group, students will go up front and present about their resource, its pros, cons and anything else they've learned.

IL Concepts:

-Students will learn the appropriate databases to use for the assignment

-Students will activate prior knowledge when exploring the databases

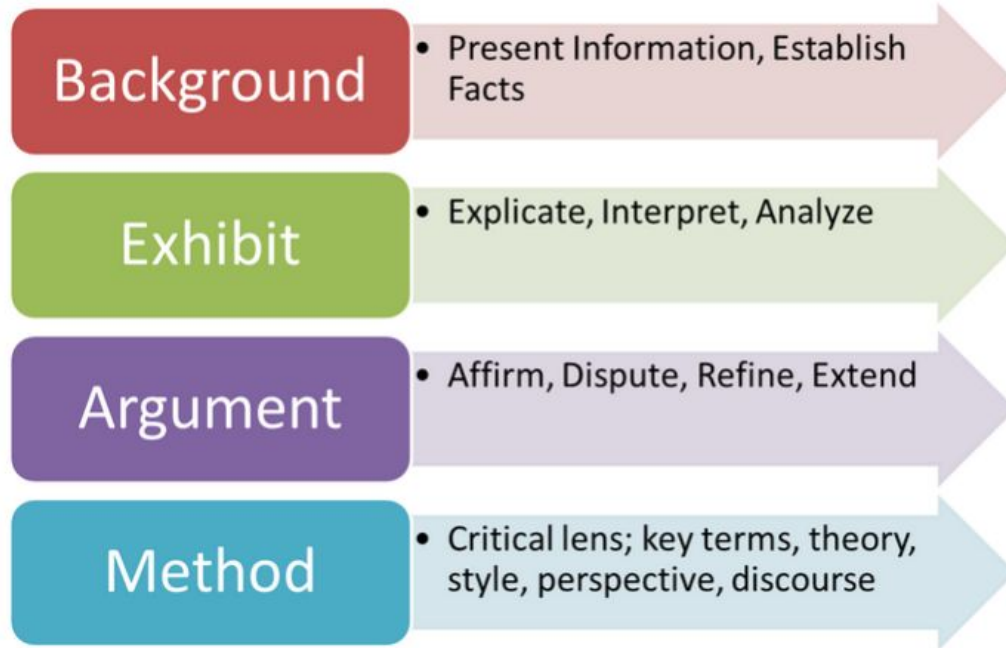-Students are given ownership over their learning, learn from peers

Evaluating a Source's Purpose

Activity Description: Using the BEAM framework, students will critically evaluate sources for their purpose and value in the context of their assignment. Students reflect on how they may use the source as well as its reliability and

IL Concepts:

-Students will describe ways in which a variety of source formats could be used for a scholarly purpose

-Students will discuss the potential value of a source in the context of her/his own writing topic

- Students should recognize that they can *do* different things with information

BEAM Method

Background	• Present Information, Establish Facts
Exhibit	• Explicate, Interpret, Analyze
Argument	• Affirm, Dispute, Refine, Extend
Method	• Critical lens; key terms, theory, style, perspective, discourse

Research Assignment Checklist

Thinking about a previous assignment …

1. Think of a research assignment you created in the past that was successful. How do you know it was successful? What do you think made it successful?

2. Think of a research assignment you created that wasn't so successful. How do you know it was unsuccessful? Why do you think it turned out that way?

3. Given some of the things we've talked about today, what help would you like from a librarian?

"Our Students Aren't in Our Heads With Us" -- Rebecca Weaver

"Assuming that we don't need to be explicit about assignment expectations creates frustration for students, and for us: we won't get the papers we want to read ...

An assignment sheet is not just a document that tells our students what we want, when we want it, in what form, and how long it's supposed to be. *It's a document that explicitly expresses our goals for the students' development in the course of the assignment, and, most importantly, it reinforces our pedagogical philosophy.* In other words, it's a user's manual to the project and goals of the assignment as they connect to the overall goals of the course."

Contact us!

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