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Introductory Research for Inner-City Advanced Placement High School Students

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Teaching Non-traditional Learners:
Tools for Creative Instruction

*Active Learning Series No. 9*

Helene E. Gold
Editor

Library Instruction Publications
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Introductory Research for Inner-City Advanced Placement High School Students

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Circumstances of the Instruction:
This module is based on a collaborative effort between a college librarian working with two 11th grade Advanced Placement (AP) History and English teachers. Students are enrolled in both the English and History classes, making collaboration and curriculum coordination easier. An instructional librarian working in concert with classroom faculty is beneficial to students because many teachers are not fully aware of recent trends such as information storage and retrieval systems and Web-based search tools. Students taking this module are intelligent, score well on standardized aptitude tests, and receive better than average grades. Still, they face many of the same challenges their peers did, including coming from lower-income and/or single-parent households, having parents with language or other educational barriers of their own, and the obstacles inherent to an inner-city environment.

The purpose of the module is to prepare these talented students for college-level work (thus the collaboration with a university librarian) and to teach them basic Information Literacy and research skills. In such a teaching environment, the best way to achieve these goals is to keep expectations high and demand much from the students. At the same time, the librarian and teachers must realize that, though intelligent and intellectually-curious, too many of the students have not been introduced to even the most basic skills necessary for academic success. For these reasons, the lessons must be scaffolded, deadlines set and adhered to, and expectations made clear. The final product is a 5-6 page research paper about the Progressive Era, (or another subject of the librarian’s and teachers’ choosing), double-spaced, complete with a works cited page of at least five sources in the MLA format.

Objectives of the Instruction:
Students will
- increase their familiarity with the academic writing process;
- select and narrow a topic;
- recognize how information is produced, stored, and used legally and ethically;
- distinguish different types of information available to a researcher; and
- develop proficiency in searching a library catalog and research databases.
Components of the Instruction:

Preparation & Presentation

Preliminary introduction (30–45 minutes)
There are two sessions in the module, but it is advisable for the librarian to introduce him/herself to the students a day or two before the sessions begin. Doing so maximizes valuable class time. High school students become apprehensive when asked to write a research paper and the introduction also helps allay students’ fears. If the high school is within easy proximity, this can be done at the school. Explain the guidelines and expectations of both you and their teachers. Being AP students, virtually all of the class will attend college after high school. Make clear that while their teachers will be giving their grades, they are being asked to write a research paper at the college English 101 level. Ask them what they find most difficult about the writing process. Answers will vary. Explain that these fears are common to ALL writers and that their situation is not unique. Avoid library jargon; this only adds to their tension. Emphasize the importance of writing clearly. Too often students believe that excessive prose or “big” words impress teachers when the opposite is true. Stress the importance of writing simply.

Assignment
Ask students to read George Orwell’s essay “Politics and the English Language” and be prepared to discuss at the first session.

Session 1 held in library’s computer classroom (60 minutes)
Preparation & Presentation
Lead class discussion of the Orwell essay. Ask students why they were asked to read it and how it relates to their own writing process.

Though students will have some knowledge of the time period from their History class, the librarian should next define the Progressive Era (roughly 1890–1920).

Students can choose topics on their own or the librarian and teachers can assign from the list provided in Appendix 1. The appendix is helpful because this population group may not have the cultural reference points of the general population.

How and where to begin the research process are usually the most difficult things for students. Nowhere is this truer than with this population, who are intelligent but may not have the support structures available to more affluent students. A number of factors can be at play: parents often cannot help due to language barriers; students may be living in a single-parent household; parents often may want to help but cannot due to their own educational limitations or limited financial resources; or the students may be first or second generation immigrants.

Encourage students to start with encyclopedias, including Wikipedia, to begin their research, even if they cannot use them as sources. Emphasize that encyclopedias are a place to acquire general information about the subject. Use concrete examples.

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Demonstrate a search of “J.P. Morgan” in Wikipedia. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the entry. Ask the students who wrote the entry and how it appeared in Wikipedia. Discuss the notes, references, and external links at the end of the article and how they might aid future research.

Next, show students The Encyclopedia of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, 3 volumes, 2005, edited by John and Joseph Buenker. A search of “tariff reform” provides a two-page summary of the issue and includes a bibliography at the end.

Following this quick overview of reference sources, have students log on to the library’s online catalog. Do not assume that the students know what a library catalog is! The word “catalog” can mean many things (student catalog, course catalog . . .) to students. Do a keyword search for “Andrew Carnegie.” Explain that search results may be arranged chronologically or by relevance. Teach students the importance of noting when a book was originally published. Ask students to compare and contrast the broad differences between David Nasaw’s 2006 biography Andrew Carnegie, Louis Morton Hacker’s 1968 The World of Andrew Carnegie: 1865–1901 and Burton Hendrick’s 1932 effort The Life of Andrew Carnegie. How might a book published during the Great Depression differ from one published in the late 1960s, which in turn differs from one published in the 21st century?

Explain that history is not just what happened, but is also our interpretation of what happened and that inevitably interpretations change as time passes and as new information is revealed. Next, have the students perform an author search under “Andrew Carnegie.” Discuss the steel magnate’s copious output of autobiography, editorial, and correspondence. Lead the class in a discussion about which of the above books are primary and which are secondary sources. Emphasize that even biographies can be primary sources, as they reflect how previous generations interpreted the subject.

After discussing books, next demonstrate licensed resources. Often students do not use licensed resources because their instructor told them not to use the World Wide Web. It is crucial that students realize that, bibliographically, databases are not the same as internet sources. Explain that databases are usually created by outside institutions, usually a private company such as EBSCO or Lexis-Nexis, or a consortium of libraries working collaboratively with publishers, such as Project MUSE. Stress that, unlike the internet, databases are usually subscription-based. One trick is to show the price-per-search of Lexis-Nexis, available here—http://web.lexis.com/xchange/ccsubs/cc_prods.asp. Students appreciate the databases more when they realize their financial value. Add that students can access databases free-of-cost through their high school, college, or public library. This is helpful because low income students do not likely have the advantages available to their middle- and upper-class cohorts.

Begin with EBSCO’s Academic Search Premier. Have students log on and do a search of “woman suffrage.” Examine the results, comparing and contrasting the difference between newspaper, magazine, and academic journal articles. Ask students how these periodicals differ and how one can tell the difference. Explain that one of the biggest
indicators is the frequency of publication; newspapers are usually published daily, magazines weekly or monthly, and academic journals quarterly. There are other differences between magazines and academic journals. Because most of these students have never seen an academic journal either at school or in the home, it is helpful to show examples. Distribute back issues of the *Journal of American History* and *American Heritage* (or similar examples) and ask students to differentiate between the two. Answers might include that magazine articles are often shorter, usually jargon-free, and probably contain more photographs. Emphasize the importance of doing more than one search and not settling for the first articles one finds. For instance, a Boolean search of “Susan B. Anthony” and “suffrage” yields different results. A search of “Susan B. Anthony” and the truncated “vot*” (which searches vote, voted, voter, voters, voting) gives the researcher even more varied findings.

Next, demonstrate *Lexis-Nexis*. After the class logs on, explain the differences between *EBSCO* and *Lexis-Nexis* and that the interfaces are different because they are created by different companies. Inform the class that articles in this database go back approximately twenty years. To contrast with *EBSCO*, have the students repeat the same search they first did in that database (“woman suffrage”). This search, going back through all available results, will yield hundreds of hits. Next, do a Boolean search adding “Susan B. Anthony” to yield a smaller, but more accurate number of results.

Because it is easy for students to get confused or distracted online, it is important to walk around throughout the session. Ask students if they understand or if you are speaking too quickly. Interact with the class by asking how many results they received. If the number of results is different, ensure them that there is not necessarily a “wrong” answer. Use this as an opportunity to explain that results may vary based on capitalization, syntax, or whether a user selected only full-text articles, and that they can choose other limiters or expanders.

Finally, demonstrate the *ProQuest’s Historical New York Times* to find newspaper articles from the era. Search “Jacob Riis.” Next, narrow the subject with the Boolean search term “housing.”

**Hands-on Activity:**

Have students use the remainder of the class period to search their subjects.

**Assignment**

Distribute “*Writing a Research Paper: A Primer.*” (see Appendix 2.) Instruct students to read and be prepared to discuss the document with their teachers between now and the next session.

Session 2 held either in library’s computer classroom or at high school (60 minutes)

Preparation & Presentation

By the second session, students will have worked with their teachers on the drafts of their research papers. The librarian’s task now is to teach how—and why—to cite sources. Often students want to do the proper thing when documenting their research but cannot because no one taught them how. This is especially true with underprivileged Advanced Placement students. Students will comprehend the purpose of citing sources more clearly if you explain the two objectives, giving credit to the author and leaving a trail for the reader (i.e., the teacher) to follow in case he/she needs to find a source.

There are three documents here:
Appendix 3 is a how-to list for the most common parenthetical references high school students will encounter.

Appendix 4 is an example of the final draft of a Works Cited page. Note the sample student name (Smith) and sample page number (6) in the upper right corner.

Appendix 5 is a key to the Works Cited page.

Distribute all three appendices to the class. Appendices 4 and 5 can be printed on the same page if possible. Examine along with the students each entry IN DETAIL and why each entry is cited the way it is. A little levity goes a long way here. Acknowledge that, yes, discussing the minutiae of bibliographic references is not the most exciting thing in the world!

Assignment

Complete final drafts of research paper for submission to teacher.


Evaluation:

Individual grades are given by the classroom instructors. The instruction librarian should consult regularly with the English and History teachers to evaluate student development and gauge the effectiveness of the module. Though the module is designed for two sessions, it can be broken into smaller components to accommodate student progress if necessary. The librarian and teachers should meet after the final grades have been disseminated to examine the research papers and ascertain where to improve for the next term.
Supplementary Materials:

The materials (.doc and .ppt) in this section have been placed on the accompanying CD so they can easily be copied and/or modified to fit the needs of individual libraries and instructors.

- Appendix 1—Research Topics
- Appendix 2—Writing a Research Paper: A Primer
- Appendix 3—Parenthetical references in the MLA format
- Appendix 4—Works Cited
- Appendix 5—Works Cited Key
Writing a Research Paper: A Primer

Pick a topic
Start early. A little preparation here will go a long way and save you time in the long run. Ask yourself: Is my topic idea relevant for my class?

Begin your research
Students often find two problems when researching topics: not finding enough information, or finding too much. That’s why you start with a literature review. No, this doesn’t mean just books. It means searching the library catalog and the library databases to see how much has already been written on your topic.

Once you know how much information there is, you must decide the type(s) of information that would be most useful. For example, are you looking for quantitative or qualitative data? Moreover, the relevance of books, periodicals, or the internet may vary depending on your topic.

Get specific
Now that you have an idea how much information is available, develop your thesis. Think hard about what you are trying to say. For instance, are you describing, analyzing or persuading?

Find and choose your sources
Instructors often require a minimum number of different sources. Know how many — at a minimum — you need, and what type(s). You’ve done a little of this in your literature review. Now it’s time to choose the actual sources you’ll use to write the paper.

The Internet is a valuable research tool, but one must always be careful when using Web resources. The American Library Association has five criteria for evaluating online resources: Is it accurate? Is it authoritative? Is it objective? Is it current? What is the coverage (that is, is it free-of-charge, easily accessible)? Don’t print out the first thing that shows up in a search engine.

Even when using “traditional” media like books and magazines you must consider things like bias, timeliness and relevance.

Prepare your draft
Only after you have done steps 1 to 3 should you write the draft.

Revise, revise, and revise again
After writing the draft and putting it aside for a period of time, go back to it and revise. Think: Does my paper say what I intend it to say? Simple is always better.

Cite your sources
Know what citation style your instructor wants you to use. Keep a list of your sources as you go along. Be advised that preparing the Bibliography or Works Cited page will take longer than you realize. Always cite your sources! When in doubt, use quotes.
Parenthetical references in the *MLA* format

1) **Single author**
One historian notes that many of these officers “were merely marking time, hoping for a transfer to a new and more exciting duty station” (Haynes 37).

2) **Two authors**
Gomulka was a Party member and emphasized that “any attempt to sow distrust of the Soviet Union will find no fertile soil among the Polish people” (Pach and Richardson 131).

3) **Source noted, but not quoted**
Not counting his journalism, Whitman wrote no less than twenty-four pieces of fiction and nineteen poems in the time leading up to *Leaves of Grass* (Reynolds 84).

4) **Author cited in text**
As John Patrick Diggins points out in *The Proud Decades*, “after the initial flush of patriotism, the world of politics, government and business returned to more familiar ways” (15).

5) **Same author**
In the opinion of one historian, “The Bandung Conference became part of Nehru’s strategy to offset U.S. alliances” (Brands, *India* 83).

On one such occasion Eisenhower encouraged Dulles to write a book articulating his views, advice he followed, publishing *War or Peace* in 1950 (Brands, *Cold Warriors* 11).

6) **Blocked quotation**
One chronicler wrote of Wilt Chamberlain’s dominance that:

As the season got under way, the rest of the teams in the NBA quickly discovered that it was almost impossible to contain Chamberlain. He scored fifty-eight points... against the Knicks and another fifty-eight against the Detroit Pistons. Other teams started telling jokes such as: How do you defend against Chamberlain? Lock the door in the dressing room, and if that doesn’t work use an ax. (Taylor 121)
7) Two-volume source
In a speech at the Overseas Press Club, Nehru again emphasized the plight of the Indian peasants, arguing that, "The primary problem of Asia is probably the agrarian problem" (First Sixty 2: 496).

8) Encyclopedia entry (no author)
The last of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points argued that: "a general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike" ("Fourteen Points").

9) Introduction, Preface, Foreword, Afterword
One observer has argued, "The many years Jawaharlal Nehru spent in jail . . . served him as a postgraduate course of education in history, literature, and education" (Padover v).


In the quotation listed directly above Padover is cited because the quote comes from his introduction to Nehru's book. Note that there would be two entries in the Works Cited page if one also quoted Nehru.
Research topics for the Progressive Era:

Jane Addams
Anti-Saloon League
William Jennings Bryan
Andrew Carnegie
Columbia Exposition
W.E.B. DuBois
Mary Baker Eddy
Marcus Garvey
Homestead Strike
Housing Reform
J.P. Morgan
Muckraking
John Muir
Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
Plessy vs. Ferguson
George M. Pullman
Joseph Pulitzer
Red scare
Religious revivalism/evangelism
Jacob Riis
Robber barons
Theodore Roosevelt
Sherman Antitrust Act
Upton Sinclair
Tariff reform
Urban League
Booker T. Washington
Woodrow Wilson
Woman Suffrage
Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA)
Each entry listed in the above Works Cited page was chosen to reflect the most common citations that appear in a bibliography. If necessary, consult the *MLA Handbook* for further examples. The following key explains each of the above entries:

1) Brodkin—Academic journal article from a database

2) Burns—Book with more than one author

3) “Eisenhower, Nehru Exchange Greetings”—Newspaper article from a database

4) Emerson—Entry notes the author, editor and re-publication date

5) “Fourteen Points”—Encyclopedia entry from a database

6) “India”—Internet source

7) Kaplan—Basic single-author entry

8) Kempton—Basic magazine article

9) Nehru—Two books listed to show how to add entries by the same author in the Works Cited page. Note that the first entry (*Nehru, the First Sixty Years*) has two volumes.

Note that the research paper, including block quotations and the Works Cited page, should be double-spaced in its entirety.
Works Cited

Brodkin, E.I. “United States Aid to India and Pakistan: The Attitudes of the Fifties.”


Burns, Ric, and James Sanders with Lisa Ades. *New York: An Illustrated History.*


Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Nehru, the First Sixty Years.* Ed. Dorothy Norman. 2 vols. New York:


(Note that the 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* requires the writer to list whether each source was found on the World Wide Web or in print format.)