Teaching Information Literacy and Writing Studies: Volume 1, First Year Composition Courses

Grace Veach
TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY AND WRITING STUDIES

Volume 1
First-Year Composition Courses
Purdue Information Literacy Handbooks

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TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY 
AND WRITING STUDIES

Volume 1
First-Year Composition Courses

edited by Grace Veach

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I am pleased to introduce this third volume in the Purdue Information Literacy Handbooks series. This book is highly relevant for all college and university first-year curricula. Many institutions require first-year students to take writing courses. These courses are optimal for preparing students with the foundation for working critically with information for academic purposes. Grace Veach compiled an outstanding array of perspectives and approaches to collaboration on teaching first-year writing courses. The chapter authors depict experts in two academic disciplines—library science and writing studies—who have shared with each other their knowledge of current theories, methods, and models. They reconciled differences in perspective, terminology, models, and disciplinary knowledge to arrive at customized teaching strategies that develop students’ understanding of using information in research processes. The authors articulate the richness, depth, and effectiveness of their particular collaborations in a manner that shows how far the integration of information literacy with first-year writing courses has progressed in our field and, specifically, in these schools. This book is impressive for its insight, depth, and openness to working with different theories and models in both writing studies and information literacy. Faculty and graduate students who teach first-year writing courses and information literacy librarians would benefit greatly from studying it together, discussing it, and applying it in their teaching.

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In 2011 when I began my doctoral dissertation on information literacy and writing studies, I discovered two fields—library science and writing studies—that both claimed interest in information literacy and researched and wrote about it. Information literacy (IL) has been the topic of discussion in multiple disciplines, but only in librarianship is information literacy crucial to the life or death of the discipline. I may be exaggerating a bit here, but the situation in librarianship in the early 21st century is such that the existence of libraries is being questioned and librarians have felt a pressing need to prove their worth.

Since the 1980s, information literacy has borne a large portion of the burden of this proof in academic librarianship. With the increasing pressure from accrediting bodies to assess outcomes, librarians, with their traditional emphasis on storage and retrieval of physical items, have been hard pressed to prove their worth through the traditional numbers of items held or books checked out. Even the traditional librarian function of indexing and cataloging data is increasingly centralized; services such as OCLC provide more and more of the cataloging before physical items reach the library, and database providers have already indexed and cataloged their information.\(^1\) The traditional “how to use the databases” function of the librarian is also being eroded by the rapidly growing adoption of discovery services, which pre-index all of a library’s database content into one searchable database. The emphasis on learning outcomes, coupled with the growing availability of materials in electronic formats, has made the traditional means of assessing the library (i.e., collection size) nearly irrelevant. Information literacy, then, not only provides student learning outcomes that can be assessed, but it has been an area of the curriculum not already staked out as the possession of another discipline.
Information literacy also plays a key role in the health of Rhetoric and Composition. A perpetual underdog discipline, Rhetoric and Composition has struggled to gain a foothold in English departments where it has been placed. Other academic departments often see it as only a stepping-stone to “real” writing, defined by them as writing in their academic discipline. By forming and strengthening partnerships with library faculty, compositionists will gain valuable allies in the constant fight for institutional capital. Even more important, the coordinated efforts of two disciplines with overlapping masteries in information literacy should have a positive effect on student learning. Students who learn to skillfully incorporate high-quality sources into their academic writing will make both the librarians and the writing instructors valuable colleagues to their peers in the other disciplines.

With a few exceptions, though (Arp, Woodard, Lindstrom, & Shonrock, 2006; Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001; Elmborg, 2005; Farber, 1999; Julien & Given, 2002; Mazziotti & Grettano, 2011), the two disciplines generally stayed in their respective corners. Both disciplines had their own approaches and their own domains (i.e., what they expected to “own” and what they expected the other discipline to cover) (Ackerson & Young, 1994; Bizup, 2008; Britt & Aglinskas, 2002; Leeder, Markey, & Yakel, 2012; Spivey & King, 1989).

With the publication of the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (2011) and the ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015), the disciplines, which had been approaching each other in the intervening years, began to have full-fledged conversations. Although they may have been centered on those two frameworks in the early days of the collaborations, they began to branch out and cover nearly every area where they converged, and even to find new convergences.

Into this conversation, then, comes this volume, which examines information literacy as it is taught to and used by first-year college students in first-year writing (FYW) programs. Schools use varied terminology for first-year programs, so some chapters will refer to first-year composition (FYC) or first-year experience (FYE) classes as well as FYW. These chapters offer practical suggestions for successfully incorporating information literacy into first-year writing classes, with theoretical support from key scholars in both librarianship and writing studies. In many cases, these chapters are cowritten by librarians and writing specialists who are collaborating on a local level as they investigate information literacy teaching through different theoretical lenses and pedagogical styles.

The book is divided into five sections. Part I, “Lenses, Thresholds, and Frameworks,” examines the disciplines as they negotiate the teaching of information literacy in various higher education settings. It appeared to many of us who were working in the intersection of writing studies and information literacy that in 2014–2015, there occurred a “fortunate convergence of exigencies” as Chapter 1 contributors Anderson, Blalock, Louis, and Wolff Murphy term it, involving the introduction of the ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015), the revised WPA Outcomes Statement (WPA, 2014), and the publication of Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), which each highlighted threshold concepts and desired outcomes in their respective disciplines. In Chapter 1, Anderson and her coauthors...
describe their institution’s reaction to a curriculum revision that was mandated during this time period, and the efforts of librarians and writing faculty to allow the disciplines to collaborate in designing a new freshman-level course that would combine writing and research by allowing the two disciplines to inform each other.

Similarly, Margaret Artman and Erica Frisicaro-Pawlowski compare the ACRL Framework with the WPA Outcomes Statement (WPA, 2014) from the point of view of writing program administrators redesigning local curriculum. They posit that the WPA document, centered on outcomes, lacks attention to students’ processes, but that this gap is supplied by the ACRL Framework. By supplementing the Outcomes with the Framework, they feel more confident about attending to the process of student learning during first-year composition than if they had relied on the Outcomes Statement alone.

Brittney Johnson and I. Moriah McCracken describe a model information literacy lesson plan that uses threshold concepts from both the Framework and from Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) (i.e., from information literacy and writing studies) as its foundation. Focusing on Scholarship as Conversation as a particularly accessible frame for first-year writers, they describe the design and teaching of a multiple-session information literacy module within a first-year writing course. Using two students’ experiences, they show how first introducing students to the idea of Scholarship as Conversation and later inviting them to enter the conversation can enrich students’ research experiences.

Part II, “Collaboration and Conversation,” is composed of examples of various approaches to teaching IL to first-year students based on the work of faculty from both the library and writing studies working together. There is not just one model; in fact, this section of the book describes multiple possibilities for faculty and librarian interaction with first-year students all centered around information literacy and writing. Valerie Ross and Dana M. Walker describe the University of Pennsylvania’s move away from the research paper in its first-year writing courses to the more authentic literature review. At the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Alanna Frost and her coauthors, working with the university’s Honors College, collaborated to design a semester-long group research project focused on giving advice to incoming students in the Honors Program. This project allowed students to become familiar with information they themselves would need to successfully navigate their college experiences, while also introducing them to the knowledge-making function of research and writing.

William FitzGerald and Zara Wilkinson take the opportunity provided to two newcomers to leadership roles to design the First-Year Composition sequence to incorporate information literacy frameworks’ threshold concepts from both disciplines in both semesters of instruction, while Katherine Field-Rothschild highlights the Research as Inquiry frame as she problematizes students’ research behaviors. Librarians and writing professors think of Google as the “junk food” of research, yet all too many students—and professors—are content with poorly constructed and insufficiently answered research questions. Community college students, often underprepared for college research, are the audience for Melissa Dennihy and Neera Mohess’s scaffolded, flipped information literacy curriculum.

In Part III, “Pedagogies and Practices,” scholars use different pedagogical lenses to
take a fresh look at teaching information literacy. Robert Hallis challenges professors to teach to an appropriate level of satisficing through reflective mentoring and appreciative inquiry, while Emily Standridge and Vandy Dubre collaborated to use commercially marketed information literacy tutorials in conjunction with reflective writing to ensure that students reached higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy in their thinking about information literacy. Crystal Goldman and Tamara Rhodes describe the use of primary sources as objects for study in first-year writing courses. They find that primary sources generate interest in first-year writers as professors use them to model information-literate behaviors and to deepen critical thinking.

In Part IV, “Classroom-Centered Approaches to Information Literacy,” we are treated to a wide range of innovative approaches to teaching information literacy in first-year classrooms. Cassie Hemstrom and Kathy Anders are using a discourse communities project to teach information literacy, weaving in both the ACRL Framework and the Elon Statement on Writing Transfer (“Elon Statement on Writing Transfer,” 2013). A librarian and an English professor discover Joseph Bizup’s (2008) BEAM schema independently and use that synchronicity to build a partnered instruction program that also incorporates a metaphor of research based on an umbrella’s structure in Amy Lee Locklear and Samantha McNeilly’s piece.

Tom Pace finds that having his students incorporate research into personal writing leads them toward some of the ACRL Framework’s threshold concepts; the exigency of a personal situation can evoke more curiosity and questioning than the standard research paper assignment, while M. Delores Carlito involves students in researching not only the topics of their research but ways to present that research in a multimodal setting. Dagmar Stuehrk Scharold and Lindsey Simard engage Hispanic students in project-based learning to heighten their awareness of real-world information literacy concerns, and Emily Crist and Libby Miles, also working with second-language students, describe a curriculum that employs social narrative to scaffold information literacy learning throughout the course.

The final section deals with what happens after the class: transfer and assessment. In Part V, “Making a Difference,” Nicholas Behm, Margaret Cook, and Tina Kazan write about the use of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) in assessment. As a local and organic process, DCM allowed librarians and writing instructors to develop shared vocabulary and goals for assessment. Lilian W. Mina, Jeanne Law Bohannon, and Jinrong Li advance an assessment methodology that uses the ACRL Framework as a rubric of sorts for measuring students’ research activities. By studying multilingual writers in this way, they not only identify a methodology, but they offer specifics of second-language learners’ difficulties and coping strategies in researching to write in English.

Brewer, Kruy, McGuckin, and Slaga-Metivier focus on the embedded librarian. How can the effect of an embedded librarian in a composition class be assessed? Is this model an effective and efficient way to teach information literacy? They report on an ongoing attempt to utilize the embedded librarian as a complement to the composition instructor in first-year composition courses.

Jerry Stinnett and Marcia Rapchak examine the traditional instructor of first-year writing, a graduate student in English, often literature, who has no previous experience in teaching writing. A lack of awareness about information literacy as well as about rhetoric
can limit these teachers’ ability to pass on information literacy skills to their students; Stinnett and Rapchak recommend acquainting the novice teachers with the threshold concepts in both areas to give them the “bigger picture” view of the two disciplines.

A team at Central Connecticut State University reports on the embedded librarian model of information literacy teaching. After scaffolding the research process with several librarian visits, they used the AAC&U’s Information Literacy VALUE Rubric (2014) combined with an indirect measure to assess information literacy learning in first-year writing students. The volume concludes with a call for deep collaboration among librarians and writing instructors with the goal of fully sharing vocabulary and outcomes in order to maximize student learning.

Conversation and collaboration between librarians and writing professors can only strengthen the two disciplines, as each group brings its own strengths to the table. By demonstrating early in students’ careers that librarians and teaching faculty work hand-in-hand and emphasize the same habits of mind, we can give them a solid foundation as they progress into their majors. Of course, this conversation and collaboration doesn’t end after students’ finish their Composition classes, and the forthcoming Volume 2 of Teaching Information Literacy and Writing Studies will address information literacy and writing studies’ work with other levels and sectors of the academy.

NOTE

1. Often this process is automated, or at best provided by nonlibrarians who are not as expensive to employ.

REFERENCES


PART I

Lenses, Thresholds, and Frameworks
CHAPTER 1

COLLABORATION AS CONVERSATIONS

When Writing Studies and the Library Use the Same Conceptual Lenses

Jennifer Anderson
Glenn Blalock
Lisa Louis
Susan Wolff Murphy
At Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi (TAMU–CC), librarians and faculty teaching in the First-Year Writing Program have a history of collaborating on information literacy efforts. In 2014, a fortunate convergence of exigencies transformed this collaboration into an intentional and sustained conversation about effectively integrating information literacy with our first-year writing course and our First-Year Learning Communities Program. These ongoing conversations among writing faculty and librarians have expanded our views about how we might best enhance student learning in the first year and beyond by providing students with a conceptual framework for thinking about and using writing and developing information literacy.

In this chapter, we argue that librarians and writing faculty need to work together to understand the threshold concepts of our two disciplines, see the overlaps between writing and research processes and forms of knowledge, and help our colleagues reconceive their approach to instruction in both writing and research for the thousands of first-year college students who cross our doorsteps each year. We need to abolish the formulaic writing of the research paper and the mechanical searching for and use of sources in favor of more generative, productive, and transferable practice in exercising the knowledges and skills of research and writing. We recognize the difficulty, however, in crossing the thresholds of each discipline. Many of us, writing faculty, librarians, and students included, have more traditional or commonsense beliefs about both writing and information, and these can cause resistance to change. This chapter chronicles our experiences as we actively worked to bring our two disciplines together in the service of student learning, using the guiding documents of our professions and our own expertise. We uncovered a surprising number of intersections and points of agreement, and the results, we believe, can provide inspiration for similar efforts at other institutions.

**EXIGENCIES**

In 2014, our university approved a significant change in the Core Curriculum, to take effect in fall 2016: First-year students would be required to complete only one semester of first-year writing, instead of two. Facing the task of reducing two writing courses to one, the writing faculty began a yearlong process to design the new course. The faculty wanted the course to be based on the current disciplinary conversations about outcomes (*Outcomes Statement for First Year Writing* [Council for Writing Program Administrators, 2014]), threshold concepts (*Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies* [Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015]), teaching/learning for transfer (*Writing across Contexts* [Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014]), the “Elon Statement on Writing Transfer” (2013), and the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (Council for Writing Program Administrators, 2011).

At the same time, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) was developing the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Librarians at TAMU–CC knew they would need to revisit the design of the library instruction program, which at the time was based on ACRL’s earlier guidelines for information literacy, *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000). They approached the writing faculty to discuss how they might transform the program, especially now that there was only going to be one first-year writing course.
BEGINNING CONVERSATIONS

Because of these exigent circumstances, four of us, two librarians and two writing studies faculty, began working together to integrate information literacy more effectively into our revised first-year course, and to undertake the larger project of integrating information literacy throughout our writing studies curriculum. We immediately recognized that the ACRL Framework was theoretically congruent with the texts that the writing faculty were using to guide the redesign of the first-year writing course. However, we also saw that more communication and collaboration between library faculty and writing faculty would be essential if we were to develop a more effective approach to helping students master information literacy. To begin, we needed to educate one another about what we were currently doing and why.

LIBRARY

Since 1994 (when TAMU–CC enrolled its first class of first-year students), the library’s instruction program has supported our First-Year Writing Program and First-Year Learning Communities Program, offering students new to the university an introduction to the resources and services that the library provides for them. Librarians and faculty in the learning communities have worked together to design research assignments and classes to help students learn about research strategies and tools. The library sessions, based on the one-shot model of instruction, were typically very skills-based and focused on using library databases to find credible information sources for writing assignments.

Librarians have been frustrated with this model. A single 50- or 75-minute session can only have a very limited impact on the educational experience of any student, especially when students’ mental models of research are almost exclusively defined by the use of Google and Wikipedia. These brief sessions give librarians very little time to discuss foundational concepts that might help students build new mental models and develop a more nuanced understanding of information sources and their uses.

WRITING

Since 1994, our First-Year Writing Program had evolved along with current approaches to thinking about and teaching writing. By 2014, we had framed our classes around the threshold concepts, Beaufort’s five kinds of knowledge, habits of mind, and the Writing about Writing textbook. Writing courses focused on rhetorical approaches for different discourse communities; recursive processes, including invention, drafting, revising, editing; and academic argument and research. We struggled with the complexities of learning and transfer and continually attempted to use student reflection to assist in metacognitive awareness (Beaufort, 2008; Russell, 1995, 1997; Yancey et al., 2014). The reduction of two classes to one put increasing pressure on the program to refine the course content to what was essential.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Attempts to emphasize a broader vision of information literacy have been stymied in part because our writing courses and librarians were connected primarily through the ubiquitous research paper (or term paper)
assignment that is a staple of most first-year writing programs. Unfortunately, the research paper assignment itself can be a barrier to student success. For first-year, first-semester students, the research paper process is a minefield of opportunities for failure. Students can be stalled at any point by the tasks of finding a research question, visiting the library, using the databases, finding sources, reading those sources, and finally attempting to integrate and cite them in that research paper. Often, students have not done tasks like this before, do not understand the reasons for these activities, and are not motivated by an authentic audience, purpose, or genre (Fister, 2013; Head, 2013; Howard, Jamieson, & Serviss, 2011; Larson, 1982; Russell, 1995, 1997).

From the library’s perspective, the first-year research paper is somewhat of a straightjacket. In classes built around the typical research paper assignment, librarians were seen as providing a service to the composition classes, helping students find sources related to a chosen topic. In this model, research was almost completely divorced from the process of question-generation and from the discovery process of initial learning about the subject of interest, and instead presented as a tool for identifying results (often with specific characteristics like “peer-reviewed journal articles”) that could then be cited in a bibliography to meet assignment requirements. This kind of class never gets to questions about why to use sources in the first place or where sources come from or a host of other important foundational concepts related to information creation, dissemination, and use, nor does a class taught this way inspire students to see research as a good in and of itself, an activity that can lead to learning and inspire genuine curiosity about the world and students’ place in it.

Writing faculty assign the research paper and librarians support with good intentions, because we are attempting to introduce students to academic research and writing practices. However, librarians and writing instructors need to reconsider how we might help students engage with research and writing using assignments with more potential for helping them cross conceptual thresholds and redefine these activities for their own purposes. By practicing authentic research and using writing for different situations, students can develop metacognitive awareness and will be more likely to extend their abilities and knowledge in meaningful ways to different contexts, to subsequent courses, and beyond (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010).

CONVERSATIONS AS COLLABORATION: TROUBLESOME KNOWLEDGE AND TROUBLING PRACTICES

The authors entered the 2015–2016 academic year with a shared conviction that we had, from our Frameworks and other guiding documents as well as our conversations to date, sufficient agreement among us to proceed with the transformation of our approach to teaching information literacy in the first-year program, a transformation to occur simultaneously with the first-year writing course redesign. We decided to begin with an examination of threshold concepts in information literacy and writing studies in collaboration with our Center for Faculty Excellence. We reintroduced the new ACRL Framework to the first-year program faculty at an August
“Best Practices” session. The writing program faculty then started to meet regularly to discuss their course redesign with librarians invited to participate. The Center for Faculty Excellence purchased copies of Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), so the group could read and discuss the threshold concepts for writing identified in that book alongside the other guiding documents. In addition to those readings, we read information about transfer of learning and librarian Barbara Fister’s 2013 LOEX talk, “Decode Academy.”

These early efforts focused on mapping the territory of writing and research, combining the important concepts from our several documents into an overarching matrix. We explored the overlaps and intersections. In those conversations, we recognized common terminology and shared views of how information (as text) is produced, disseminated, and used. Moreover, we recognized that similar theories of learning were informing our shared documents, all of which confirmed for us that our curricular partnership could be more tightly integrated than it had been. We found many points of agreement, supplemental and complementary. We shared similar goals and vision, and similar theoretical lenses to think about student learning.

For example, early in our conversations, we developed a table to show connections between ACRL threshold concepts and those we were using from Naming What We Know. (Brittney Johnson and Moriah McCracken [2016] have done similar but more in-depth work in this vein.) We discovered that many of the threshold concepts in Naming What We Know were so closely aligned with our aims for information literacy and our experience of the research process that we could frequently substitute the word “research” for “writing” in a section of the text and find that the result was completely appropriate to our purpose. We saw similarly close alignments when we compared the ACRL Framework with the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing.

CONTINUING CONVERSATIONS: FROM TEACHING TO LEARNING

To help us see the bigger picture that would encompass all the documents with which we were working, one of the authors printed all our documents, cut them apart, statement by statement, and reserved a large conference room with ample table space in the library. There, several librarians spent time arranging and rearranging the slips of paper, classifying and reclassifying the various concepts, themes, and statements to attempt to represent visually and materially the overarching matrix that we had been envisioning. As they were assembling this big picture, they discovered natural categories and created new headings, including, for instance, how the information world works, authority, disciplines, habits of mind, privilege, intellectual property, scholarship as a conversation, formats/genre, and the writing/research process.

Librarians and writing faculty gathered one afternoon to see and discuss the results of this work. We circulated among the tables, discussing what might be the best way to organize all this so that faculty, librarians, and students might understand information literacy, research, and writing in new ways. Halfway through this afternoon of conversation we discovered a fundamentally different way to think about and represent the connections between information literacy and...
writing. We recognized that in our conversations, we were explaining connections in terms related to the ways we want students to approach writing. In other words, we could most effectively see and explain connections and relationships among all the statements on these tables when we envisioned what we want students to experience as writers and researchers, and more specifically when we were able to envision students engaged in the recursive processes of writing or research.

Using the idea of process as our lens and as the organizing principle for all the materials we were attempting to integrate enabled us to make connections among concepts in more concrete ways. We realized that we did not want or need a single overarching matrix representing the connections between these frameworks and outcomes. Instead, connections would be dynamic and situational. Students, librarians, and faculty could and would make sense of the concepts we were introducing in different ways, emphasizing elements of the frameworks and of the outcomes differently, and expanding their learning related to writing and information literacy over time as they experienced new situations in which they would use writing, research, or information literacy. Instead of focusing on teaching students about the frameworks and outcomes, we realized that we should focus on enabling students’ learning how to learn to use writing, research, and information literacy in varying contexts and situations, for varying purposes. We then turned our attention to conversations about developing learning environments and experiences that enabled and promoted deep, transferable learning.

To help support these efforts we wrote two parallel statements in which we offered (necessarily linear and possibly incomplete) explanations of “What do writers do?” and “What do researchers do?” (see Boxes 1.1 and 1.2). These documents were designed to help writing faculty recognize which elements of our conceptual frameworks they might emphasize and which outcomes they might focus on as they designed activities and assignments for writing classes and/or information literacy instruction. These statements are designed to help writing faculty and librarians make the alignment of these concepts, knowledge practices, and dispositions more explicit to students.

With the fall 2016 semester fast approaching, we rewrote student learning outcomes (see Box 1.3). We were focusing on how to create learning experiences, assignment sequences, and activities that would challenge students to cross thresholds, act from a different set of beliefs about writing and research, and internalize new understandings of writing and information literacy. We knew that we had to find ways for students to do a variety of things differently, and to reflect on the differences.

We developed a new assignment sequence, allowing faculty flexibility. Discovery and inquiry connect to audience, purpose, genre, and context from the beginning of the semester. Students can experience, for example, how “authority is constructed,” “scholarship is conversation,” and “writing is a social and rhetorical activity” simultaneously during the discovery phase of the course. Concepts related to information literacy and writing will seem less discrete or abstract because students engage with them while they are writing and researching (see Box 1.4).

Students move through a sequence that begins with discovery and exploration of information related to one or more of their areas of interest. They are encouraged to develop and refine research questions to
broaden and deepen their research. For at least the first half of the semester, teachers encourage students to engage with diverging inquiries instead of emphasizing the typical converging inquiry that leads too soon to closure with a focus and thesis statement. With expectations for using the library resources and librarians throughout the semester, we envision multiple class visits to the library or multiple class periods devoted to research in the classroom. As students identify and locate sources of information, we encourage them to map conversations, consider credibility and value of information, and practice summarizing information and synthesizing multiple sources. We emphasize this part of the sequence as researching a subject or issue for the sake of learning, not writing. As they learn more, through research, about the subject, we invite them to begin to consider how they might enter the “conversation” and why. Eventually students reach the point where they propose and create genres for particular audiences and purposes, a variation on the “composition in three genres” assignment from Writing across Contexts (Yancey et al.,

BOX 1.1
WHAT DO WRITERS DO? (Excerpt from our revised ENGL 1302 course information)

When we see writing as an activity, as social, and as rhetorical, we envision writers as participants in “activity systems,” as members of various communities (of discourse, of knowledge, of practice).

• Individuals encounter “situations” that call on them to use writing as a way to achieve a specific purpose.
• Recognizing these situations as “rhetorical” (or as “activity systems”) enables writers to understand how aspects of the situation affect the ways their uses of writing can be successful or not (effective or not).
• As a result, writers analyze the “rhetorical situation” (or the “activity system”) and they use what they learn from this analysis to help them recognize what choices they have as writers about most effective genres (kinds of writing, forms of writing) to consider.
• Writers recognize that choosing a genre brings further choices about which of the genre conventions are flexible and which are not.
• Writers also use analyses of rhetorical situations (or activity systems) to determine what kinds of information they need to achieve their purposes.
• Through “research as inquiry” and “strategic searching for information,” writers locate information that helps them learn more about what they may need to know to achieve their purpose.
• Through [ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate, select and use (integrate) effectively the results of inquiry] writers select information from what they have learned to use in their writing.
• Following conventions appropriate for the rhetorical situation and the genre they are using, writers integrate the information they have selected into their writing.
• Writers know that production of a text is a process, and they choose to use the process that will enable them to produce the most effective text, given the constraints and affordances of the rhetorical situation.
• Depending on their situation, writers often work with diverse others, collaborating during the process of invention, drafting, sharing/responding, revising, and editing.
• As writers gain experience, they learn that writing for new rhetorical situations means that writers may be novices, or have limited experience with writing in these situations, which may mean that their processes may include “failed” drafts, ideas that don’t quite work, choices that aren’t effective. Writers understand that this is normal, and can contribute significantly to their learning.
2014). They return to what they have learned through research and must determine how much of that research they might use, what further research they need to do, and how they will use the results to help them achieve a particular purpose with a specific audience using a specific genre. Throughout this sequence, students reflect regularly on how information literacy concepts, writing concepts, habits of mind, and key terms relate to their work.

In our assignment sequence, students are focusing less on using tools to find sources on a topic about which they have to write.
Collaboration as Conversations

Chapter 1

BOX 1.3
EXCERPT FROM OUR REVISED ENGL 1302 COURSE INFORMATION

Course Description
English 1302 introduces students to writing studies, rhetoric, and academic research (information literacy). Students will read, apply, and reflect on the current research and scholarship in writing studies, especially threshold concepts, kinds of knowledge about writing, and rhetoric. Students will learn how to transfer, deepen, and extend their ability to use writing in various contexts.

ENGL 1302 Outcomes
Students’ portfolios will demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the following outcomes.
1. Identify how their views of writing have changed as a result of the work they have done in the course
2. Demonstrate their ability to analyze different rhetorical situations (in academic, workplace, or civic contexts)
3. Demonstrate their ability to use their analyses of rhetorical situations to identify options and to make appropriate choices that will enable them to use writing to achieve specific purposes
4. Demonstrate their ability to locate, read, evaluate, select, and use (integrate) effectively information from appropriate sources with their own ideas
5. Demonstrate control of situation-appropriate conventions of writing
6. Explain what they have learned from being a novice in new writing situations, and describe how these experiences, which might include failure, contribute to their willingness to accept new challenges as a writer
7. Demonstrate their ability to collaborate effectively as members of diverse teams/groups of writers
8. Evaluate the ways in which they have become a more reflective (mindful, self-aware, thoughtful) writer

Key Terms
For ENGL 1302, we have identified the following key terms we want to emphasize (throughout the semester). These complement the threshold concepts that will be the focus of our reading and much of our informal and reflective writing.
• Rhetorical Situation: audience, purpose, context, exigency
• Discourse Communities and/or Activity Systems
• Genre and genre conventions
• Research as Learning/Information Literacy
• Composing Processes: planning, researching, drafting, sharing and responding, revising, editing, publishing, reflecting
• Reflection, metacognition, transfer/expansion

Habits of Mind
English 1302 will promote students’ development of the eight habits of mind that are essential to students’ success in college writing (The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing). You will also find these same concepts in the ACRL Information Literacy reading, where they are described as “dispositions” that support and promote the development of students’ information literacy.
• Curiosity: the desire to know more about the world
• Openness: the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world
• Engagement: a sense of investment and involvement in learning
• Creativity: the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas
• Persistence: the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects
• Responsibility: the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others
• Flexibility: the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands
• Metacognition: the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge
In our new course, for the first half of the semester, we propose three parallel threads of writing activities: One in which students write About Me; a second thread in which students Write About Writing, about themselves as writers, and about their understanding of the reading in Naming What We Know; and a third thread, Research as Learning, in which students write about themselves as researchers, engage in discovery research, and engage with assigned readings from the ACRL Framework. Below are excerpts from our writing faculty website with an overview of how we explain this to faculty.

**ENGL 1302: Assignment/Activity Suggestions**

For our first uses of the new text and different approaches to assignments, we could focus on two possible ways we will engage with students differently.

1. Be intentional about using a shared conceptual vocabulary, talking about writing and research by using the language from our Key Terms, from our text, and from the ACRL Framework.
2. Integrate more informal writing that engages students with the readings, concepts, vocabulary. Generate class discussions from this student writing.

   - This is not saying that we won’t engage students with writing projects that produce finished documents resulting from revision.

Considering the above, these following sections offer various ways to use writing activities/assignments to engage students with our new textbook, to engage students with “information literacy”/research as learning, and to engage students in ongoing self-assessment and reflection/metacognition.

We all might think about the “shape” or “trajectory” of our assignment sequences in these ways: The first part of the semester, leading to the midterm portfolio, would engage students in three parallel threads of reading, writing, research, and reflection, resulting in numerous less-finished pieces of writing and two “finished” pieces: The extensive Reflective Overview of the portfolio and a proposal for the writing and research they want to do for the second half of the semester.

**Thread One Focus**

Possible ways to think about this thread:

- About Me (and/or Defining Myself):
  - Personal/Writer/Researcher/Learner
  - Who Am I: prior knowledge/future plans
  - This I Believe: About Writing/Research/Learning
  - Self-Assessing/Reflecting

**Course materials for reading:**

- Suggest students use Habits of Mind and Key Terms to help respond to some of these kinds of prompts.
- Prompts for this thread of writings could focus on personal characteristics and others that ask students to Self-Assess/Reflect, and Exploring Who am I as a writer, researcher, reader, learner (with examples).

**Thread Two Focus**

Possible ways to label or think about this thread:

- Learning (More) About Writing
- Crossing Thresholds

**Texts/Readings include:**

- Key Terms
- What Do Writers Do
- NWWK: for example
  - Preface: First two paragraphs, pages ix–x
  - Last paragraph on page 2, beginning with "Threshold concepts are . . ."
  - "Metaconcept," pages 15–16
- NWWK 1.0
  - Related Key Terms, etc.
- NWWK 2.0
  - Related Key Terms, etc.
- NWWK 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3
  - Related Key Terms, etc.
- NWWK 4.0, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4
  - Related Key Terms, etc.
- NWWK 5.3, 5.4
  - Related Key Terms, etc.
Possible description to students:

One of the primary goals of this course (and any course you take over the years) is to expand what you know about a particular subject and what you know how to do with what you know. In a very broad sense, in this course, we want you to expand/add to/create new knowledge with the kind of quality information you currently have/know about writing (written communication/communication) and expand the ways you can use this information effectively/more effectively.

When we say “expand,” we mean more than just adding more knowledge or skills, more than adding more information. Instead, we mean that what you are learning, the new information, will combine with/interact with/integrate with what you knew and what you now know and this synthesis will transform what you know and know how to do in ways that are difficult (probably impossible) to undo.

Here’s a simplistic analogy or example, as a way to understand what we mean by “threshold concepts.” Think of a threshold as a boundary, starting point, beginning, dividing line, start of something new/different, the indication of change of state or status. (For example, some common uses of the word: threshold of pain, of consciousness, of manhood, of a new discovery). Consider opposing words or ways of thinking. Instead of a “threshold” we might see only closing, closure, completion, finale, finish, period, stop, termination, end, ending, or barrier. In other words, “threshold” in the sense we want to use means more, other, different, and we want to see it as something we want to pass through or over. We don’t want to think of learning as ending. We don’t want to think that we have come to the “end” or our learning about writing (or anything else, for that matter).

In our courses, we want learners to be curious, open, persistent, positive.

Thread Three Focus
Possible label for this thread:
• Research to Learn
• Discovery as Research

Texts to Use:
• Research as Learning
  • ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (edited version)
  • Information Literacy Infographics
  • What Do Researchers Do
  • The “Information Cycle”
  • http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/informationcycle.html
  • Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
  • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwdFqjMUIhY
  • UCF Libraries
  • https://vimeo.com/89231161
  • Josh Vossler http://www.joshuavossler.com/
  • From Topic to Problem to Questions
  • PhraseBank

Pedagogical Focus:
• Consider how we might engage students with research from the very first weeks of class, inviting them to identify relevant “topics” for their research without the pressure of having to use the results.
• Consider an ongoing, semester-long research log, in which students record their ongoing work without having to focus on precise documentation or to annotate fully. Instead, try to help them develop a habit of exploring, discovering, and keeping track of what they do and find, especially early in the semester.
Instead, they are using research as a means of discovery and learning, gathering information without necessarily having to use it in writing, which makes the research process itself significant and useful. Librarians work with students to show them how to use the library’s Discovery service to learn about a subject of interest from a variety of perspectives and develop questions that spark curiosity and motivate them to learn more. The research classes with a librarian become sessions about discovering, not finding, and are designed to help students explore broad ideas (and expand their ideas about research itself) and to make better decisions about how to focus their interests as they investigate compelling, authentic reasons to use writing.

WHAT NEXT: WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

As we were writing this chapter in fall 2016, we were offering the new writing course for the first time to approximately 1,250 first-year students, one-half of our entering first-year class. We will be assessing portfolios from a large sampling of those students to determine what we can learn about how students engaged with aspects of the course and how fully teachers implemented the new features of the course. For now, we share these lessons learned as a result of our collaboration.

We discovered that we had more in common than we ever suspected, not just with regard to our guiding documents or our
disciplinary approaches to research and writing, but even our roles within the university. We found that both of our programs had a “service” role with respect to other units on campus: the writing program was tasked with teaching students to write; the library was expected to teach students how to do research; and we both labored beneath unrealistic expectations, that a single class session (in the case of information literacy) or a single course or course sequence (in the case of writing studies) could prepare students for their entire college careers. Perhaps this burden of expectations may have encouraged a kinship and mutual understanding to develop, which made our collaboration even more fruitful.

Before this collaboration began, our relationships were affected by what seemed to be the natural dynamic of first-year writing courses being clients of the library, contracting every semester for a specific service, whether a class or an online research guide. We had never discussed our disciplinary identities and fields of expertise in any depth. Our interactions had been the kind one would expect between professionals from different disciplines; based on mutual respect but, perhaps, not a lot of mutual understanding.

Through our conversations, we began interacting as scholars/professionals from different disciplines, with disciplinary knowledge and evidence-based professional practices. We were connecting as members of communities of practice. We became more than short-term partners in a knowledge-economy exchange; we became co-learners exploring the threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge of our two disciplines.

Our initial common ground was commitment to student learning. However, as we began to read and process the frameworks and other documents, we could see how, in fact, we were ourselves learning: encountering and crossing thresholds in both writing and information literacy. We were beginning to experience a benefit suggested in the ACRL Framework’s (2015) appendix:

A vital benefit in using threshold concepts as one of the underpinnings for the Framework is the potential for collaboration among disciplinary faculty, librarians, teaching and learning center staff, and others. Creating a community of conversations about this enlarged understanding should engender more collaboration, more innovative course designs, and a more inclusive consideration of learning within and beyond the classroom. (p. 13)

As we should have expected, however, when we went to share our findings with our colleagues, we learned that our shared knowledge was not so easily transferable to other librarians and writing faculty, which leads to another lesson. What made sense to the four of us as we talked about assignments, activities, and resources did not immediately resonate with our colleagues. The solutions to the problems we were identifying were classic examples of troublesome knowledge and practices, associated with threshold concepts we had not considered, and much work remains ahead of us in terms of sharing our discoveries with fellow librarians, writing faculty, and other stakeholders.

Through our conversations, we also discovered the need to examine and either change or reclaim the discourse we use when talking about writing, research, and information literacy. In his “Preface” to Naming What We Know (2015), Ray Land offers an insightful
observation about a relation between language use and learning.

In our work in the field of threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge, my colleague Erik Meyer and I noted from the outset how the conceptual transformations and shifts in subjectivity students experienced in the various disciplines we investigated were invariably and inextricably accompanied by changes in their own use of discourse. (p. xi)

To be successful in our future collaborations, we (faculty, librarians, and students) must develop a new, shared terminology to use in our discourse if we expect to achieve the kinds of “conceptual transformations and shifts in subjectivity” we hope to accomplish.

Consider these few examples as terminology that has negative connotations: “research paper,” “write a paper,” “writing course,” “research.” Consider what students hear and feel when they hear these words/phrases. Consider their “prior knowledge” and their motivation to engage further in any of the activities associated with these words (Box 1.4). In addition, consider the impact of the phrase “research paper,” which yokes research and writing together as if research is done only for a paper or a writing assignment. In our case, we have decided we want to separate the two, helping students recognize them as distinct and equally valuable activities.

How do we help students learn to use different genres? How is a “paper” a different genre? Librarians teach about genres in almost every class: what is a journal article if not an example of genre? However, we don’t talk about them that way even though our students are being taught that term and using it would help reinforce their learning. Consider the ways we talk about writing and research: do we focus on nouns and nominalizations or verbs and action or activity? English faculty and librarians should be sensitive to language use, to help us reinforce each other’s teaching more effectively.

One other lesson we may have already known but that we understand even better now is that developing “information literacy” is a lifelong process. And information literacy is dynamic, perhaps even organic, and not “content” or “skills” that can be “taught” one way for everyone. Although information literacy as an initiative may have its home in the library (it should), it will not succeed without participation and support from faculty across the campus, at all levels. Why? Because information literacy concepts and practices need to be integrated in courses across and throughout the curriculum. To imagine that even the most robust library staff could implement this kind of initiative alone is unrealistic and not even really desirable. Ideally, librarians should work closely with faculty in the disciplines, helping them with curricular revisions and effective pedagogical practices, and identifying information literacy concepts relevant to faculty members’ disciplinary specialties. Faculty need to learn from librarians, not just use them as a service, and then take an active role in teaching information literacy to their students.

A final lesson relates to what we do not know well enough. As professionals responsible for enabling and promoting learning, we must educate ourselves and our colleagues about how people learn. We must ensure that the experiences, activities and assignments we are designing will align authentically with the principles of learning as they are set forth in such texts as Ambrose and colleagues’
(2010) *How Learning Works* (see Box 1.5) and a precursor of that work from the National Research Council (2000), *How People Learn*. We need to think beyond the taxonomic tyranny of Bloom and the performance focus of “teaching.” We produce learning, not grades or credit hours, or library visits. Barbara Fister (2013) says this well:

> The purpose of a university is rather like the purpose of a library—to promote without prejudice both learning and discovery, to support the creation of new knowledge, and to preserve and pass down what we know. (p. 3)

**References**


Council for Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and


