

Comp Quickreads

CSULA Department of English

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Research and Information Literacy

Core Information Competencies: An Outline

The CSULA information literate student can:

1. Define the research topic and the need for information
2. Access information effectively and efficiently
3. Evaluate information critically
4. Organize, synthesize, and communicate information for a specific purpose
5. Ethically and legally access and use information

(taken from "Core Information Competencies" developed by the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, CSULA)

Information Literacy Instructional Materials

The following materials developed by the JFK Library are available on the Composition Faculty Resources web site.

Library Exercises:

- Information Diary
- Narrowing a Topic
- Managing What You Find: Research Journal
- Scholarly Journal or Popular Magazine
- Web Site Evaluation

ENGL 102 Materials

- Constructing the ENGL 102 Research Assignment
- Model Rubric for ENGL 102 Research Outcomes

The most recent Composition Conversation focused on information literacy, but the discussion quickly turned to teaching research skills and research writing in first-year writing courses. This shift was unsurprisingly given the close connection between research and information literacy. If research is the university's attempt to institutionalize inquiry and each student's attempt to discover his or her intellectual curiosity, then information literacy identifies the foundational skills necessary to feed that desire to know.

The conversation initially focused on the resources available to help ENGL 102 instructors incorporate information literacy in their courses. A range of instructional materials were developed by CSULA librarian Catherine Haras and have been available online at the composition faculty resources web site since September 2008. These materials include exercises that encourage students to explore the library's resources and think about the different types of research materials available. Also included are sample assignments and guidelines for incorporating and assessing student research specifically in ENGL 102.

Several participants also mentioned class visits to the library to participate in research workshops. These workshops introduce information literacy skills and help students navigate the wealth of resources available. All participants commented on the success of these workshops, though some suggested they were underutilized and others reported the concerns expressed by the librarians that students could be better prepared. The librarians have suggested that instructors could do the following to make the most of the library visit: 1) Review the materials on information literacy posted on the

Composition Faculty resources page; and 2) Help students develop a focus for their research assignment prior to the library visit and even have students send their topics to the librarian so that he or she can prepare specifically for the students' research focus.

While the availability of these resources makes it possible to teach research in a first-year writing course, some participants noted that ENGL 102 is merely one piece of the puzzle. Just as first-year writing courses are not solely responsible for writing instruction at the university, ENGL 102 is not solely responsible for ensuring information literacy competency. Some even wondered whether research was appropriate in a first-year writing course, noting that the teaching of research in first-year writing is a controversial subject. The Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Outcomes statement for first-year composition did not initially include any outcomes related to research and only later added one under the category "Composing in Electronic Environments." Some experts believe research is better taught in the disciplines, and of course students' research experience at the university will hopefully include several self-initiated and self-directed research projects in their major courses. But as one participant observed, research skills like writing skills develop slowly over time and after much practice. While we can't "inoculate" them with information literacy, we can expose them to the process. If we attempt to teach a "product," we will almost always fail because the research project is a discipline-specific genre. If we attempt to teach a "process," we can help students conduct independent research and join the academic research community.