

**The Student as Researcher:  
How Do We Welcome Students  
into the Universe of Academic Discourse?**

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## **Percentage of FYC programs that require at least one research paper:**

Ambrose Manning, 1961: 83%

Ford and Perry, 1982: 78%

Carra Hood, 2010: 86%

## **Percentage of research assignments across the disciplines:**

Head and Eisenberg, 2010: 83%

## Forms of research papers reported by Hood:

- “traditional” informative/expository paper in an objective voice
- researched argument
- proposal
- article for a popular publication
- I-search paper
- intellectual biography

There are exceedingly few articles of a theoretical nature or that are based on research, and almost none cites even one other work on the subject. They are not cumulative. Rather, the majority are of the short, often repetitive, show and tell variety characteristic of an immature field.

Ford, James E., Sharla Reese, and David L. Ward. "Selected Bibliography on Research Paper Instruction." *Literary Research Newsletter* 6.1-2 (1981): 49-65.

This address:

- History of our (Writing/English teachers') engagement with the research paper,
- Some of the more promising pockets of literature on the subject, and
- Some of my own recent research (guardedly positive)

Bruce Ballenger, *Beyond Note Cards: Rethinking the Freshman Research Paper*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1999.

For freshman composition may involve reading, not only in study of models, but also practice in compilation. . . . How to find facts, how to compare inferences, and finally how to bring reading to bear--in all this, freshman composition may be of practical service to any other course, and of liberal service to the student himself. That compilation is commonly regarded as a mechanical process of paste-pot and shears, when experience proves it to be, not only open to originality, but in many cases positively conducive to originality, is a reminder to freshman English.

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At its weakest, the student essay should be a new selection of facts which develop his central idea; at best, it should be the development of a new idea from facts already known, or a new interpretation of facts hitherto unknown or not recognized as pertinent to the idea. By presenting an original view of the subject in an individual manner, the research essay can bring new insight to an old problem.

Harry R. Warfel, Ernst G. Matthews, and John C. Bushman. *American College English*, 1949.

The goal of this research is retrieval of information. . . . I regard it as outrageous to demand that a typical freshman originate a feasible thesis

David M. Wells, "A Program for the Freshman Research Paper." *College Composition and Communication* 28 (1977): 383-84.

Schwegler and Shamoon report that most of the instructors they interviewed believed that the aim of the research paper was “to get students to think in the same critical, analytical, inquiring mode as instructors do—like a literary critic, a sociologist, an art historian, or a chemist” (821).

Robert A. Schwegler and Linda K. Shamoon. “The Aims and Processes of the Research Paper.” *College English* 44.8 (1982): 817-24.

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Three major nodes of research:

- Cognitive-process work of the 80s and 90s
- Library research
- The Citation Project

National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy

<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/resources/techreports.csp>

- Linda Flower,
- John Hayes,
- Jennie Nelson
- Margaret Kantz, etc

Linda Flower, et al. *Reading to Write: Exploring a Cognitive and Social Process*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.

Recasting “the research paper” as “writing from sources” does two things:

1. it distinguishes the task of using source texts to feed an argument from all other forms of empirical research, which arguably are very different processes, and
2. it makes us look at the process itself: what goes on rather than what the product should look like.

Jennie Nelson and John R. Hayes. *How the Writing Context Shapes College Students' Strategies for Writing from Sources*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Writing. Technical Report 16 (1988).

<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/602>

*low-investment strategies* involve the familiar pattern of waiting until the last minute and then quickly finding a few sources that contain “easily plundered pockets of information”

*high investment strategies* involve broader information-seeking followed by writing a paper that constructs a complex argument around an issue

## Contexts that favour high-investment strategies:

- task broken into portions (drafts, response statements, log entries and other forms of reporting)
- feedback on each stage
- instructor takes the role of collaborator rather than examiner
- significant time allotted to the process

Students' investment is proportional to the instructor's investment.

Second node: Bibliographic Instruction, aka Information Literacy or Academic Literacy.

Sample journals:

*Journal of Academic Librarianship*

*Research Strategies*

*Research Quarterly*

Keefe, Jane. "The Hungry Rats Syndrome: Library Anxiety, Information Literacy and the Academic Reference Process." *Research Quarterly* 32.3 (1993): 333–39.

Leckie, Gloria J. "Desperately Seeking Citations: Uncovering Faculty Assumptions about the Undergraduate Research Process." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22.3 (1996): 201-208.

Choose one of the following topics:

- Biodiversity;
- Ocean pollution;
- Transportation of hazardous wastes;
- Desertification; or
- The tropical rainforest.

In your paper, discuss:

- The nature of the issue;
- Its natural/biophysical aspects;
- What has been done on the issue since 1980;
- What is being done on the issue currently. (203)

“Stratified methodology”: the assignment is stretched out so that individual components and associated skills can be taught one at a time.

Lisa Rose-Wiles and Melissa M. Hofmann. "Still Desperately Seeking Citations: Undergraduate Research in the Age of Web-Scale Discovery" (2013). *Library Publications*. Paper 69.

[http://scholarship.shu.edu/lib\\_pub/69](http://scholarship.shu.edu/lib_pub/69)

Rebecca Moore Howard et al. *The Citation Project: Preventing Plagiarism, Teaching Writing*. <http://site.citationproject.net/>

Preventing plagiarism is a desired outcome of our research, as the subtitle above indicates, but the Citation Project research suggests that students' knowing how to understand and synthesize complex, lengthy sources is essential to effective plagiarism prevention. If instructors know how shallowly students are engaging with their research source—and that is what the Citation Project research reveals—then they know what responsible pedagogy needs to address.

Citations compared to original texts and meticulously coded as

- Copying (with or without attribution)
- Patchwriting
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing ("restating a passage from a source in fresh language and compressing by at least 50% the main points of at least three consecutive sentences")

Very little true summarizing (6.3%)

70% of citations from the first two pages of the source

Working from isolated sentences rather than whole ideas ("easily plundered pockets of information")

= need for focus on reading as well as writing

## Insights from the literature:

- Writing from sources is a really, really hard thing to learn to do.
- Despite that, some students seem to do OK.
- Students profit from staged assignments with a lot of guidance.
- Students need a lot of help learning to read difficult material.

# My current project

Focus on senior rather than first and second year students

13 students in Arts.

Questions to elicit:

- How much do they understand about the mechanics of research?
- What they think is the larger role of research (the epistemic question)?
- How do think they learned this?

**Senior Students:**

**Two Vignettes**

# Laura

Started in community college.

Tried Computer Science, Education, now in Communications Studies with a Management minor: “the fastest way I could finish my degree with what I already had.”

Now mostly anxious to be done and working in oil and gas.

Why do faculty members engage in research?

“I haven’t honestly thought about that. To make the professors better teachers at what they do and more knowledgeable in what they do? I guess that’s my answer. I never really thought about it. Yeah, that would be my answer.”

Name as many purposes of a citation as you can think of.

“To not copy someone’s work without giving them credit, because somebody else did the research and did that work and shouldn’t be taking it as your own words.”

Any others?

“I don’t know. My moral code wouldn’t allow me to just take somebody’s writing and say it was my own—use it as my own. There’s some really—good—I haven’t really—no, that’s—”

Scholars – writers generally – use citations for many things: they establish their own bona fides and currency, they advertise their alliances, they bring work to the attention of their reader, they assert ties of collegiality, they exemplify contending positions or define nuances of difference among competing theories or ideas. They do not use them to defend themselves against potential allegations of plagiarism.

Russ Hunt, *Four Reasons to be Happy about Internet Plagiarism*. N.d. Web. 10 December, 2015. <<http://www.stthomasu.ca/~hunt/4reasons.htm>>.

Do you enjoy writing research papers?

“I feel that it makes me a smarter person every time I do it. Because it—the process is just—it can be daunting when you haven’t even started it. But it first of all requires time management which is good for everybody to have mastered. So you need to plan.

How do you typically go about writing a research paper?

“I try to look for as many points as I can toward supporting my thesis. And then obviously you have to make it well rounded. I’ll write my ideas down in pros and cons in a way. I start from just jotting my ideas down and trying to make it balanced.”

# Estelle

Started in English, then Psychology, now in Development Studies.

“I love it. It’s my passion.”

Why do faculty members engage in research?

“As humans we’re trying to figure out the social world around us or even the scientific world. So research is kind of a way to constantly be advancing our knowledge and, especially with conferences and things like that, sharing with other people. . . . That way, it just contributes to a way bigger knowledge base, I guess.”

Name as many purposes of a citation as you can think of.

“OK in the first two years that I had to do citations, I was like ‘Ah this is the biggest pain in the butt, who wants to do this.’ And it’s like ‘Well you do it because your professor wants it.’ But I think now at this point, I can acknowledge that it’s also about, if you’re trying to contribute some piece of knowledge to something, you need to also acknowledge who has also done work in that area. So if I’m looking something up, sometimes citations are the best way for me to find out more about that. So an article might be about something general, but the citations point to the specifics that make up that article.”

If you have found a really useful source, how would you find others like it?

“My general thing would be to use the reference list in that article. And then I would also sort of, depending on the titles and things like that, try to take key words from that article. So, you know, sometimes, even within our recommendation report, like you’ll be reading something on, they’ll call it ‘interfaith’ and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, I never thought to call it that.’ So I’ll take a key word that they use and use that in my future searches. So, you take the jargon of the article and then try and find related things.”

Do you enjoy writing research papers?

“I actually want to throw up saying I do, because I never thought I would. But now that I’m doing things I’m interested in, it is more about getting to know about that subject matter, not just fulfilling an assignment. And if you have the time, which is always the biggest factor, it is fun to read all of their references or to go link searching and learn as much as you can about it. . . . [A recent paper] was on Bio Piracy, the commodification of life basically. And I didn’t know anything to do with that and it was one of my most interesting topics, because you start from square one and go from there and you read all of these things. It just felt cool to learn so much about it from nothing. I would say I really enjoy it now, as long as I have the time – student stress, you know.”

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We want our students to view mystery as a source of inquiry, research, and writing. Mystery is an academic value; what good would an institute of inquiry be if everything was already known?

Davis, Robert L., and Mark Shadle. "Building a Mystery: Alternative Research Writing and the Academic Act of Seeking." *College Composition and Communication* 51.3 (2000): 417-47.

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We see a perfect storm brewing on some campuses: (1) many students have imperatives to graduate in four years or less, because of the weak economy, rising tuition costs, and pressure from the institution and family; (2) many students take a brimming course load each term, which may require more work than they are capable of completing; (3) many students develop a work style that tries to get as much done in as little time as possible and work expands to fill the time allotted.

Alison Head and Michael B. Eisenberg (2009, Dec.). Lessons learned: How college students seek information in the digital age. *Project information literacy progress report*. University of Washington's Information School.

# Larger Patterns

My earlier observations of first-year students:

Of the nineteen students I spoke to, only one reported following up a reference in another piece of reading. More typically, they research by combing the plethora of bibliographic tools they have been given, turning up sources individually and treating each as if it were unique, picked out of space, rather than as a part of a vast web of discourse.

“Reinventing WAC (Again): The First Year Seminar and Academic Literacy.” *College Composition and Communication* 57.2 (2005): 253-76.

# Table 1

## Ways that students reported using to find related sources

Follow citations in the source	13
Look for other works by the same author	4
Recycle key words from the source back into databases	3
Use “cited by” links	3
Use “similar to” links	1
Look for others in the same or similar journals	1
Look for other articles in the same database	1

[\*\*Desperately seeking citations: Uncovering faculty assumptions about the undergraduate research process\*\*](#)

GJ Leckie - *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 1996 - Elsevier

This article discusses information-**seeking** problems which the typical research paper assignment creates. The problem is divided into four components. Faculty must assume more responsibility for teaching information-retrieval skills in their courses, and the article ...

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I didn't know that it was actually "cited by," but I've read ones, and then they'll have a pop-up window that says "similar to this article" and they'll list some and I'll follow them -- sometimes I've found, my paper uses four articles just from link hopping just from that one site . . . . I had never made that connection, though, that cited in these other works means that they're future works, but that's clever.

Far from being empty vessels, many of these students are brimming over with knowledge about how to find things (e.g., articles, people, information, products) through the use of various online resources. Students often know how to do digital searching — better than we as instructors do. . . . We therefore contend that academic research practices need to be connected to students' existing practices rather than set up as wholly separate from (and better than) them.

James P. Purdy and Joyce R. Walker. "Liminal Spaces and Research Identity: The Construction of Introductory Composition Students as Researchers." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 13.1 (2012): 9-41.

Table 2

Answers to the question, “What is the purpose of faculty members’ research?”

Discover and share new knowledge	6
Stay up to date in order to be a better teacher	6
Stay up to date in your field (in general)	3
Gain prestige for the individual academic or for the university	2
Money (grants, promotion)	2
Busy work for academics	1

Creating new knowledge:

“As humans we’re trying to figure out the social world around us or even the scientific world. So research is kind of a way to constantly be advancing our knowledge and, especially with conferences and things like that, sharing with other people.”

Improving teaching:

“I think it’s good because it provides students with someone who actually knows stuff about what they’re doing—like they’re actively doing the research in what they’re teaching about.”

“I haven’t honestly thought about that. To make the professors better teachers at what they do and more knowledgeable in what they do? I guess that’s my answer, I never really thought about it. “

“I would say the money and the prestige is probably a big one. As I understand, faculty, unless they’re under tenure or have been at the university for a long time, don’t get an exorbitant of money and they do all this research and stuff to not only build up to where they would like to be on the university hierarchy, but also to become experts in their subject and do something that might pay them otherwise. So, I guess it comes down to money honestly.”

How did they learn what they know?

Tell me about any experiences you can think of, dating back to your very first year at the University of Calgary, that have had an influence (positive or negative) on your understanding of the research process. In particular, were there any courses you took that had a bearing on your attitude to research? Or any particular profs? What did they do that helped or hindered you?

This phenomenographic research [is] so called because it is interested in exploring how learners describe and understand learning tasks rather than merely explain what students do.

Mary Lea. "Academic Literacies and Learning in Higher Education: Constructing Knowledge through Texts and Experience." *Studies in the Education of Adults* 30.2 (1998): 156-71.

Table 3

Where students reported learning their research strategies

Disciplinary course (introductory or other)	10
Library workshop (in a course or free-standing)	5
Trial and error (no feedback mentioned)	5
Personal advice from a prof	4
First-year seminar	4
Profs talking about their own research programs	2
Personal advice from library staff (as opposed to a formal workshop)	2
Writing center	2
Peer(s)	2
High school	2
Internet source (such as the Purdue OWL)	2
Trial and error (with feedback)	2
Profs talking about their experiences writing research papers in school	1
Writing course	1

## High School:

My high school research was awful. I'm trying to remember. We must have had to source in some way, shape or form, but honestly, the high school I went to—when I came in, I had never heard of APA, I'd never heard of Chicago, MLA, any of that. . . . Quotes, I would usually use a quote as in, this famous guy said this, quote it, but no citation. Adam Smith said blah blah blah. . . . We had to do research, but I wouldn't say it was academic. I mean, I'm sure I used Wikipedia.

First Year Seminar (four of six students):

[She] gave us a sheet on writing styles. How you should be setting up sentences, how you shouldn't be setting up sentences. and then also really good feedback, because we had to do little papers throughout the semester. She gave really good feedback on the papers as to what you were doing maybe not as well as you could be doing and also what you were doing really well. . . . Also just being able to talk to her—she's extremely approachable to be like "OK, what do you mean by this? Can you tell me how can I improve upon this?" Just lots of resources I guess.

## Discipline-specific courses (in some cases)

A lot of it's just kinda like "Here, fend for yourself. Do a research paper. Find journal articles, go." There's not a lot of—it's very like mechanical, it's like "Here's Psych Info. This is how you use Psych Info to find journal articles. this is where you find them." There's kind of a push for that, but there's not a lot of—I don't know, like personal help, or like individual kind of coddling, or "this is how you do it."

Discipline-specific courses (in other cases):

Actually, in my first year I took Introduction to Communication and it was a fantastic course. . . . Looking back at it, I loved it. It taught me a lot about—basically just like how to be a good communicator and how to write a paper clearly and how to find things and—that was awesome.

## Trial and Error (seven students)

For the first few years of my university, I always took a lot of History classes. And in History, you always write at least one big paper. So, just in doing those classes alone, I definitely got better and more efficient at writing papers, because you just get in this mode—you find ways that work and you find how you work, and you just figure these things out as you go. It's almost like trial and error.

## Faculty Modelling

There's a Sociology professor that I will never forget. . . . So it was talking a little bit more about her research and her research was looking at single-income families and their development from smaller communities . . . . So when she talked so passionately about her research in class, and would make it in a fun manner, I was interested in doing that.

I think that a lot of students, when they think of research, they think of like going into old archives and things like that; and picking through stuff that's from years and years ago. Whereas, when you actually think about it, the more recent stuff is what you want to be looking at, because it's the most recent ideas and things that are our knowledge now in our time. So I think by having teachers discuss that they're actually doing research currently, brings the students back to the idea that this is a process that people work towards now.

# Conclusions

1. We are not alone.

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1. We are not alone.
2. Learning to write from sources is a long process.
3. Scholars such as Gloria Leckie and Nelson and Hayes chart a course for the recovery of the research paper.

4. Despite gloomy studies, some students actually get it.

You're learning about things within the subject that you're studying, obviously to kind of feel maybe a little bit more connected to what you're studying. Or maybe I just feel that way because I feel more connected to what I'm studying when I do research papers. I imagine just a little bit of both. I feel like we're little scholars in training, sometimes.