

Research Your Way Past Writer's Block

Advanced students often know the basics on how to use the library, but they need research support. This recipe helps graduate students to build a scholarly community.

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This is a recipe for students conducting a lengthy research project: senior thesis, master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation. Academic research and writing can be a very lonely affair. This workshop will provide students with:

- a scholarly community in which to share research woes and help solve each others' problems
- a chance to get help with research issues that they're stuck on
- tips on how to keep research organized over the course of an advanced project
- a venue for finding further research help in the library (e.g. connecting students with a subject specialist, locations of special collections, etc.)

COOKING TIME

Cooking time is at least 60 minutes and serves no more than twenty students.

ACRL INFORMATION DIETARY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Standard One: 1.1, 1.4

Standard Four: 4.2

MAIN COOKING TECHNIQUE

Small group discussion, write/pair/share

MAIN INGREDIENTS

- Computer access for all students
- Blackboard/Whiteboard
- A copy of *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* by David Allen. New York: Viking, 2001.

PREPARATION

- Have students pre-register and include the college in which they're studying.
- Prepare a list-making handout for students to create three lists: list of projects (long-term and short-term), to-do list, list of reminders of actions needed from others (things to follow-up on).
- Prepare to advise students on organizational strategies and tools.

THE INSTRUCTION SESSION

1. **Write** – 5 minutes
 - a. As students come into the class, they will do a Brain Dump.

- b. Instructions: sit down at a computer and start a list of your current research woes – the things that are keeping you up at night over your research project.
2. **Introductions** – 5 minutes
 - a. Name, department, subject of research (in a sentence or less!)
3. **Pair and share** – 15 minutes
 - a. Students form small groups, based on academic disciplines, and share their current research issues and discuss ways to address those issues.
 - b. As students discuss, librarian roves, noting common themes and issues and joining conversations to give suggestions on solving research problems.
4. **Report** – 20 minutes
 - a. Groups give two-minute reports on common issues in their groups
 - i. Share problem (e.g., navigating a particular database, having too much information, having too narrow a research topic)

- ii. Report on potential solutions
- iii. Get feedback from class and librarian on how else to solve this problem

5. Mini-lecture – 5 minutes

- a. Librarian and graduate assistant offer tools for keeping research organized. Lightning fast introduction to *Getting Things Done* list-making method for staying on task.
 - i. List of projects – long-term projects, both academic and personal
 - ii. List of reminders for next actions (to do list) – physical actions that you need to do next to make your projects progress
 - iii. List of reminders of things you're waiting for from others (like email responses, feedback from professors, etc.)

6. Guided practice – 5 minutes

- a. Handout with three list categories for students to start list-making. Students may start on this in class, but will take it with them to adapt to their own needs

7. Conclusion: When in need of assistance, don't hesitate to ask



ALLERGY WARNINGS

- Workshop must be publicized and marketed well in advance
- Students may need sample research issues to address before they start conversation. Otherwise, they may wander into territory that librarians may have a harder time addressing – difficult or unavailable advisor, lack of funding, etc. Try to stay focused on research and organization issues.
- Sample research issues:
 - Too much information on the topic – information overload
 - Navigating a particular database
 - Where to find some necessary information on the topic
 - How to re-find something you found once and can't relocate
 - How to stay on schedule with research/writing
 - How to keep track of all the journal articles, books, etc.
 - How to find out what's being published right now on the topic
- One of the issues we've dealt with most often in this workshop is current awareness. Students are often interested in learning how to set up RSS feeds, Table of Contents alerts, and the like in order to streamline the literature review process. Be prepared to show students some tools (RSS readers and database alerts) that they can use to stay abreast of new information on their thesis/dissertation topics.

CHEFS' NOTE

- This workshop fills a real need for graduate students who have been working in isolation and just need to talk through some of their research issues and get some fresh ideas on staying organized and completing a research project. As discussion facilitator, the librarian may feel at times like a therapist, listening to and sympathizing with research problems. More can happen, though, than just a gripe session.
- In one session of this workshop, a doctoral student mourned the loss of a citation that he found once but could never find again – “the one that got away.” Fellow workshop attendees recalled their own sad stories of lost articles. The library instructor demonstrated the magic of Advanced Search in Google Scholar for finding partial citations. Later that week, the student sent a grateful email to share the good news – the lost citation was found!
- In another workshop session, a student expressed a need for resources to translate a small but essential document for his research. A fellow student knew someone who would be able to perform that service and a deal was made!