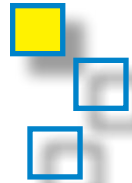


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# White Board



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## For Better Research Assignments, Ask a Librarian

A RECENT SURVEY of faculty handouts for research assignments found that most of the handouts provided details for length, citation guide style and how to get assistance from the faculty member. What wasn't included was a critical need for most undergraduate students: context for the research topic.

Across the board, the handouts lacked specifics of the research context, including where to start, where to focus the information seeking, and how to locate a variety of information types. These key research behaviors are not common skills in todays, or perhaps any, undergraduate students. Ironically when follow-up conversations were completed with the faculty members who took part in the survey; they did not believe students knew where to look but hadn't included the directions necessary to direct students in this phase of research either.

Including where to begin and how many places to look would provide an adequate framework for student research assignments and it seems a necessary component for faculty to consider when designing a research paper or other assignment.

I believe that a partnership with a subject librarian or instruction librarian can provide a solid solution to this area of potential frustration for faculty. A co-developed assignment can help better align the student's research experience with the course learning outcomes, while saving faculty time and effort for other parts of teaching the course. Librarians can serve as the research expert outlining discipline specific resources, including library databases, catalogs of books and media, government resources, subject portals, and online encyclopedias that will steer students to high-quality resources including those on the Internet. Yes, students can and will utilize the Internet and librarians can assist them in understanding the context of those sources within the range of sources available.

Assignments with librarian input will likely identify places to start and provide descriptors or subject based resources to locate resources useful for their assignment. This will allow students to spend less time mulling over thousands of "hits" in a Google search and more time synthesizing the research in-

formation into a coherent paper or presentation. Librarians acknowledge that understanding the broad scope of a discipline's literature is a skill worth developing and they are happy to guide the students through that part of a research-based assignment.

Include a librarian in your next assignment design meeting and you will be pleased with the results both in your valuable time saved and the enhancement to the student learning in your course.

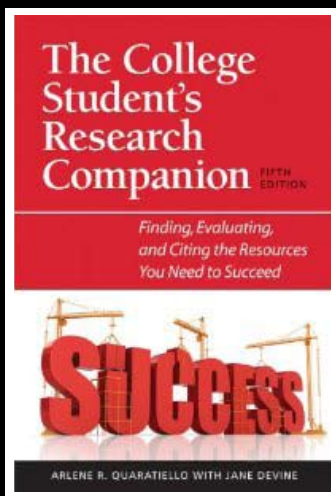
*Beth Schuck, associate university librarian, Cline Library, Northern Arizona University.*

*Reference:*

*"Assigning Inquiry: How Handouts for Research Assignments Guide Today's College Students," Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, Project Information Literacy Progress Report, University of Washington's Information School, July 13, 2010.*

*Beth Schuck; For Better Research Assignments, Ask a Librarian; Faculty Focus; October 17, 2011; [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/instructional-design/for-better-research-assignments-ask-a-librarian/> ] October 17, 2011*

## BOOK



### The College Student's Research Companion: Finding, Evaluating, and Citing the Resources You Need to Succeed, Fifth Edition

Most students faced with writing a research paper probably start at the same place Google. Here's a cutting-edge guide that will save your students from fruitless, random web searching. - *Product Description, Amazon*

Authors: Arlene Quartiello and Jane Devine. Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.; Fifth Edition edition (November 30, 2010)

Open House - Nov 19  
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*Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching  
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# Helping Students Find Their Voices: Four Corners of the Classroom

DO YOU FIND THAT students often struggle to put together effective oral presentations? To help students, try this activity as a way to provide feedback before the big speaking day. The four-corners activity can foster confidence in students while informing them about effective non-verbal/verbal delivery, audience needs, and how to craft effective speaking notes.

Using the four corners of the classroom, each student delivers his or her presentation to a small group, receives individual feedback, and then rotates within that group from speaker to audience member. This activity is ideal for a full class period (50 minutes) and requires only a timer.

## HERE'S HOW TO STRUCTURE THE FOUR CORNERS:

**PREPARATION:** You will want to schedule this activity at least a week before the presentation is due. Ask students to bring all of their speaking materials with them: rough draft outlines, final outlines, references, and speaking notes. It is okay if students have not fully completed their speech—they will still get something out of this activity. In fact, if a student tells me they don't have speaking materials, I insist they participate using whatever materials they have. I begin setting up the classroom about 10 minutes before class begins. Desks should be moved to the four corners of your classroom. The desks should be facing the corner in a semi-circle. The speaker will stand with their backs to the corner and face a mini-audience of approximately five-six desks (depends on class size).

**Activity:** Next, divide the students into four groups (a group for each corner). I purposefully put students who may not know one another well, who can learn from one another, or who have similar issues, together in a group. The students will deliver their presentation to their mini-audience. Four



*Four corners classroom set up*

speeches occur simultaneously. In a typical classroom, the mini-audience will have no trouble hearing their speaker. The teacher will move around the room, with the timer, and provide feedback. I generally stop each round of speeches at five minutes (which reflects my speaking assignments). At the end of the first round of speeches, allow a few minutes for the group to critique and offer suggestions for the speaker. Then, each group elects another member to speak and the process continues until all group members speak.

**THE INSTRUCTOR:** The instructor moves around the room; stopping to listen in on each of the four groups and offer feedback. It is an easy way to hear where the class may struggle and learn what areas need improved for future instruction, too!

**THE AUDIENCE:** Depending on how structured you want the activity, you can give the audience a list of criteria to look for or even assign each student to a specific role. For example, one student can watch for non-verbal issues, one can critique the introduction and conclusion, and another can examine oral references. If you prefer something less structured, simply ask the students to provide general comments and feedback.

**RESULTS:** Typically, students are actively involved, engaged, and excited for the “four

corners” day. It is an activity that fosters peer-to-peer interaction and is a good way for students to practice in a non-threatening format. The instructor can provide targeted, individualized feedback on oral presentations before the big day. Best of all, this activity provides students with the chance to orally present their speech with a live audience. They can see where the gaps are, if their speaking notes are helpful, and what to change before presentation day.

*Lora Helvie-Mason, EdD is an assistant professor of communication studies at Southern University at New Orleans.*

*Lora Helvie-Mason; Helping students Find Their Voices; Four Corners of the Classroom; Faculty Focus ;October 10, 2012; [ <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/helping-students-find-their-voices-four-corners-of-the-classroom/> ] October 10, 2012.*

## CAMPUS VIEW

