

## Ready Set Research

### Materials:

Whiteboard and markers; Instructor's workstation computer and projector; Ready Set Research materials website (<http://www.saddleback.edu/Library/inst/materials.htm>); RSR: Looking in the Right Place handout

### Students will:

- Compare their experience doing research to Kuhlthau's model of the research process
- Recognize the importance of making decisions and considering consequences during the research process
- Match different information needs with the most appropriate resource formats
- Identify sources of research assistance available from the library

### General lesson notes:

This workshop is about unraveling the parts of the research process that may seem mysterious. Neither students nor most professors are paying attention to some of the most important steps in the research process—the steps that we know will make the writing easier. In this workshop, students will be introduced to ways of thinking about problems that they may not have even known they had. So we need to help them to identify the decisions they've made in the past and their consequences as well as new possibilities for the decisions they can make the next time they have research to do. The research process can be seen as just a series of decisions and consequences—nothing mysterious.

## Lesson

### **Pt. 1 Models of the research process:**

(Total < 20min.)

**2 min. Pair/Share: Ask students to partner with their neighbor and come up with 3-5 words or phrases that describe what they feel when they're starting research.**

These should be examples of their emotional or psychological state, i.e., what's going on inside their head rather than what they're physically doing to complete the research.

**1 min. Shout-out: Ask for examples and list them on the board.**

It's likely you'll see responses like frustration or confusion come up for students as common feelings. If there are similarities among the students' responses, point those out. Some of the frustration or confusion students feel may come from having to make so many decisions during the research process and not knowing how to judge what the consequences will be. One could make a very complicated decision tree based on all of the small and large decisions that get made.

**1 min. Ask students to describe some of the decisions they have had to make when working on a college assignment like a paper or a speech.**

If it's not mentioned by any of the students, you should remind them that asking for help from a librarian is a decision that can save them some time at any stage in the research process, even though at first it may seem like it takes more time. You might point out the email reference link and remind them that they can ask for help at the reference desk.

**15 min. Directed learning: Use the diagrams and tables representing the research process. These are linked from the Ready Set Research materials website, <http://www.saddleback.edu/library/instruction/materials.html>.**

Show the "Basic Research Model" of students' experience doing college writing: Get the Assignment → Start Writing. Ask for feedback from students on whether or not this model seems to describe what they do in their classes. Then show the slightly more involved "Basic Research Model with Research" that includes research as an intermediate step. Using the "Expanding the Research Step" and "Introducing the Detailed Model of College Research" illustrations on the RSR materials website, show that the research step itself is made up of several stages. Now show Kuhlthau's "Detailed Model of College Research." (Most students have experienced research as a single step, so this model will likely be new to them.) Briefly explain the stages on the model. For example, during the **Initial Search** it's perfectly acceptable and even desirable that students

should be reading sources like Wikipedia to learn more about the topic they're considering, but by the time they develop a focus and start collecting information for it, they need to move away from general sources to narrower ones.

**Point out the feelings and thoughts that go along with the first stages of the research process.**

These are likely to be the feelings that students expressed at the beginning of the class. Show them that these feelings are normal and are actually built into the research/writing process. The problems start when students skip the steps of **Finding a Focus** and actively **Collecting Information** in support of that focus. When students skip these steps, they go right from doing a preliminary search—finding anything generally related to their topic—to starting their writing.

**Check for students' comprehension by using the following examples:**

Students will know if they've been doing this if they ever find themselves using a quote in their paper that isn't absolutely necessary evidence for making their point. If they have to massage the quote or couch it in a great deal of explanation to make it work then it's likely that they never reached the step of doing focused research to find the information that would actually support their writing process. Usually this means that they have not selected a focus before they started writing.

**Emphasize that the decision to skip stages in the research process has consequences:**

Often this leaves students trying to form a focus from the materials they've collected rather than having the right materials to follow through with a focus they've chosen. It might be helpful to let students know that the frustration or confusion they feel when they're writing a paper this way isn't because they're bad writers but because they skipped a step in the research process that would have saved them from that trouble. The decision to carry-out research without developing a focus has the consequence of making it harder to write a paper. Kuhltau's table shows

that if you choose a focus and gather information for that focus, you should be feeling more confident and more interested in your paper by the time you start writing. If students aren't feeling those things, that's another way to know that they've skipped those steps.

**Pt. 2 Collecting Information – Making Decisions about Your Sources:**  
(Total: < 30min.)

3 min. **Directed learning: Give students a context for the Collecting Information stage so they can tell how it's different from the Initial Search.**

**Finding a Focus** is the middle step in Kuhltau's research model. It's really up to each student how this step gets done. Generally it involves looking for patterns in the materials that the student reads during the initial, unfocused search. The table on this stage shows some of the common strategies and actions students can consider when they're developing their focus. Only after students find a focus are they ready for the **Collecting Information** stage. The decisions to be made during this stage may be unfamiliar to students who have skipped it in the past. In general, during this stage students should be thinking about what kind of information would be the best evidence for making their point about the focus they selected. This requires making some educated guesses about where they can find the kind of information they need. When describing this stage, you may find it helpful to show students the corresponding **Collecting Information** table.

5 min. **Group discussion: Why should we use a range of resource types when we collect our information?**

Encourage students to consider what they already know about these different types of sources: books are different from articles are different from websites. Remind students that they may have had assignments that included requirements to find and reference one book, two articles, and a website, for example.

10 min. **Directed Learning: Write the categories (books, articles, websites) on the board and have students give suggestions for why their professors would have this requirement.**

I offer students my model of the structure of information so they can use it if it works for them when they're planning their research. I lay out the three categories of sources as I see them—Books, Articles, and Websites—and then the subcategories (like anthology, scholarly article, or .edu site) that define more specifically the purposes each source. The basic connections I make for them between source and information are: books are for complex, multi-faceted topics and will give students a sense of the context of their topic; articles are more focused and make it possible to find current, original or local information; and websites are best used for the type of information you can't find published in books or articles, such as the research done by non-profits outside of academic circles, niche interest information, large documents like those published by the government that are too expensive to publish and distribute widely.

15 min. **Directed Learning: Distribute the handout Ready Set Research: Looking in the Right Place.**

Briefly explain the purpose of the handout (i.e., giving students a place to record the connections they're making between kinds of information and types of sources) and introduce the concept that students should know a little about what they want to find before they even start the focused process of collecting information. There are some questions that can help guide students when consider where to go for the information they need: **Who is likely to have gathered or created the information I'm looking for?** The answers could include government or non profit organizations, people with certain kinds of jobs, individuals with personal interests. **What format would make it easiest to get this kind of information across?** The answers should take into account whether the information

requires illustration, needs to be very current, takes a lot of time to produce, takes a lot of money to produce. Considering the answers to these questions should help students to use their time more efficiently and will make it easier for them to get help from professors or librarians because they'll have a goal in mind when they're doing their research. Help students by explaining the answers on their handout in these terms when appropriate.

**Give students guidelines to remember about the best place to look for each kind of information.**

Point out that this might give them some new associations with the types of sources you've been talking about, i.e., books, articles and web sites. Students will use the **RSR: Looking in the Right Place handout** to make notes about the connections between the kind of information they need and the type of source that's most likely to contain it.