CHAPTER 14

Supporting Early Undergraduate Students:

Using Video to Introduce Critical Reading Skills in Scaffolded Information Literacy Instruction

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Introduction

Activating prior knowledge is identified as a key tool for supporting students as they develop academic reading skills.[1] By drawing on learners' past experiences, librarians are able to start with familiar tools and concepts to introduce new ones related to information literacy (IL).[2] These skills are necessary to successfully tackle common assignments such as research papers, and their value can be applied within a variety of courses, levels of study, and even beyond academics into a workplace environment.

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For today's learners, issues involving overconfidence and academic entitlement create challenges that lead them to believe they will do well, even when little effort is applied to their studies.[3] In addition, Twenge, Campbell, and Gentile explain that when rating qualities such as academic ability, drive to achieve, and writing skills, it is more common for modern students to consider themselves "above average" than older populations, despite the fact that they are not actually more accomplished in these areas.[4] These situations are concerning as students' inflated self-esteem may cause them to shy away from asking for help and to underestimate potential gaps they possess as new university learners. On the other hand, the need to perform well in university may also lead students to become overwhelmed by their assignments, convinced that they do not have what it takes to achieve their goals.[5] In some cases, students may develop depression as a result of academic stress—a connection that, according to Wynaden, Wichmann, and Murray, has become more prominent in recent years.[6] Experiences like this may also play a role in impeding students from seeking assistance outside of the classroom, hindered by their own fears of inadequacy. It is clear to us that today's students encounter many barriers surrounding academic success and can benefit from a classroom environment where direct assistance with IL, reading, and writing skills is possible.

We work at the University of Manitoba (U of M) Libraries, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. U of M is the largest post-secondary institution in the province. A portion of new U of M students will directly enter a discipline or major in their first year; however, most will spend a year being undeclared. Therefore, freshmen may be described using terms such as "first-year" or "first-year within a discipline." To simplify this concept, the entire population will be referred to as "early undergraduate students" throughout this chapter.

As subject librarians, we have the opportunity to work closely with instructors and tutors from the university's writing centre, the Academic Learning Centre (ALC). Our units often share handouts, refer students to each other's services, and, on occasion, provide collaborative instruction sessions. However, there are no standard requirements for how the libraries and the ALC interact with one another, meaning that these partnerships are usually dependent on the initiatives of each librarian or library location. Through conversations with faculty members and instructors from the ALC, we identified an absence in instruction on critical reading. While critical reading is an essential skill needed to succeed in increasingly advanced courses and assignments, instruction on this topic does not often appear in early undergraduate classroom settings.

To better support our students, we regularly engage in planning with instructors to develop a scaffolded instructional approach. This technique outlines activities that connect with each learning outcome and creates a teaching structure that allows for "building complexity towards the final deliverable."[7] In this context, scaffolding involves offering a session on critical reading in addition to addressing more traditional IL topics such as searching, incorporating resources, and citing, as all of this content is valuable when completing assignments.

Although library instruction tends to emphasize "one-shot" teaching, our anecdotal evidence suggests that a scaffolded, multiple-visit approach is a better fit for working through the stages of writing. If instructors are hesitant about giving up class time, one

of the best ways to propose the scaffolded approach is to request shorter time periods for each session. For example, instruction could occur over three twenty-minute sessions focused on critical reading, searching and evaluating, and incorporating found information rather than one sixty-minute session where all of these topics are addressed. This allows the librarian and instructor to schedule IL instruction at crucial points throughout the writing process. In addition to the "Says/Does" exercise described in this chapter, activities in other sessions might include peer-to-peer paraphrasing exercises or using live polls (e.g., Poll Everywhere) to encourage interaction with dry topics such as plagiarism (including accidental) and citation management.

Critical Reading Connection

Manarin et al. explain, "Students want financially and personally rewarding careers often linked to degree completion, and if students cannot read critically, they are more likely to struggle with program requirements."[8] However, instruction in critical reading is not provided in the majority of undergraduate courses and, as a result, students struggle to complete their course work effectively and often fall short of instructors' expectations. By developing critical reading skills at the early undergraduate stage, students are better prepared to navigate academic discourse in future learning.

Teaching Strategy

The purpose of using video content is to bridge the gap of understanding between what students have already experienced with communicating information and how this process will translate to an academic environment. To encourage students to begin to think about this shift, any of the following open discussion prompts (and potential corresponding responses) may be helpful prior to the activity:

- Where do you watch videos? (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, Instagram)
- Why do you watch videos? (e.g., learning, entertainment purposes)
- How do you use videos to communicate information? (e.g., to support your ideas or opinions, to entertain)
- Do you prefer to create, share, or view video content? Why does each of these roles matter? (e.g., creating is similar to writing an article, sharing is like citing a source, viewing is what the reader would do)
- How would a content creator convince you to believe them? What strategies do they use? (e.g., influencers will show how a product works, how they personally use it)

This critical reading strategy is adapted from an exercise found in John Bean's *Engaging Ideas*.[9] The activity gives students time to examine how people use references to be more convincing, the point of writing in a deliberate way, and how the quality and structure of an argument are more important than the overall quantity of words. When selecting a video for use, choose a handful of shorter (four- to six-minute) videos and share them with the instructor for final selection. Involving instructors in the teaching preparation solidifies this activity as a collaborative endeavour, allowing them to be more comfortable working with librarians in instructional development.

For the activity, you will need a projector and screen, a short video, and an activity template (figure 14.1) as a handout for each student. A transcript corresponding to each video segment can be shown with the video to assist in accessibility. Provide students with the following directions for completing the "Says/Does" template:

1. Draw a line down the middle of your page, making two columns.
2. Watch the video and follow along with the subtitles, one "paragraph" at a time. We'll pause between.
3. After each paragraph, on the left write what it says (paraphrase a summary statement) and on the right put what it does (action of the paragraph).

Summary: What does it say?	Structure: What does it do?
Citation:	

Adapted from J. Bean, *Engaging Ideas* (2012)

Figure 14.1
"Says/Does" reading exercise template

The template includes a space to enter the full citation for the source (in this case, a YouTube video), as well as two columns: one for a summary of the information ("what is the author saying?") and a second that covers its purpose or value ("what is the author doing?"). We instruct students to break information down into smaller pieces (e.g., paragraph by paragraph) and include page or paragraph numbers if appropriate. In addition to being shared in class, we provide the handout within the course's Learning Management System (LMS). This way, students have multiple chances to interact with the template (and to print or save it if needed) and to use it beyond a single session.

As the video plays, the transcript is visible across the bottom of the screen. We pause the video between each segment or paragraph to give students the opportunity to think critically about the content and write their responses in both columns of the template.

After each pause, we initiate an open discussion with the class. Students can listen to the opinions of their peers and share their own insights about the content, building on a group-focused learning experience. This also gives students who struggle with the activity the confidence to better understand expectations as the exercise continues. Another variation of this lesson involves a "think-pair-share" approach, ensuring that all students can participate, even though some may feel less inclined to share openly with the entire class.[10]

By summarizing the content in the first column, students are engaged in an exercise to put the information in their own words. By completing the second column, students better understand the author's intentions and are provided with examples of how language can be used to one's advantage. See figure 14.2 for an example of a completed version of the "Says/Does" Reading Exercise Template.

Summary: What does it say?	Structure: What does it do?
1. This guy was in jail, he met BJ who spent a bunch of money on creating a website.	• Introduces the speaker (former inmate). • Sets the audience up with a setting/ context.
2. Surrounded by ambitious people who knew what they were doing in business, even though the jargon was different.	• Acclimates the reader to the surroundings. • Introduces the "characters"
3. It's hard to make money in there. Everything is expensive and you don't make much money.	• It gives further context to the hardships. • Probably leads into the next paragraph.
4. There are many ways to make money, some riskier than others. Gives some pricing ideas to provide context.	• Draws audience into the life in terms they can understand.
5. Ingenuity in prisoners, and they want to use these skills outside.	• Further drawing in of the audience using familiar terms
6. No training/rehabilitation programs for ex-offenders, so that's why they re-offend.	• Gives audience insight into why this guy is talking about this stuff. • Probably trying to introduce a "sell".
7. Why he's in jail, and why he's talking. He hopes we'll help by giving people chances, and recognizing potential.	• Gets people thinking about different ways they CAN help. • Calls audience to action.
Citation: Smith, Jeff. (2012, December 5). Lessons in business… from prison. YouTube. https://youtu.be/zWxFhFZJDks	

Adapted from J. Bean, *Engaging Ideas* (2012)

Figure 14.2

Example "Says/Does" completed activity

The activity's discussion may include example questions, such as the ones below, adapted from Fowler, Aaron, and Marshall's *Instructor's Annotated Edition of The Little, Brown Handbook*:[11]

- What arguments does the author make?
- What evidence does the author use to support their arguments?
- Who is the ideal audience for this work? Is the author using language that's appropriate to connect with their audience?

Specific frames within the Association of College and Research Libraries' *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*[12] can also guide this conversation. For example, by examining their two columns, students can reflect on why a particular piece of writing was cited in this video (Authority is Constructed and Contextual). Further, students can look at how the author or speaker introduced ideas from someone else (Information Has Value; Scholarship as Conversation) or consider how the author or

speaker organizes their thoughts within the context of the video as a whole (Information Creation as a Process).

Discussion

We have used various activities to connect with early undergraduate students but find that the most engaging have been those which draw on prior knowledge, as we believe the accessibility of the material is more important than the applicability of the content presented. As described in *Critical Reading in Higher Education*, "Integration comes at a cost to content memory."[13] For example, the use of a YouTube video on a popular topic might be more effective in developing the critical reading skill than a course-related item as students aren't expected to navigate a foreign database, decode academic speech, or retain content. We recommend choosing a video that uses conversational language so that the goals of the activity are more easily met. This leaves the learner open to understanding the purpose of what the author is saying and how they can apply these same strategies. It is important for us to communicate that this exercise and its corresponding template can be used beyond the in-class activity. In doing so, students are prompted to draw on their newly developed critical reading skills when working on assignments.

The exercise described in this chapter works particularly well with in-person humanities and social science courses, where small group discussion is easily facilitated. In this case, the activity template could be handed in for participation marks, but there are many ways to incentivize critical reading. Examples include assignments such as annotated bibliographies, reading responses, or LMS discussion forums.

When grading assignments, instructors may see signs of poor critical reading skills without recognizing the bigger issue. The symptoms may include a lack of citations, misuse or overuse of quotations, difficulty summarizing and paraphrasing ideas, clear and unrecognized bias, inability to respond to sources with original ideas, or inadequate use of evidence to support claims. McAllum points to a need for an instructional approach that better prepares students for future assignments, explaining that "our current teaching practices do not well equip students to independently tackle complex tasks in educational and workplace settings."[14] As instructors have no way of knowing if students have received instruction on critical reading in the past, it is imperative that it is introduced early in the undergraduate experience. However, Odom and Helfers[15] suspect that faculty often feel uncomfortable teaching beyond discipline-specific content.

The symptoms of issues in critical reading correspond to IL, so we feel it is important to address them in our instructional roles as librarians. Instructor feedback indicates that our scaffolded team-teaching approach throughout the assignment process helps to alleviate the pressures of teaching beyond course content. Students tell us that the multiple visit format helps them to better understand the many ways we can support them.

Although our dedication to their learning is appreciated, students may ask, "Where is reading really going to get me if I'm not graded on it?" Without understanding that becoming a better reader leads to becoming a better writer, their writing fails to progress.

Therefore, librarians and instructors should be intentional in partnering to introduce reading and writing instruction to address this perceived lack of need.

Conclusion

As discussed throughout this chapter, success with critical reading in early undergraduate studies depends on a number of factors. Relationships between partners such as libraries, faculties and departments, student groups, and other campus units contribute to a more holistic learning experience. These relationships create space for conversations about recognizing learning gaps and therefore make them easier to address through approaches such as scaffolded instruction.

When entering academia, students don't realize that critical reading is a skill that needs to be developed, which is why the "Says/Does" exercise is so valuable. Incorporating a familiar context such as the genre of videos, which many students have prior experience with, and encouraging students to discuss their responses puts them at ease with a new and possibly daunting concept. Our students' engagement in the activity and willingness to ask questions shows us that we've succeeded in creating space for a safe and productive learning experience.

Notes

1. Candice Livingston et al, "The Impact of an Academic Reading Programme in the Bachelor of Education (Intermediate and Senior Phase) Degree," *Reading and Writing* 6, no. 1 (2015): 2, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/rw.v6i1.66.
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3. Kirstie McAllum, "Managing Imposter Syndrome Among the "Trophy Kids": Creating Teaching Practices That Develop Independence in Millennial Students," *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 364, https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177848; Zachary W. Goldman and Matthew M. Martin, "Millennial Students in the College Classroom: Adjusting to Academic Entitlement," *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 366, https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177841.
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5. McAllum, "Managing Imposter Syndrome," 364.
6. Dianne Wynaden, Helen Wichmann, and Sean Murray, "A Synopsis of the Mental Health Concerns of University Students: Results of a Text-Based Online Survey from One Australian University," *Higher Education Research & Development* 32, no. 5 (2013): 846–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.777032.
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8. Karen Manarin et al., *Critical Reading in Higher Education: Academic Goals and Social Engagement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 8.
9. John C. Bean, "Helping Students Read Difficult Texts," in *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 171.

10. Mahmoud Kaddoura, "Think Pair Share: A Teaching Learning Strategy to Enhance Students' Critical Thinking," *Educational Research Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2013): 3–24, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1061947.pdf.
11. H. Ramsey Fowler, Jane. E. Aaron, and Cynthia Marshall, *The Little, Brown Handbook: Instructor's Annotated Edition* (Toronto: Pearson, 2016), 182.
12. *Framework For Information Literacy For Higher Education*, Association of College and Research Libraries, accessed February 12, 2021, http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.
13. Manarin et al., *Critical Reading in Higher Education,* 10–11.
14. McAllum, "Managing Imposter Syndrome," 364.
15. Stephanie Odom and Richard C. Helfers, "Improving Criminal Justice Students' Writing Outcomes Through Systematic Writing Instruction," *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 27, no. 4 (2016): 549–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2016.1148749.

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