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The MAPIT and GETIT approach to introductory instruction sessions

A protocol for novice researchers

"What should I cover?" and "What can I cover?" are questions all of us who provide library instruction struggle with on a regular basis. These questions surface because most introductory library instruction sessions mirror other classes on campus. This typically translates into 50 minutes of contact with students. As such, we have to decide what to cover and how much depth to provide. Increasing pressure for accountability (e.g., information literacy, accreditation) and incorporating instruction about computers (e.g., networking, printing) absorb an increasing number of precious minutes.

To help address these concerns, I have developed an instructional protocol to electronic information resources for "novice researchers" that recognizes the time limitations typically imposed on instruction, yet still gets across "the basics" without sacrificing quality. The acronyms MAPIT and GETIT characterize my approach which has a few underlying assumptions:

- **Emphasize process over product.** First and foremost, I'm a firm believer that if beginner researchers are taught to focus more on developing good search strategies and research techniques, the results will take care of themselves.
- **Recognize different ability levels.** I recognize I'm going to bore some at the upper level and lose some at the lower level. Still, because of the diverse range of computer and/or research skills, I direct my lecture to the majority of students who tend to fall somewhere in the middle.
- **Build a foundation before building a house.** Good research involves five

steps (as defined in the "Information literacy competency standards for higher education"). However, I acknowledge that most topics and features cannot be covered in a 50-minute session and, as such, focus only on the elements that are relevant to most, if not all, resources (e.g., keyword vs. subject searching).

- **Avoid jargon.** If there's a way to discuss something without jargon, do it! Technology and research can be frustrating enough without unnecessarily clouding the water further.

The MAPIT and GETIT approach, which keeps the above in mind, has three components. The first two attempt to incorporate the first two standards for information literacy:

1) Determine the nature and extent of the information you need.

2) Access needed information effectively and efficiently.

Component 1: MAPIT

I begin each class talking for just a few minutes on the importance of good topic development. I emphasize that you cannot choose the "proper tool for the job" until you have a good sense of what it is you're seeking. In that light, I point out that good research is not simply a matter of typing in a couple of keywords or using a single database.

I explore the MAPIT acronym to cover some of the basics of topic development that students should consider before select-

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ing a resource or otherwise starting their research.

Material
Different indexes index different types of content, but many also index different types of materials (e.g., articles, books, video).

Audience
Different resources have different levels of content. One wouldn't use *The New England Journal of Medicine,* for example, to discuss measles with a third grader . One needs to select a resource with content geared towards the appropriate audience.

Perspective
Most topics can be researched from a variety of perspectives. Heart disease, for example, could be researched as a medical issue (e.g., causes) or an educational one (e.g., how to prevent it). As such, several resources may need to be explored to get the best information.

Intention
What do you hope to do with your final project? For example, will you be challenging or supporting a particular perspective or claim? This will affect how one conducts research.

Topic
What are some of the key names, concepts, dates, and relationships that are central to the topic? Reference books are a great place to start to develop this list that can then be used to search electronic indexes.

Component 2: GETIT
Depending on the nature of the assignment, after outlining the MAPIT approach, I spend the majority of the class demonstrating and otherwise discussing possible resources and search strategies. I frequently point out that research is circular , not linear . Rarely will one resource, one strategy, and/or one set of search terms address all of one's research needs. That's why it's called *re*search. The

GETIT acronym heightens awareness of these issues.

Generate
Maintain a list of terms that seem to work or that appear in the various citations you think might be useful. What works in one resource often works in others.

Explore
What other ways can you say the same things? For example, women and females may seem synonymous but will produce two dramatically different result lists. Try variant spellings, different ways of saying the same thing, and/or key names and concepts.

Try various resources
It's unlikely that one resource will provide you with all of the information you need. It's just as unlikely that a single medium will do so either. Good research involves books, articles, Web sites, and other information resources.

Investigate other strategies
Set or remove limits to narrow or broaden your search. Limiting to peer-reviewed or full-text literature or a particular journal or date range will significantly lower the number of results. Removing any or all of these limits will increase the number of results. Similarly, if you're struggling, try a keyword search; to gain focus, try a subject search.

Try, try again!
Again…they don't call it research for nothing. You will often have to search and search again and then search some more.

Component 3: Computer instruction
Because of information's interdependency with computing technology, I always incorporate at least 5 to 10 minutes of basic computer instruction into every class. Typically this occurs at the end of the discussion and generally revolves around issues relevant to

all researchers, such as accessing resources from home and problems with PDF files (e.g., printing, viewing).

Summary

While it does have obvious limitations, the MAPIT and GETIT approach typically generates positive feedback from students and faculty alike. It seems to hit a middle ground, and almost everyone seems to learn something they didn't know before class. At the very least, this approach gives students a framework upon which they can build as their research needs develop. Still, as it's impossible to address every issue and answer every question in the time allotted, it's important to close every lecture by noting that a librarian is always the best resource for additional assistance whenever it's needed. ℳ