

Using Scholarly Sources: Are students as prepared as they think they are?

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Questions

- What contributes to helping students find and identify scholarly sources?
- If students self-report a high level of confidence in their ability to find scholarly sources, is this evidenced in the sources they include in their annotated bibliographies?
- What prevents students from successfully finding and identifying scholarly sources to complete course work?

Background & Assessment Strategies

1. We identified freshman writing classes (WRI 10) to participate.

2. Students received *in-person library instruction*, included instruction on distinguishing between popular and scholarly sources.

3. Students completed a short *exit survey* immediately following library instruction.

4. Students submitted an *annotated bibliography assignment* for class, which required the inclusion of scholarly sources.

5. Students completed a short *debrief online survey* following their annotated bibliography submission.

6. Students completed online portfolios with a *reflective cover letter* on “Research Ethics” and included an *annotated bibliography* as evidence of research.

7. A team of *librarians* examined surveys and evaluated student work.

- o Post-instruction exit survey
- o Post annotated bibliography debrief survey
- o Cover letter on “Research Ethics”
- o Annotated bibliography



Findings: Students’ Perceptions and Preparedness

WRI 10	Survey Debrief	Annotated Bibliographies
Freshmen Writing	Following library instruction, does the student report feeling prepared to find scholarly sources.	Does the student meet the source requirements for the annotated bibliography?
#1	Very Prepared	Yes
#2	Prepared	No
#3	Prepared	No
#4	Somewhat Prepared	No
#5	Prepared	Yes – if including serious sources
#6	Prepared	Yes – if including serious sources
#7	Prepared	No
#8	Very Prepared	No
#9	Prepared	Yes – if including serious sources
#10	Prepared	Yes – if including serious sources

- Students struggled to find and include the required number of scholarly sources (peer-reviewed) in their annotated bibliographies. Only one student in 10 met the requirements.
- Four students did include a number of serious sources which may indicate students’ awareness of the need for credible resources.
- Half of the students relied heavily on popular sources rather than including any, or an appropriate number of, scholarly or serious sources.
- The level of confidence Writing 10 students (predominantly freshmen) conveyed immediately following a library session, via an exit survey, did not relate to the quality of work they produced.

Findings: Students’ Reflections in their Cover Letters

WRI 10	Annotated Bibliographies	Cover Letter
Freshmen Writing	Does the student meet the source requirements for the annotated bibliography?	Does the student’s written reflections about research match the work produced in the annotated bibliography?
#1	Yes	alignment
#2	No	disconnect
#3	No	disconnect
#4	No	big disconnect
#5	Yes – if including serious sources	alignment
#6	Yes – if including serious sources	alignment
#7	No	alignment
#8	No	alignment
#9	Yes – if including serious sources	alignment
#10	Yes – if including serious sources	alignment

- Some students appeared to acknowledge the databases as useful and credible but in reality they minimally used them.
- Students’ reflective cover letter were more likely, than their exit survey responses, to accurately represent the work they had produced in their annotated bibliographies.

Scholarly Sources – Why Not More?

The students’ cover letters suggest some reasons why scholarly sources may have not been included.



Defaulting to Google

- o Google is a preferred go-to search tool though it doesn’t include much, if any, scholarly information.
- o Google still provides something rather than nothing.



Research Takes Time

- o Time management is an issue; researching takes longer than expected.
- o When working close to a due date, suitable sources available through Interlibrary Loan are not an option.



Searching, Evaluating, & Accessing Difficulties

- o Unsure about differences between scholarly and popular sources
- o Have difficulties finding suitable keywords to use in databases, end up with too many or too few results
- o Confusion regarding the role of UC-eLinks and how to access full text

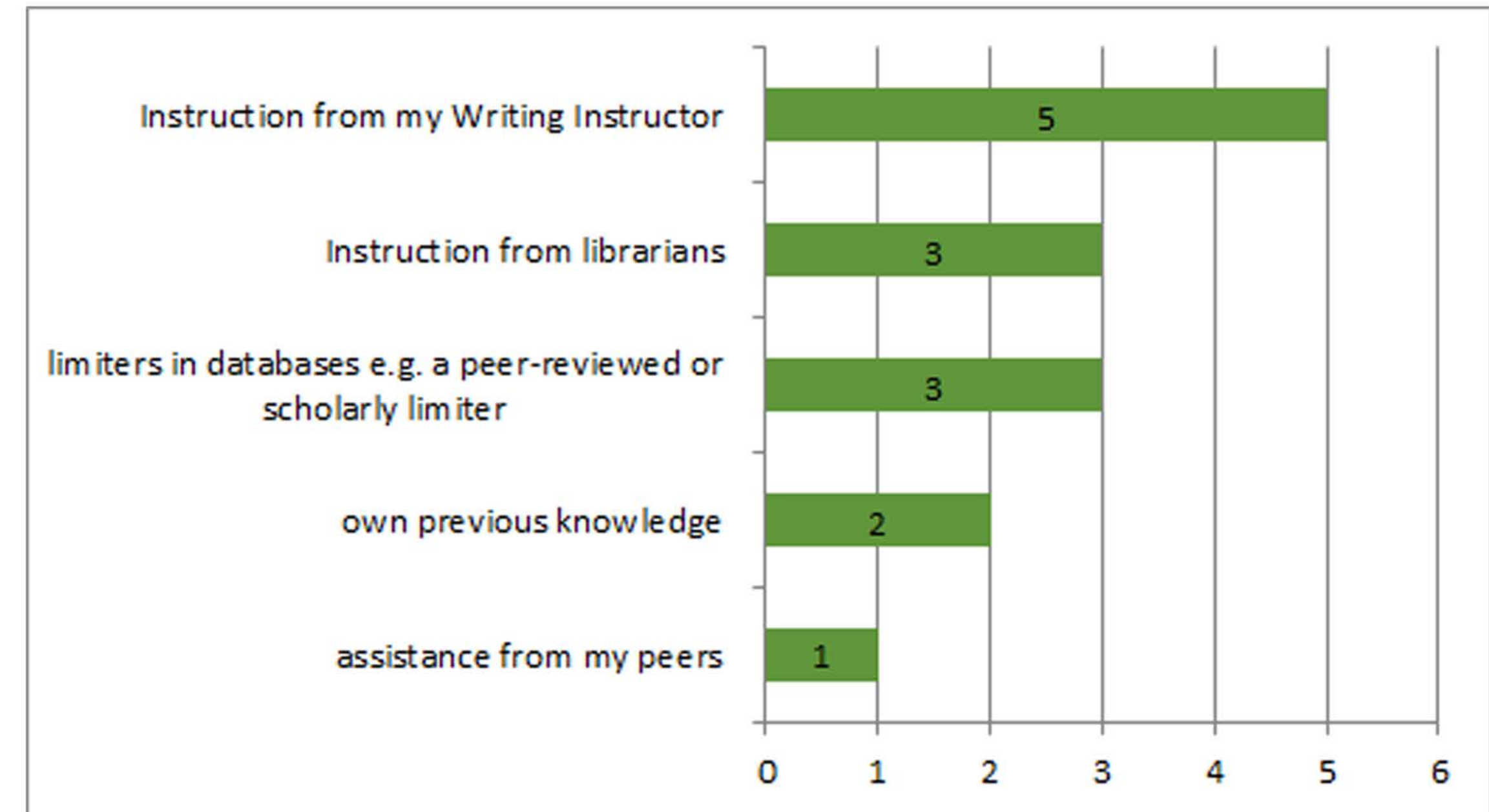


Scholarly is not always Suitable

- o A scholarly article may not have the information sought e.g. it is difficult to find scholarly articles focusing on a specific geographic location such as Merced.

Scholarly Sources – Help in Identification

A small sample of students (5), via the post-annotated bibliography survey, noted that the following helped them to identify scholarly sources for their annotated bibliographies.



Challenges

- Obtaining sections to participate
- Limited data from low participation rates on post-annotated bibliography survey
- Time consuming nature of bibliography evaluation
- Difficulty of getting to the “why” piece of our original question largely due to our methodology.

Conclusion

- Students do not necessarily use scholarly resources even when they are required for their assignments.
- Students acknowledge the usefulness of library resources and may be able to locate scholarly resources, yet they tend to default to popular sources.
- The cover letters and surveys hint at a number of reasons why students may tend to avoid scholarly sources and use popular ones instead.
- Our methodology made it difficult to answer the question in which we were most interested: What prevents or encourages students to use scholarly sources?
- This conclusion is based on a very small sample from a single class and cannot be generalized.

Follow-Up

- In fall 2013, we interviewed students from another Writing 10 section about their use of scholarly and popular sources.
- They relied heavily on limiters in databases to locate scholarly sources.
- Though they did not find it challenging to find scholarly sources, they often found it difficult to find relevant sources.
- Limits of time and reading comprehension surfaced as challenges in scholarly source use.