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It's not just us

Sharing the ACRL Framework with writing tutors

The research process and the writing process are intertwined, but academic libraries and writing centers can too often be siloed campus resources working alongside but apart from one another. The Towson University (TU) Library was beginning a renovation to build a one-stop academic support center on our main floor that would include a dedicated TU Writing Center satellite location. The Writing Center employs a peer tutoring model that supports both undergraduate and graduate students. This opened the doors for some more intentional collaboration between our two units. After some cross-departmental visits, we identified a need for research-related training sessions for peer writing tutors in the upcoming fall semester. During hybrid asynchronous and live sessions, we introduced the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and invited writing tutors to consider how each frame relates to the writing process. By sharing the Framework directly with tutors through self-paced activities and group discussion, we uncovered that there were more similarities in our work than we assumed.

Planning the lesson

We saw this as an opportunity to connect with emerging peer tutors. We wanted to focus on helping peer writing tutors build on their existing knowledge and honor their expertise as frontline supporters of students seeking academic help. To start, we briefly scanned the literature about library and Writing Center collaborations but centered our own curiosity and intuition while designing our lesson plan. We wanted to understand the following: What did these students know already about information literacy needs, and how did they frame their work as tutors? Knowing how closely entangled writing and research processes are, we had also recently discussed the strengths and weaknesses of sharing the ACRL Framework outright. We were concerned that sharing the Framework as written could be overwhelming for students. However, if we chose not to share the Framework, then we may be underestimating student ability at the start.

At the time, peer writing training was held in a hybrid modality using our learning management system, Blackboard. We would have a full week in the training schedule, and we decided to follow the Writing Center's existing model of creating asynchronous online activities that would lead to a live online discussion. The Writing Center tutor training schedule included six discussion sessions that would include a professional staff member from the Writing Center and up to eight peer tutors.

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Our goals for our learning module were to survey tutor perceptions of the TU Library, expose them to library resources they could use during sessions or refer students to, and discuss the connections between information literacy skills and their work as writing tutors using the ACRL Framework as a guide. Ultimately, we hoped to build the tutors' confidence in supporting students directly and empower them to make meaningful referrals to subject librarians or online self-help resources when appropriate.

Asynchronous pre-work

We designed two discussion board activities for the tutors leading up to the live sessions. For the first activity, we shared a Framework Discovery Document to introduce the frames.[1] This document consisted of a simple table that included each frame, a one sentence summary of the frame in action, and a link to a short video explaining each frame created by Steely Library at Northern Kentucky University.[2] For example, we provided students with the following information for the Information Has Value frame:

Table 1. Excerpt from the Framework Discovery document we provided to students prior to our training sessions.[4]

ACRL Frame	Frame in Action	Watch for Understanding
Information Has Value	Students will demonstrate an awareness that information has educational, societal, and commercial value in order to identify the rights, responsibilities, and barriers associated with information creation, access, consumption, and dissemination.	Info Has Value video (YouTube, 1 minute)[3]

We asked students to review each frame and corresponding video and to select one to respond to on the discussion board. We provided basic reflection prompts to help start a conversation:

- How does this frame connect to your work as a writing tutor?
- In what ways have you seen this idea in action in your own experience as a student?
- Now, respond to a peer's discussion about a second frame, other than your own.

Some librarians have questioned the utility of sharing the Framework directly with students on the grounds that it is too complex or theoretical for students to fully grasp in a typical short library session.[5] However, we found that assigning our simplified Framework Discovery Document as asynchronous pre-work allowed students to engage with their chosen frames in a meaningful way. We hoped that paraphrasing the frames, as some librarians have recommended as a best practice,[6] would help students to understand these complex concepts more easily. As other librarians who have tried introducing the ACRL Framework to undergraduate students have noted, some of the frames resonated with students more than others.[7] We allowed the writing tutors to choose which frame they wanted to discuss, and they gravitated toward Information Has Value, Research as Inquiry, and Searching as Strategic Exploration.

In the Information Has Value frame, students focused their reflections on the importance of crediting others through citations, noting that the students they work with are often unclear about what information needs to be cited and the impact our citation choices have on the broader scholarly conversation. Several students noted that citing sources is a way to show

respect for authors and celebrate the value of their work. For the Research as Inquiry frame, the tutors commented on how students often struggle to come up with a research question or to craft and support a thesis statement that does more than simply summarizing sources. For Searching as Strategic Exploration, the tutors mentioned the need to search in multiple places and experiment with broader and narrower search terms to find the best sources for their needs. In all three of these frames, tutors' reflections illustrated the importance of finding and interpreting sources in academic writing. In this way, this activity helped students to recognize the areas of overlap between the library and the writing center, which paved the way for substantive discussions in our live sessions.

Since these peer tutors often assist with reviewing citations, our second asynchronous activity examined a sample reference page. Because the tutors had a strong understanding of how to create proper citations, we did not want to just rehash citation mechanics. Instead, we looked for ways to demonstrate both *why* scholars cite and *why* disciplines commonly require one style over another. We provided the basic information for two journal articles from different fields and asked tutors to first find the articles on their own and then cite them in any way they felt was most appropriate. Most students selected APA (American Psychological Association) style or MLA (Modern Language Association) style.

The tutors had mixed reasons for choosing their styles. Some said they used the style they were most familiar with, while others assumed one or the other was appropriate for the discipline. What was not standard across this activity was the paths taken to retroactively locate the articles. Several students used Google Scholar, but some accessed it on the web while others went through the library's portal. Most students searched by article title, but one student used the digital object identifier. This finding is a confirmation of skills woven throughout the entire Framework: that there are often multiple paths to what we would define as a successful inquiry. The straightest path is not always the road most traveled, but tutors leveraged their varied and existing skills to successfully find what they needed.

Live sessions

Throughout the week, we responded to the discussion board posts and began building rapport with the tutors. We integrated some direct quotes from student responses into our live presentation and retooled the content to address what students had demonstrated the most interest in. We remained flexible and each session informed the next. In our first session, a writing center instructor asked us to define the term "threshold concept" for students. This prompt led to a discussion of what threshold concepts existed in the students' majors as well as in writing as a discipline. The writing tutors ultimately concluded that the most important threshold concept in their context is that writing is an iterative process that requires and benefits from feedback and revision. This idea is at the center of what the tutors do, but they remarked that students often had trouble reaching this understanding because they expected writing to be a linear process.

In subsequent training sessions, we anticipated this conversation and adapted our own language to tap into that existing knowledge. For example, an important threshold concept in writing studies is summarized as "Writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms."[8] We were able to tie this concept to any number of information literacy skills, including the Information Creation as a Process frame, which identifies the ability to consider the process behind information creation and its connection to the specific need of the creator and

audience.[9] In this way, our discussion of the meaning of a threshold concept led students to discover additional connections between research and writing.

Because we would be repeating the live presentation six times, we also wanted to create a structure that would ensure we hit common notes in each session but left plenty of room for serendipitous conversation. We titled our presentation "Best Friends Forever: Cook Library + Writing Center," hoping to set the tone that we were friendly and approachable resources for peer tutors and all students. After introductions on both sides and a participatory recap of the assigned pre-work, we introduced an in-session activity designed to have the peer tutors think critically about how information sources can support or hinder a thesis statement. We presented tutors with seven sources about the broad topic of voting in America. The source formats were as varied as the content, ranging from Twitter posts to peer-reviewed academic journal articles.

After a review of each source, we introduced three scenarios: talking about voting rights with family members, finishing a college research paper, and preparing to draft an article for a school newspaper. We asked the tutors to consider the group of sources and choose the best two for each scenario, promising them that there was not one right answer. This demonstrates the concept that credible sources come in many forms and that these tutors come to the process with their own perspectives on authority and relevance. Through this exercise, tutors began making connections to issues they had experienced in actual student tutoring sessions. They vocalized that oftentimes inappropriate sources make the writing process harder for students because they do not have the right evidence they need to support their claims.

We built on that scenario format to introduce tutors to library resources they could access during tutoring sessions. Some scenarios had obvious responses, like the scenario where we asked tutors how they would help a student schedule an appointment with a subject librarian. Others were less straight-forward and required tutors to consider what they did not know about the library and only assumed, navigating the library website in real time. We asked tutors what they could do if they were helping a student find discipline-specific information outside of their own major or comfort zone. The tutors presented a range of options including using subject-specific databases, visiting research guides, or starting with encyclopedia entries to build their own knowledge before assisting the student.

Conclusion

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy proved to be a valuable tool for teaching and learning in our sessions. By exploring the six frames, writing tutors gained valuable insight about the interconnectedness between information literacy and writing. They were also able to connect the notion of threshold concepts into writing as a field of study. Another success of our sessions was that it opened the door for future, more in-depth collaborations with the Writing Center.

Discussing the ACRL Framework gave our Writing Center colleagues a greater understanding of the work that we do and the knowledge and skills that we believe are most central to students' development as researchers. Since the sessions, we have collaborated with the Writing Center on other projects, including teaching a session on genre during the summer training for writing fellows and co-designing a support session for conditionally accepted first-year students. We look forward to future partnerships with our friends and colleagues in the Writing Center.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Association of College & Research Libraries, "ACRL Framework Discovery," May 10, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/framework-discovery.

2. "Information Has Value," Steely Library NKU, YouTube video posted Oct 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQdfvvx6_oM.

3. "Information Has Value."

4. Association of College & Research Libraries, "ACRL Framework Discovery."

5. Amber Lancaster, Donell Callender, and Laura Heinz, "Bridging the Gap: New Thresholds and Opportunities for Collaboration," in *Rewired: Research-Writing Partnerships within the Frameworks,* edited by Randall McClure, 91 (Chicago: ACRL, 2016), https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/72269; Stephanie J. Schulte and Maureen Knapp, "Awareness, Adoption, and Application of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy in Health Sciences Libraries," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 105, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 351, https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2017.131; Melissa Gross, Don Latham, and Heidi Julien, "What the Framework Means to Me: Attitudes of Academic Librarians toward the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," *Library & Information Science Research* 40, no. 3–4 (July 2018): 266, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2018.09.008.

6. Lancaster, Callender, and Heinz, "Bridging the Gap," 91.

7. Jennifer Jarson and Rachel Hamelers, "Is the ACRL Framework a Teaching Tool? Undergraduates' Interpretations of Its Language and Concepts," *Reference Services Review* 50, no. 2 (January 1, 2021): 186, https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2021-0054.

8. Charles Bazerman, Bill Hart-Davidson, Neal Lerner, Cheryl Ball, Colin Charlton, Andrea A. Lunsford, and Kevin Roozen, "Concept 2: Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms," in *Naming What We Know, Classroom Edition: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, 35 (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15nmjt7.

9. Association of College and Research Libraries, "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," January 11, 2016, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.