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America's Next Top Citation: Teaching MLA skills to Students

Katelyn Angell

Long Island University, katelyn.angell@liu.edu

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Early in my career as an academic librarian, I primarily taught citing and referencing skills to students in library sessions via slideshows in lecture format. However, several years ago I determined to revamp my method of teaching citing skills at Long Island University-Brooklyn. I wished to bring more interaction to the library instruction classroom, as well as devise a means to increase student enjoyment without compromising learning outcomes.

Inspired by game-based learning, audience response systems, and the idea of meeting students where they are, I developed a collaborative, one-hour interactive workshop focused on helping students in English composition classes learn the fundamentals of Modern Language Association (MLA) style.

The scholarship of Mary Broussard[1, 2] played a pivotal role in my interest in incorporating games into my pedagogy, primarily to first- and second-year college students. For example, a colleague and I experimented with using a free online citing game called Citation Tic-Tac-Toe[3] in library instruction sessions with undergraduate students, and documented the success of this initiative in a journal article.[4]

This practical experience combined with the increasing number of journal articles about analog and digital games in an academic library setting cemented my decision to develop my own interactive activity. I chose the competency of documentation because it is one of the most difficult information literacy skill sets to teach, particularly in terms of keeping students engaged in the content. Several librarians at Northwest Missouri State University (NMSU) developed a thorough and effective four-pronged process of helping students learn and retain the fundamentals of citing: textbooks (e.g., style manuals), online tutorials, classroom instruction, and individual consultations.[5] I envisioned my citation activity as a hybrid between an online tutorial and traditional classroom instruction, combining two of these pedagogies described by the NMSU librarians.

In order to make my workshop as engaging as possible to students, I decided that all of the questions in the activity would pertain to popular culture. Amy Springer and Kathryn Yelinik discussed their experiences incorporating aspects of pop culture into one-shot library instruction assignments.[6] The researchers focused on content from television shows frequently watched by young adults at the time, particularly the reality show *Jersey Shore*. Both librarians reported increased student engagement and participation as compared to previous library sessions unrelated to pop culture. Springer conducted a survey in which about 95% of students reported engagement during pop culture- themed

Katelyn Angell is first year success librarian/assistant professor at Long Island University-Brooklyn Campus, email: katelyn.angell@liu.edu

library instruction, and 74% believed the presence of pop culture content resulted in superior information retention. Their success of infusing mainstream television shows into library instruction played a major role in my decision to create a pop culture-centered interactive activity.

I titled the workshop "America's Next Top Citation," a play on words of the long-running television show *America's Next Top Model*. The popular audience response system Poll Everywhere was used as the platform for the workshop. This software is very user-friendly, offers an unlimited number of polls, and is free of charge up to 25 responses per poll.[7] Poll Everywhere is frequently used by educators to anonymously test knowledge and seek student feedback in the classroom. Jared Hoppenfeld described his experiences incorporating this software into library instruction sessions.[8] His research documented multiple benefits of teaching with Poll Everywhere to both students and teaching faculty. The former demonstrated palpable enjoyment and attentiveness in this interactive session, while the latter learned more about their students' research habits and technology usage.

Studies such as Hoppenfeld's contributed to my decision to select Poll Everywhere as the platform of choice for America's Next Top Citation. I developed 11 questions pertaining to the basics of MLA, including in-text citations, identifying different types of sources, the works cited page, and citing an article. Nine questions are multiple choice, and two are open answer. For example, one question asks students to identify how Miley Ray Cyrus would be listed as an author in a reference. Another question requires students to identify the publisher in a book about the *Jersey Shore*. All 11 questions are presented in the sidebar on the next page.

Students complete the tasks in pairs, and use one cell phone to text message their responses. All students are provided with a copy of the Purdue OWL MLA Classroom Poster, which is freely available on the university's Online Writing Lab website.[9] This resource provides succinct and essential information on MLA formatting, in-text citations, and works cited pages. The pairs are highly encouraged to use this overview during the library session and to refer to it in the future when formatting their own research papers.

During the library session I begin this activity by displaying the first question on the projector screen. Students spend a few minutes consulting with their partner and the MLA handout. Once they believe they have the correct answer, they submit their response via text message. Poll Everywhere also supports responses directly through their website or via Twitter. Responses are anonymously displayed on the projector screen. Once all pairs have sent in their answer, the correct answer and a brief explanation is provided by the librarian. Students are invited to ask any questions but rarely act on this opportunity. We then move onto the next of the 11 questions.

Overall, students have displayed visible enjoyment and engagement with America's Next Top Citation. I have informally asked multiple classes of students if they would prefer to learn about citing from either this workshop or a classroom lecture, and all who volunteered feedback preferred this pop culture interactive format. The activity promotes teamwork and the incorporation of technologies and content relevant to students' daily lives into the library classroom (i.e., cell phones, popular media).

Within my practice, I frame America's Next Top Citation as a hybrid between game-based learning and problem-based learning, and in the future I would like to formally assess its impact on student learning. This activity could be easily replicated by librarians at other institutions interested in incorporating both unique technology and games into their classroom. Additionally, the existing questions provided in the appendix could easily be modified to fit any other style format, such as American Psychological Association.

America's Next Top Citation question list

1. Why should you cite your sources?
a. To avoid plagiarism
b. To allow your readers to locate sources you used
c. To help your readers understand your arguments
d. All of the above

2. What's the format here? Turnquist, Kristi. "As 'Breaking Bad' Opens Final Season, the Old Walt is Gone." *The Oregonian* 15 Jul. 2012. ProQuest. Web. 13 Mar. 2013.
a. Web
b. ProQuest
c. The Oregonian
d. 15 Jul. 2012

3. Who published this book? MTV. *Gym, Tanning, Laundry: The Official Jersey Shore Quote Book*. New York: MTV Books, 2010. Print.
a. MTV
b. MTV Books
c. New York

4. Which of these phrases should be in italics? MTV. Gym, Tanning, Laundry: The Official Jersey Shore Quote Book. New York: MTV Books, 2010. Print.
a. Author (MTV)
b. Book title (Gym, Tanning, Laundry: The Official Jersey Shore Quote Book)
c. Publisher (MTV Books)

5. If I was going to use the Vampire Diaries Fan Club website in my paper, would I need to list the website's URL (address) in the reference?
a. Yes
b. No

6. What's the article title in this reference? Willoughby, Sergie. "A Slam Dunk in Brooklyn." *Network Journal* 20.1 (2013): 41. ProQuest. Web. 14 Mar. 2013.
a. A Slam Dunk in Brooklyn
b. Network Journal
c. ProQuest

7. When do you use an in-text citation in a paper?
a. When you quote directly from a source
b. When you paraphrase (reword) a source
c. Both of the above

8. Which is the correct in-text citation for the following quote? "The portrayal of doctors on television has shifted significantly during the past 60 years."
a. (Quick, p. 39)
b. (39, Quick)
c. (Quick 39)

9. What's the name of the page in your paper where you list all the sources that you used? *Open-ended answer*

10. If Miley Ray Cyrus wrote a book how would you list her name in a Works Cited page?
a. Cyrus, M. R.
b. Miley Ray Cyrus
c. Cyrus, Miley Ray

11. Find an article in ProQuest databases about The Walking Dead and send its reference in MLA format. *Open-ended answer*

Notes

1. Mary J. Snyder Broussard, "Secret Agents in the Library: Integrating Virtual and Physical Games in a Small Academic Library," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 17, no. 1 (2010): 20-30, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10691310903584759.

2. Mary J. Snyder Broussard, "Digital Games in Academic Libraries: A Review of Games and Suggested Best Practices," *Reference Services Review* 40, no. 1 (2012): 75-89, www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/00907321211203649.

3. Jenne McCabe and Greg Brown, "Citation Tic-Tac-Toe," James Madison University, https://www.lib.jmu.edu/tictactoe/ (accessed June 23, 2016).

4. Eamon Tewell and Katelyn Angell, "Far from a Trivial Pursuit: Assessing the Effectiveness of Games in Information Literacy Instruction," *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice* 10, no. 1 (2015): 20-33, https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/EBLIP/article/view/22887.

5. Sarah Park, Lori A. Mardis, and Connie Jo Ury, "I've Lost My Identity—Oh, There It is … In a Style Manual: Teaching Citation Styles and Academic Honesty," *Reference Services Review* 39, no. 1 (2011): 42-57, www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/00907321111108105.

6. Amy Springer and Kathryn Yelinik, "Teaching with the Situation," *C&RL News* 72, no. 2 (2011): 78-118, http://crln.acrl.org/content/72/2/78.full.

7. Poll Everywhere, "Frequently Asked Questions," https://www.polleverywhere.com/faq#cost (accessed June 14, 2016).

8. Jared Hoppenfeld, "Keeping Students Engaged with Web-Based Polling in the Library Instruction Session," *Library Hi Tech* 30, no. 2 (2012): 235-252, www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/07378831211239933.

9. Kate Bouwens, "Purdue OWL MLA Classroom Poster," Purdue University Online Writing Lab, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/17/ (accessed June 22, 2016). ℀