

## Chapter 7

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### ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

#### *Using Interviews to Explore Information-Seeking Behavior*

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#### ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on an interview-driven qualitative research study of first-year writers' information-seeking behaviors. Informed by a synthesis of literature from the humanities and information science, we arrived at key exploratory findings by recruiting eleven first-year writing students from two universities (five at one and six at the other); interviewing them using a semistructured methodological approach; and processing the transcribed interviews using thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). The study indicates that students continue to be Google dependent and to prefer secondary sources. They demonstrate a behavior we call *funneling* as they conduct their information searches (beginning with expansive search terms and moving toward more specific terms and expectations at the end of their research) as well as reliance upon people as information sources, favoring friends and family members over faculty and information professionals.

#### INTRODUCTION

In 1993, Charles Schroeder wrote, "I am suggesting that an overall understanding of how students learn and where they are in the process can help us meet the needs of the new students who sit in our classrooms" (Schroeder 1993, 26). His suggestion is as true now as it was more than twenty years ago: as teachers, we must understand our ever-changing groups of students in order to help them. Today's writing students are mired in a conflicting world of computers and pens, smart phones and paper, and digital and physical information. Before writing

instructors can ask students to research, it is imperative to understand their information behavior. In their article “Information Behavior,” Karen Fisher and Heidi Julien write that human information behavior involves many complex factors: people’s information needs, the context of the information needs, how people seek information, their formal and informal information collection, and what they do with the information (Fisher and Julien 2009). That description provides a basis for the research described in this chapter.

Information behavior is fluid and context dependent (Attfield, Blandford, and Dowell 2003, 435; Boyd 2004, 82); different user groups exhibit different information-seeking behaviors (Boyd 2004, 82). First-year writing students comprise a large and diverse information-user group dispersed across the United States. These facts make this group particularly compelling to study in terms of information behavior since their writing classes, in many ways, are representative of their campuses and the undergraduate information user group as a whole. In spite of previous research (e.g., Downs and Wardle 2007; Li and Casanave 2012), we still have much to learn about first-year writing students’ information behavior and undergraduate students’ information use in general. Yet instructors are repeatedly challenged to teach students information skills without an empirical understanding of their students’ contexts or practices. This chapter introduces a small pilot study designed to revisit questions from earlier research about the information-seeking behavior of first-year writing students. It is our hope that explicit discussion of our research methods will provide a foundation for future researchers to replicate or expand the study and that the findings themselves—especially where they correlate with findings from other studies—will provide writing instructors with a better understanding of the information-seeking strategies of their students and the pedagogical strategies they might adopt in response.

## FRAMEWORK

Jamieson and Howard (2011) note that how students research and cite is underresearched, especially as such practices relate to the rapidly expanding role of digital information. While it is generally assumed that all the information readily available on the Internet has increased, a parallel increase in plagiarism has been proven difficult to measure (Walker 2010). What is clear, however, is that undergraduate students still cite books and journals from local library collections (Hendley 2012; Jamieson 2016). Thus, we present a framework for understanding

the information-seeking behavior of undergraduates based on literature from information science and the humanities. For the purposes of this chapter, we define university writing courses as required, general education, lower-division writing classes aimed at teaching incoming college and university students to write in formal and/or academic modes (e.g., first-year composition, freshman writing, and so on). This study focused on students enrolled in classes that required them to conduct research for their writing assignments. With online information resources such as digital libraries, websites, and blogs playing a more prominent role among all information user groups, it is important that researchers and practitioners understand the new role of digital information seeking among undergraduate writing students in addition to the contemporary face of their nondigital information-seeking behaviors. This study investigated the following questions:

1. Where do undergraduate writing students go for information?
2. How do undergraduate writing students arrive at information sources?
3. How and why do first-year composition students use their favored sources of information and choose not to use other sources of information?

## METHODS

### *Basic Description*

This study draws on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. We selected naturalistic methods, interviews in particular, because we felt they were the best way to gather exploratory data that would reveal both students' search and use processes, as well as the context for that process on a granular level. We gathered data through eleven-question semistructured interviews (see app. 7.A) at two large public universities in the United States in the spring of 2012. We chose semistructured interviews because this approach allowed more flexibility than fully structured interviews while still providing uniformity of the data we collected. The data for this research study were collected in the context of a class, which resulted in rich data because the students were in the process of searching for information to write their papers. The drawback to holding in-person interviews was a smaller sample size, which didn't necessarily allow us to generalize these findings to the entire population of first-year writing students.

Eleven students volunteered to participate, five at institution 1, and six at institution 2. All interviewees were white; seven were male,

and four were female. To preserve as much of the instructional and task-orientation context as possible, all interviews were conducted on students' respective campuses. The interviews were conducted with individual participants in a private room; one researcher interviewed the student and the other observed the interview via Skype (videoconferencing software), asking relevant follow-up questions at the end of the interview. Students were aware of the second researcher's presence. Interviews were audio recorded to document interviews in their entirety and to facilitate future transcription. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. We employed thematic analysis and an inductive approach to analyze students' responses to the interview questions (Boyatzis 1998). This process involved transcribing the audio recordings of student interviews, during which process we took note of interesting phenomena and trends, which informed our initial coding scheme. After the transcription process, we used the initial coding scheme to code the transcribed interviews. The coding scheme was extended with additional codes as needed, and the researchers clarified the different codes to achieve consistency. As such, this study used inductive codes, derived directly from the interview data, developed from the bottom up (Boyatzis 1998).

#### *Expanded Discussion of Methods*

To arrive at these methods, we first developed our interview guide (see app. 7.A) based on the research questions that shaped the study. Next, both researchers identified a suitable quiet, private location to interview participants. At institution 1, the researcher used her office. At institution 2, where the researcher shared an office, the researcher requested a room from her department and was granted one in the conference room of the department's main office.

Students who were enrolled in a single class at each institution self-selected for participation in this study. At institution 1, the researcher solicited student participants by contacting an instructor in the English department by e-mail, who then advertised verbally in one section of first-year writing and collected sign-ups by e-mail. Students at institution 2 were solicited via e-mail by their instructor, one of this study's researchers, and invited to use a website to choose an interview date and time. At both institutions, students were offered a nominal amount of extra credit, with additional opportunities for extra credit existing in both classes.

Next, the researchers followed a standard procedure to prepare for the interviews. For each interview, the researcher printed a clean copy of

the interview guide, leaving space on the page for notes, which we handwrote on the page as needed. Each researcher turned on her computer, then opened and tested the audio-recording software. We used Audacity, a free audio-recording and editing package available at sourceforge.net. Then, the researcher logged into Skype for the other researcher to attend the interview in both audio and visual formats.

When the student arrived, the researcher welcomed the student, explained the purpose of the research, provided and explained the informed-consent form and asked the student to sign it, then started the audio recording. The interview followed a semistructured format, with the interviewer asking a question from the guide, allowing the student to respond, then asking follow-up questions or probing certain points further as needed. When the interview was completed, the researcher turned to the second researcher attending via Skype and asked if there were any questions they would like to pose. Once the interview was over, the interviewing researcher ended the audio recording, thanked the student, offered a candy bar as thanks for their help, and accompanied them to the door.

Once all participants had been interviewed, the researchers listened to the recordings using headphones and typed up the interviews verbatim in word-processing software. Doing our own transcriptions had the benefit of getting us much closer to the data than we could have if we had paid others to transcribe for us. When transcriptions were complete, we met to discuss emergent themes, inspired by the methods outlined by Richard Boyatzis (1998) and the detailed knowledge of the interviews that developed from the intensive transcription process. Arriving at a consensus for a theme allowed us to define it as a code, which was added to a digital coding sheet in a word-processing program. We used the first coding sheet to locate examples of the codes in the interviews, and as additional codes emerged, we met, arrived at a consensus, and added the code to the coding sheet and did additional coding passes of the transcriptions already analyzed. When all transcriptions and codes were exhausted, we concluded our analysis.

#### *Limitations of This Method and Recommendations for Follow-Up Studies*

Data were collected on students' campuses, in academic buildings and rooms, and in the case of institution 2's students, by their instructor. It is possible this approach would cause students to give answers colored by their positioning in the academic setting. Future research might investigate this influence by conducting similar interviews in more informal

settings and/or having the interviews conducted by the students' peers or researchers from other institutions.

A larger sample size from more sites would help balance any skew caused by location, institutional practices, or policies or pedagogical interventions by individual faculty or librarians. This study was small and basically exploratory; future studies might replicate it in different populations, with larger sample sizes and/or using other questions or methods.

We interviewed eleven first-year writing students from two large, public universities in the United States regarding their information behavior. The small sample size and qualitative methodology were intended to capture as much of writing students' information-seeking context as possible, but what we gained in nuance we lost in scale. While it is not possible to generalize these findings to larger populations of first-year writing students and undergraduate students, this approach provides an important exploratory snapshot into the world of undergraduate researchers in the second decade of the twenty-first century, building on and updating earlier studies and suggesting areas for further research.

The qualitative nature of our research does not lend itself to meaningful numerical data but is best understood within the larger categories that identify trends and areas for further research. Future researchers might add a larger-scale survey to interviews, as does Project Information Literacy (see Head and Eisenberg 2009), or expand the model of focus groups and individual follow-up interviews (Valentine 1993) to multiple sites.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Although we asked eleven interview questions (see app. 7.A), and follow-up questions where relevant, our goal was to answer the three broad questions discussed above. Approaching our findings in this way offers an opportunity to imagine local studies on one aspect of information literacy, a concept that might block or facilitate research behavior (see Serviss and Jamieson, interchapter 3 in this volume, XXX–XXX), or relevant pedagogies. The findings replicate and update prior research, as shown in the detailed discussion of findings later in this chapter.

### *1. Where Do Undergraduate Writing Students Go for Information?*

Our thematic analysis turned up interesting phenomena and trends. These emerged from the data and led to sometimes surprising findings, such as a heavy reliance on friends and family members in the

information-seeking process. When looking for sources, students in this sample largely went to the following information resources<sup>1</sup> in their information-seeking processes: Google, *Wikipedia*, news websites, friends and family members, class notes, and select subscription databases. Only a few students reported using physical libraries, librarians and information professionals, content experts, books, or magazines, a significant update from research conducted at the beginning of this century, such as that by Fescemyer (2000) and Rowland and Rubbert (2001), which found that students are strongly attached to print materials, especially books. This progression is reflected in the literature, with studies published in 2005 finding students split between searching for information digitally and physically (Callinan 2005; Twait 2005) and more recent research correlating with our findings (Head 2013).

### 2. How Do Undergraduate Writing Students Arrive at Information Sources?

For the most part, undergraduate writers arrived at information sources for their papers by using resources they had “always” known about or been taught about in their high-school or college classes. Based on their descriptions, students tended to define specific information seeking as simply having a topic in mind and going generally in search of related information; very few students described actually seeking a particular source type or even having particular expectations for what they would find. First-year writers largely began their search processes by casting a wide net, typing in their topic in its broadest form, such as *childhood obesity*, or *war in Iraq*. Their search terms sometimes became more specific as they uncovered more information in the course of their search or if something in particular piqued their interest.

### 3. How and Why Do First-Year Composition Students Use Their Favored Sources of Information and Neglect or Choose Not to Use Other Sources of Information?

Students appear to use the sources they do because they are familiar and accessible. Once students feel comfortable using an information resource, they use it regularly and search it until they perceive they have exhausted all it has to offer (whether or not that is actually true). Students also tend to use sources they feel they clearly understand, and these are typically secondary sources. One way to understand this trend is to imagine students’ neglect of sources as a combination of ignorance and unwillingness to venture outside the information resources with which they are comfortable or to adopt new information-seeking behaviors.

In general, weaknesses in first-year writing students' information behavior appear to be their heavy reliance on a limited number of information resources and their tendency to engage with only part of these resources; constraints on their time and their reluctance to invest too much time in their writing assignments; inability to generate productive searches; dependence on family and friends as information sources while ignoring librarians and faculty; and employment of easier-to-use (secondary) source types. Such limits suggest first-year students have yet to grasp the concept of research as inquiry or indeed any key aspects of information-literacy instruction. Dedicated lesson plans and course activities in composition courses could form a significant part of the solution to these weaknesses (see for example the recommendations in Head (2013) based on Project Information Literacy research). More research is needed to develop adequately complex and practical plans to assist first-year writers as the large and omnipresent group they are.

#### **DETAILED DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF PRIOR RESEARCH**

Our findings for this population of FYW students are in line with findings in other studies of undergraduate students more generally, and while we did not replicate the research questions in other studies, we did design them to be in dialogue with and, where relevant, update other research along the lines of the representation of RAD research as a process articulated in this collection (see Serviss, introduction to this volume, XXX–XXX). Students in our study grounded their information-seeking behaviors in the Google search, appearing to operate in distinct comfort zones developed from the instruction they'd received in various classes. They preferred secondary sources, which they often did not read fully. They reported being nervous about their use of *Wikipedia*, yet they used it anyway. We also found that people who could serve as information sources comprised a major part of students' information-seeking behavior, but that the people consulted tended to be friends and family members; faculty and information professionals were largely absent. Students also demonstrated limited understanding of citation and plagiarism when summarizing and paraphrasing sources. Below is a fuller discussion of our findings and the other studies that they confirm or update.

*The “Google Generation” Strikes Again*

The students interviewed in this study reported research strategies that align with those found in other studies (most specifically Head 2013; Lee 2008; McClure and Clink 2009; Rowlands et al. 2008). This generation of students is heavily reliant on search engines, especially Google, for finding information. Common to all students participating in this study was the use of Google as one of the first, if not the very first, place they went to find information. Students were also highly unified in their reasons for using Google as one of their primary resources for information. One student summarized other responses well: “Quick. Convenient . . . I can find whatever I need through Google” (student 7). He went on to describe, as many other students did, that he was aware there were other (“more scholarly,” as student 6 put it) ways to find information. In addition, students voiced the sentiment that they felt their current information-seeking behavior was adequate: “Right now, Google’s working for me, and I’m not, uh, as smart, you know, with different databases and search engines as I wish I could be, so Google, right now, just works for me” (student 7).

*The Information “Comfort Zone”*

Our findings were also in line with those of earlier studies in that the students reported exhausting their searches once they had reviewed the information options they had used before rather than looking for new places to find information (Lee 2008, 214; Kim and Sin 2011, 180–84; Timmers and Glas 2010, 64; Warwick et al. 2009, 2412). Students probably only *perceived* that they had exhausted their sources, however, as four students admitted there was probably more information on their topic in the source but that they were unsure of how to locate it. Students in this sample used a relatively limited repertoire of information resources, primarily Google, news websites, friends and family, class notes, and select databases through their institution’s library website, all of which appear to represent a distinct “comfort zone” in which they operated. Students tended to describe a linear process as they worked through their selected resources for information, starting at their preferred information resource—for all but one, Google—and proceeding to their next favored resource when no more satisfactory options could be found (students 1 and 3–11). They reported that when they felt they had enough information (usually, the minimum number of required sources for their paper), they simply stopped looking for any more information.

*Use and Fear of Wikipedia*

Michelle Twait found that undergraduate students' top criterion for finding a source useful was perceived content (students did not seem to read a source in its entirety before making these decisions), followed by familiarity with where the resource is housed (a website or database, for example). Other prominent criteria (in decreasing order of importance) were reputation or credibility; convenience; and format, type, or genre (Twait 2005, 569–70). Hur-li Lee arrived at similar findings three years later (Lee 2008, 214–16). Kyung-Sun Kim and Sei-Ching Joanna Sin studied the selection criteria students claimed to use and compared them with the methods they actually used based on characteristics of the sources they finally selected. From a list they provided as part of the study, Kim and Sin found students' favored criteria to be accuracy and trustworthiness, ease of accessibility, ease of use, cost (whether the resource is free or not), and currency. The characteristics of sources students actually used were ease of accessibility, cost (whether the resource is free or not), familiarity, ease of use, and content comprehensiveness (Kim and Sin 2011, 184–85). In all of these studies, familiarity was high on the list, and for current students, perhaps the most familiar resource is *Wikipedia*. Alison Head's more recent survey of 1,341 first-year students reports that while students describe moving away from Google and *Wikipedia* as they progress through their education, "learning to navigate their new and complex digital and print Landscape" (and struggling in the process), many others report that "they still relied on their deeply ingrained habit of using Google searches and *Wikipedia*, a practice that had been acceptable for research papers in high school" (Head 2013, 3). These findings mirror those revealed in our study.

Most students in our study reported that they had explicitly been discouraged or even forbidden to use *Wikipedia* as a resource of information in their writing by their high-school teachers and/or college instructors and professors. As a result, students were anxious about accessing *Wikipedia* in the course of their research, all the while feeling comfortable with the generalness of its content. Student 10 characterized the scenario this way: "*Wikipedia's* always, like, the definition is what [Google] automatically goes to, and then I'll read through *Wikipedia*, but everyone always says don't always trust it, depending on the teacher, and so then, I'll try and find other sources." While it appears from the data that different teachers of writing feel differently about *Wikipedia*, on the whole, students perceive their teachers as disapproving of the site. This cautious use of *Wikipedia* was also reported by Lim, who observed

that students use *Wikipedia* in the initial stages of their information-seeking process but fail to cite it (Lim 2009, 2200).

### *Engaging with Sources*

Jamieson and Howard (2013) found that first-year writing students largely used academically appropriate sources in their papers (e.g., journal articles, books, book chapters, government documents, etc.), but these sources were used selectively. For example, 69 percent of the research had been drawn from the first page (46 percent) or second page (23 percent) of the source (see also Jamieson, this collection). Our pilot study further investigated both these findings by exploring the degree to which students engage with the information they choose. When asked question 8 (*How far into a source do you read before choosing something to include in your paper? Is it different for short sources and very long sources?*), students responded that they would “try” to read the entirety of the piece of information, but most admitted they limited the amount of time they spent on their essays, which subsequently limited how far they read into a source before choosing something and incorporating it into their papers. In many cases, rather than trying to find the best piece of information for their papers, students simply used the first they came across. Student 4 described some of the limitations in delving into sources. “It’s just, if it’s really long, I have a job, I have other homework to do, you know?” This finding is not altogether bleak, however. Students 6 and 9 both described reading their sources in their entirety. Student 9 even described printing all his sources and highlighting and annotating them.

### *Funneling*

Question 2 on our interview guide explored why students engaged so briefly with their sources. We found that students searched in a way we describe as *funneling*. Students tended to begin their research with expansive search terms to find basic information on the subject. Toward the end of their research, they had more specific search terms and source expectations. Students tended not to browse for topics for their essays, instead choosing them *ahead* of their writing and information-search processes. Armed with a topic, students *then* engaged in browsing behavior, typically using the simplest form of their topic as their search term, such as “animal testing” (described by student 10), “religion in politics,” (described by student 6) or “Johnny Depp films” (described by

student 7). Only when their central search term returned too many hits or failed, in their perception, to turn up any more useful information, did students begin to add to or change their search terms.

Student 11 summed up his peers' and his own behaviors succinctly and clearly: "I tend to browse in the beginning, and then, as I get more specific in my paper, obviously, I'm going to search for more specific things to fit that exact topic." His description points to another finding of this study: students in this study largely tended to select resources that supported their predetermined stance or approach to a topic rather than letting the information they found in the course of their search process shape their perspectives. This finding is especially interesting given the earlier finding that students tend to select topics they are interested in but know little about. This apparent contradiction is worrisome because if this is the case, students are apparently choosing their sources out of convenience, learning little about their topics in the process of writing their essays; they are supporting limited repertoires of knowledge with limited information, found in limited *resources* of information, a finding that confirms what researchers such as Twait (2005, 567–73) and Lee (2008, 211–19) found.

### *Social Information Seeking*

The students in Twait's qualitative study reported that in their information searches, they infrequently or never consulted people—whether friends, faculty, or librarians (Twait 2005, 571); however, others have found that students do appear to consult their peers during their information-seeking pursuits and do so more often than consulting faculty and librarians (Baro, Onyenania, and Osaheni 2010, 114–15; O'Brien and Symons 2005, 421). This finding may be the result of local contexts or the fact that not all students studied were first-year students, but it is an issue worth further exploration.

In our interviews, students readily and easily discussed the people involved in their information seeking, and when they chose to talk to people for information, students went to family members and friends unless being prompted or required to contact members outside their social circles by their teachers. Student 10, when asked whether she would cold-contact someone without being required to by an instructor, firmly replied that she would not; she would only contact friends and family in the course of her usual information seeking.

Students reported that they liked referring to friends and family members for a variety of reasons. Student 4 observed that his family members

could be trusted to know good information on the kinds of subjects he tended to write on. While it was expected that some of the students would consult information professionals such as librarians and library information specialists, only one student, student 8, reported working with an information professional in the course of seeking information for her papers. Given that students tended to exploit information resources they had been taught about in academic settings, it is possible additional guidance and instruction is needed from writing instructors to guide their students to information professionals who could help them immensely in their search process (Head and Eisenberg 2009, 15).

### *Avoiding Plagiarism*

A key finding of the Citation Project (e.g., Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue 2010, 177–92) was that students tend to patchwrite (see Jamieson’s “The Evolution of the Citation Project,” this volume). In Rebecca Moore Howard’s 1993 article, she introduced the term “patchwriting,” describing it as “copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes” and arguing that patchwriting is “a valuable composing strategy in which the writer engages in entry-level manipulation of new ideas and vocabulary” (Howard 1993, 1). She called on faculty and administrators to stop classifying patchwriting as plagiarism, a lead the Citation Project and the Council of Writing Program Administrators have followed, classifying it as “misuse of sources” but not plagiarism (Council of Writing Program Administrators 2003). Our interviews reveal that this distinction has not reached the majority of students.

Students reported that they are well aware that they should not plagiarize and that they make clear attempts to avoid plagiarizing but struggle to incorporate sources, a finding also reported by Head (2013). Like the students in Head’s study, students in this study reported needing a fuller understanding of the distinctions among quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing sources and how to cite them. We asked students whether they tended to quote, summarize, or paraphrase in their writing (question 10). If they responded that they summarized or paraphrased, we probed the nature of that practice further by asking how much of the original sentence structure they preserved when they did so. Approximately half the students described keeping the original structure of the source to a large degree (generally defined as misuse of sources). One notable case was a student who believed that simply changing words in a sentence was plagiarism but still didn’t fully

understand how to paraphrase. Student 9 stated, “I completely change it when I paraphrase, I mean, it’s plagiarism if you don’t and so I just usually completely change it, and I won’t cite ‘em, I’ll just use it, the information I found, and I’ll just completely write it in my own words.” Student 9 also stated, “I don’t really like to summarize, ‘cause I never really got how that . . . I know how to summarize it, but I never really got how you cite that.” While students on the whole seemed to understand the proper way to attribute quotes, their understanding of summary and paraphrase was highly nuanced and seemingly incomplete.

## CONCLUSION

While some of the findings of this study are inconclusive because of the small sample, many of our findings align themselves with and expand upon existing perspectives of undergraduates and first-year writers, suggesting that earlier research findings and findings from other small studies are generalizable in key areas. We hope others will build upon our research and expand the study to more students, especially first-year students, and more institution types. Such research should help key stakeholders, such as librarians, instructors, administrators, and developers of textbooks and digital products, identify important trends among this unique user group and develop appropriate pedagogies, policies, and resources. But in the meantime, we believe these findings will be of assistance to faculty and librarians helping first-year composition students develop their information-literacy skills, given that these students are still at the start of their academic careers.

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### *Note*

1. Due to differences in usage of terminology between the humanities and information sciences, this chapter defines *resource* as an encompassing source of information, such as a search engine or a database, and a *source* as a single published genre or piece of information such as a person, journal article, book, or webpage.

## APPENDIX 7.A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. The first thing I want you to share is a story. Think about research papers, that is, the essays where you have to incorporate outside sources. Think about ones you have written for your college-level English courses. If it helps, think about the next essay you have to write, too. Tell me the story of what happens from the time you get the research paper assignment to the time you turn it in. *As necessary during the story, inquire about where information/research/sources came from.*
2. When you do research for your English papers, do you go in search of something specific, or do you tend to browse until you find something? Can you try and describe what your search process is like from beginning, when you start looking for information, to end, when you have everything you need?
3. Generally speaking, where else do you go in terms of gathering research or sources for your English papers, thinking about both people and places?

*List sources here:*

- a. Are there any other places you go for information? For instance, digital libraries, databases, library websites, news sites, Wikipedia, or other websites, for example?
  - b. I'm not familiar with \_\_\_\_\_ (information place). Can you describe it briefly for me?
4. Why do you use \_\_\_\_\_ (source) for your writing research? (What is it about those information places that you find useful? What is special about them?) *Go through each source student mentioned, asking why student uses each source.*
  5. How did you find out about these sources of information? (Were you taught how to use them? Did you hear about them from friends or roommates? Forums? Study guides? Just happen upon them?) *Go through each of the sources the student volunteers to learn how s/he found out about them.*
  6. When you come across a potential source for your paper, how do you know if a source is useful or not? How do you know if a source is credible?
  7. When you choose a source for your paper, what makes you decide to keep it or move on without using it?
  8. How far into a source do you read before choosing something to include in your paper? Is it different for short sources and very long sources?

9. During the search process, do you tend to prefer primary sources or secondary sources? To clarify, primary sources are the first reports on data or original documents, and secondary sources tend to interpret, analyze, summarize, or paraphrase the original information. A medical study from Princeton would be the primary source, where WebMD, Wikipedia, and news articles would be the secondary sources.
  - a. Why do you prefer primary/secondary sources? What is it about them that is helpful to you when you research and when you write?
10. When you add the source to your writing, how do you typically do it? Do you quote it, summarize it, paraphrase it, reword it? (*Whichever one(s) the participant chooses, ask them how they define that: How do you define summarizing?*) If they mention summarizing or paraphrasing, ask: When you summarize or paraphrase, do you keep some of the sentence structure of the original, do you move things around and change it completely, or what does that look like when you do it?
  - a. (Ask why they do it that way, if it's not built into their answer.)
11. Is there anything else about the information you use as a writing student that would be helpful for people to understand?

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