

ONE PAGE WONDER – A PRACTICAL WAY OF GETTING FRESHMEN AND SOPHOMORES INTO THE LIBRARY

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Are most instructors of lower level courses interested in some workable system of stimulating student library use? Experience and shop talk indicate that the answer to this question is a hearty yes. The writer has settled on a procedure that has proved fairly effective in teaching a variety of subjects during a period of several years. In this case a partial solution has been what the students jokingly call "one page wonders." This will be further explained.

Problems Discouraging Early Library Use

Most instructors of freshman and sophomore courses are confronted with several problems when it comes to encouraging their students in library use. This frustration often results in the attitude of, "We will leave this for the advanced classes and seminars where term papers and research papers will be required." Realistically, this delay distributes the burdensome task of faculty paper work since the majority of instructors have a balanced teaching assignment of beginning and advanced courses. This approach limits the student. Lack of actual experience in using the research tools available in the library causes the instructors of the advanced courses to spend the first half of each semester in actually directing their students in library use. Therefore, there are strong arguments in favor of early introduction of students to actual library use if a workable system can be developed.

Experience indicates that a research assignment without some form of individual follow-up is less than satisfactory. The follow-up or paper grading presents a problem because of the usual large class size in introductory courses.

The nature of the subject matter in these courses is usually so extensive that detailed consideration of an idea at that time is not practical or possible. Consequently, neither the instructor nor the student has time to stop and consider one idea in depth. This is left until later.

Another problem is often lack of space for reserve material. Should the instructor attempt to select and place on reserve the best sources for the many subjects dealt with in the class, it would involve an unreasonable portion of the collection.

A Proposed System of Library Use

The "one page wonder" solves some of these problems. The students are assigned a fairly broad, easy to find subject for research. An example may be the Federal Reserve System. They are directed to prepare a paper of only one page in length using theme form with particular attention to spelling, neatness, etc. In each assignment they are given reasonable but specific points to cover under the broad subject, objectifying their presentation. Examples of specific points on the subject above would be a combined statement of history and purpose, organization and major weapons available for carrying out its purpose. In addition, the students are asked to include their bibliography in proper form on the same face of the page. Diverse sources are encouraged. At this point, take the word of the writer that this can be done on one page. This particular assignment would be made prior to or at the beginning of discussion of our monetary system in a basic course in agricultural economics – the instructional area of the writer. Normally, this assignment would be handed in at the next class meeting two days later.

Scoring

Grading is simple providing the subject has been carefully selected in terms of objectification. The reader can scan the one sheet hurriedly noting inclusion or exclusion of the specific points of coverage sought along with general form. The papers

are scored on the bases indicated below.

3 – nearly perfect

2 – good but with some omission or weakness

1 – unacceptable in content but handed in

0 – failure to submit paper

Note: The score of a late paper would generally be reduced by one level – judgment must prevail here.

Any points above two are added to the final average before the letter grade for the course is determined. Conversely, any deficit of points below two is subtracted from the final point average. This scoring system is thoroughly explained to students at the beginning of the semester. A class critique is made particularly after the first assignment.

Scoring of the papers is adequately accomplished in an average of one per minute if notes are not made. A short class review when returning the papers serves to indicate individual deficiencies.

When students realize that the scoring system is a fairly easy way of gaining final grade points – or losing them – they respond well. Grading is objective but generally on a positive note since good reception by students is important to success. In short, "the benefit of doubt goes to the runner."

Plagiarism Minimized

Students appear to abandon plagiarism after the first or second assignment. Five or six assignments are usually the limit per semester. This varies from one semester to the next as do the assignments. In an effort to telescope this information, it is difficult to copy a fellow student's work directly or by paraphrasing without its being easy to recognize. Direct quotes without credit from texts do not generally cover the subject. Along with the obvious advantage of the student's gaining skill and confidence in using footnotes, the bibliography gives the grader an opportunity, if necessary, of final check for authenticity.

Participants are encouraged to seek each other's assistance in finding the material. Types of sources such as periodicals, books, encyclopedias, etc., are suggested by the instructor at the time of the assignment.

It is important to stick to a broad subject where there are numerous sources of information. This precludes the necessity of placing items on reserve. Also the student has a fairly simple task of finding the information which provides a sense of accomplishment. An effort is made not to break the student's back with the obscurity, complexity, or frequency of the assignments.

Prompt scoring and return of papers insure the gain for the student in that he recalls his research when it is discussed in class. The instructor gains in having better prepared students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these frequent short research assignments should not require additional time of the instructor beyond the two or three minutes taken for assignment, five or ten minutes for discussion when returning the papers, and the one minute checking time per paper. If this system or some adaptation can be a means of the average beginning student truly looking on the library as an aid to his education, we will have made some real progress. Incidentally, the basis for the students' naming it a "one page wonder" is that they think it is a wonder when they get it all on one page.