



*Evidence Summary*

**One-Shot Library Instruction Sessions May Not Increase Student Use of Academic Journals or Diversity of Sources**

**A Review of:**

Howard, K., Nicholas, T., Hayes, T., & Appelt, C. W. (2014). Evaluating one-shot library sessions: Impact on the quality and diversity of student source use. *Community & Junior College Libraries*, 20(1-2), 27-38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02763915.2014.1009749>

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To assess the effect of one-shot library research workshops focused on database searching on student coursework bibliographies.

**Design** – Comparative bibliometric analysis of student bibliographies.

**Setting** – Career and Transfer Program at a community college in Illinois, United States of America.

**Subjects** – Students taking an English 101 course.

**Methods** – During the study, 39 sections of English 101 occurred. An optional library

instruction session was offered to faculty and as a result students from 18 sections participated. Each session consisted of a 45-minute lecture and 30 minutes of independent research time. The librarian delivering the session introduced students to keyword searching and demonstrated the online library catalogue and two core electronic databases; Academic Search Complete, and Opposing Viewpoints in Context (OVC), and other databases of their choosing. Students in each session were required to submit a variety of assignments in an exit portfolio at the end of the semester. Sections of students were excluded if the instructors did not submit the students' portfolios and they no longer taught at the community college, making it impossible to track down the portfolios. Exclusion also occurred in cases where

sections were taught by the researchers. Seventeen sections who had attended library instruction group and 14 sections who had not attended the library instruction group were included in the study and randomised.

Researchers evaluated portfolios according to the following criteria: whether the student who submitted the portfolio attended library instruction; whether their portfolio earned a pass or fail mark; total number of citations in bibliographies; number of each type of source (e.g., book, journal, Internet resource, or other; and dates of sources).

**Main Results** – Data were collected from 115 portfolios submitted by students who had attended a library session and 92 portfolios from students who had not attended a library session. Student pass or fail status was not reported. Attending library instruction did not have a significant effect on the mean number of total citations: 5.513 for attendees vs. 6.076 for non-attendees. Of 205 student portfolios evaluated, there was no difference in the number of types of resources used by students who had library instruction ( $2.3 \pm 0.1$ ) and those who had none ( $2.2 \pm 0.1$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion** – The library instruction sessions did not increase the use of academic journals or the diversity of sources used. However, students were more likely to use library sources if they attended training. The authors recommend that demonstrating multiple databases should be covered in later sessions and more conceptual information literacy instruction should be the first step. Librarians could teach the value of different types of sources; connect the sources to the tools needed to locate and access them; and demonstrate how to effectively evaluate sources. The authors recommend further research to evaluate objectives, content and outcomes of this type of library instruction.

### Commentary

To date, several studies report that one-off workshops, tailored to the needs of student groups, may result in the increased use of specific databases (Rafferty, 2013; Van Epps,

2013). Similar to the results of this article, these studies found that the educational interventions used had a positive impact on student assignments. Current evidence is insufficient to provide us with a systematic understanding of how library instruction contributes to student-focused outcomes. The authors attempt to tackle this issue. Heterogeneity in the conduct and reporting of previous library instruction sessions make them difficult to generalise to wider populations.

Elements of the results section of the ReLIANT (Reader's guide to the Literature on Interventions Addressing the Need for education and Training) instrument were used to critically appraise the study. This is a tool generally used by library professionals for appraising published reports of educational and training interventions.

The authors address an important question regarding one-shot library sessions: how can they be designed to improve the standard of student citations? Our knowledge of the impact of library instruction sessions is largely based on small studies; however, these authors collected an adequate sample size. They make important recommendations to focus more on information literacy for students.

The study lacks baseline information and there are too many unacknowledged variables. For example, we do not know the level of prior experience students had with literature searching, database usage, or additional training that might have impacted the quality of their portfolios. This information would be a valuable addition, allowing readers to judge whether the study could have external validity to other populations. While p-values are given for outcomes, confidence intervals are not reported.

The researchers describe how they altered their instruction as a result of their findings.

The researchers measured and recorded short-term outcomes based on the bibliographies in the students' portfolios. Therefore, it is not possible to predict whether students continued

to benefit from the instruction in the long-term. The author concludes that the order of demonstration of the databases in the session was the reason a high number of students consulted the final database (OVC) more frequently. This reasoning does not account for factors such as ease of use, accessibility, or relevance to the assignments. In addition, the authors state that they made “numerous assumptions” during the study and that the way they determined whether a citation was a library or non-library resource was “highly subjective.” These limitations undermine the overall research findings and conclusions. Therefore, data reported in the study may not support the authors’ conclusions.

This article is significant to library and information practice because it adds to the growing body of evidence that draws attention to the limitations of one-shot library instruction sessions. It points to the need to capture long-term learning outcomes. It highlights the lack of a reporting guideline in this field which could improve the quality and consistency between studies to facilitate comparison. The study demonstrates the complex challenges related to making claims about the impact of library instruction. Library and information professionals who are planning and developing one-shot library instruction sessions should aim to prioritise active learning and information literacy

instruction over database demonstrations to increase the potential depth of student learning and knowledge transfer.

## References

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