# Cast Your Students as Scholars: A Participatory Information Literacy Lesson Plan

Time: 45 min+

Audience: Undergraduate college students, best for students early in their degree paths

Materials

Required:

* Computers for research

Optional:

* Digital Artifact Submission Method (online discussion board, other)
* A Method for distributing or allowing students to choose topics
* Explanatory Slides

This is a highly variable research activity that can be adjusted to fit a variety of lesson lengths and leveraged to cover a variety of information literacy topics. By inviting students into the scholarly process, this activity invites students to see themselves as research and scholarship participants instead of simply observers. Students will still explore a topic to learn more about it, but by framing students as producers of information, we create the groundwork for later conversations about authority and scholarly process.

This lesson plan details the basic idea behind casting your students as scholars and how that can support student learning, but many of the details are up to you. As the author of this document, I would love to see this as a collaborative exercise. If you use this framework and it works for you, please share your experience.

## Artifact

Begin by asking students to write a small amount (a few paragraphs, 500 words) about something they know and how they know it. This can be something they have experienced, or something they have learned a lot about. It’s important at this point to tell students that they will be sharing this information. I’ve been calling this document an artifact.

### Alternatives & Considerations

* Depending on the parameters of your instruction scenario, you might ask students to complete their artifact before they come to class.
* Consider writing an artifact or two in case a student does not complete the work ahead of time.
* Do what you can to remove any stress around this assignment. In some cases, students expect the assignment to be more difficult than it is, as it does differ from many assignments they are asked to complete.

## Searching

Ask students to set aside their own artifacts and engage with an artifact another student wrote. What that engagement or research looks like will differ based on the time you have available. Some students may not love their new topics, or won’t know where to go from here. Use this as an opportunity to talk to them about narrowing or broadening their topics, choosing a direction based on what about this topic interests them. Then, ask them to search for resources on the narrowed topic they have chosen.

### Alternatives & Considerations

* Consider if you will ask students to switch topics with the student next to them, or allow them to choose from a list of submitted artifacts.
* If you’re short on time, consider choosing one database for students to search.
* The size of student’s topics will depend on what you are asking them to do with their research.

### Possible Learning Objectives

* Students will be able to recognize common library database features and how those features affect their results.
* Students will be familiar with library resources in the topic area of their research.
* Students will be able to modify a topic’s scope to match the demands of their assignment.
* Students will be able to identify the key terms from their research problem or topic.

### Information Literacy Concepts

* Defines Information Need (ACRL, SCONUL 1&2, ANZIL 1)
* Finds Information (ACRL 2, SCONUL 3&4, ANZIL 2&4, ANCIL 5)
* Searching as Strategic Exploration (Frame 6)

### Expand

If your instruction has time for topics included below or others like them, you can leverage student’s current research to support conversations around:

* Searching Techniques (Boolean, Phrase, Truncation)
* Citation

## Authority

When students have had some time to search for additional sources on their topic, regroup for a conversation about source evaluation/authority. Source evaluation conversations provide a great opportunity to talk about how students’ sources fit together to advance their learning. How does the artifact written by their peer contribute to their knowledge and fit into the conversation around this topic? What kind of information does it include? When would this be good information to have? When would we want scholarly sources? What kind of authority does their peer have on this topic? Do the other sources they found agree with the artifact? What do you do when you find two sources that disagree?

### Alternatives & Considerations

* This conversation includes the potential for ambiguity and for students to identify their peer artifacts as “bad sources”. Frame this conversation carefully to build up students as scholars while being honest and realistic.

### Possible Learning Objectives

* Students will consider the value and authority of various sources and analyze the strengths of different types of information on their topic.

### Information Literacy Concepts

* Evaluates (ACRL 3, SCONUL 5, ANZIL 3, ANCIL 4)
* Authority is Constructed / Contextual (Frame 1)

## Peer Review / Scholarship as a Conversation

Ask students to present what they learned through their research on a peer’s topic. Students review the presentation of the peer who choose their original artifact. What did they learn from someone else researching their artifact? Discuss with students how this assignment mirrors peer review and the scholarly process.

### Alternatives & Considerations

* Presenting research can be formal (paper), creative (brochure, infographic), or informal (short presentation).
* Creative presentations can incorporate learning about creative commons and copyright for images.
* Any presentations of research with a deliverable component can touch on citation and appropriate attribution.

### Possible Learning Objectives

* Students will be able to summarizes the scholarly information process and see themselves as actual and potential information creators.

### Information Literacy Concepts

* Uses Information (ACRL 4, SCONUL 7, ANZIL 5, ANCIL 8&9)
* Scholarship as Conversation (Frame 5)

# Cast Your Students as Scholars: Examples

## Term Length Course

In a previous position, I had the opportunity to teach Information Literacy to first year undergraduate students via a credit bearing course. I used the lesson outlined above as a thematic, overarching assignment for this course.

### Artifact

I assigned the Artifact assignment during the first week of the term. I asked students to write 500 words about something they knew and how they knew it. This could be something they had experienced, or something they had learned about. Students submitted this assignment to a Blackboard Discussion board set up for this purpose. Students then had a week or so to consider other student’s artifacts, and choose one to research for their course project. Students were not always happy with their chosen artifact. I used this as an opportunity to talk with students about the direction of their research. Students needed to connect their research to their chosen artifact in some way, but they were encouraged to choose a direction that interested them. There were many questions about which artifacts were still available and I used a Google Sheet to help facilitate this process. I wrote an example artifact to help students who might be unclear about the expectations of the assignment.

## Searching

Students searched on their topics over a few weeks of classes. We learned about the library discovery service, databases, keyword and advanced searches, citation and intellectual property. Through these discussions, we referenced their topics and research, using sources they found as examples. Students were searching for sources to use for their final project in the class, which required them to find a variety of sources and use them to present what they learned.

## Authority

During the class meeting where we talk about source evaluation, in conjunction with a broader activity on source evaluation, we discuss authority and explore what that means in relation to the artifacts they wrote and chose. I asked students: How does the artifact written by their peer contribute to their knowledge and fit into the conversation around this topic? What kind of information does it include? When would this be good information to have? When would we want scholarly sources? What kind of authority does their peer have on this topic? Do the other sources they found agree with the artifact? What do you do when you find two sources that disagree?

## Peer Review / Scholarship as a Conversation

Students presented what they learned by submitting their final projects for the class. Projects were required to include ethically sourced images, a variety of sources, and a design component. The instructions prioritized information sharing and appropriate citation over following the rules of a formal paper.

After students submitted their projects, they were instructed to review the submitted project of the peer who choose their artifact. To accomplish this, students submitted their projects for grading to an assignment drop box and to the discussion board.

Students had time in class to look at their peer’s artifact, and we discussed what students learned from their peers. One student wrote about the culture of Turkey, where she grew up. The student who choose her artifact to research presented her research on a specific aspect of Turkish culture, drinking coffee. The student who wrote the original artifact reviewed the presented research. It was a great interaction to watch. The students disagreed on one aspect of coffee consumption- and it opened a great conversation about how experiences can differ.

We then reviewed the assignment, and reflected on how the process of the assignment was similar to the scholarly information production process.

## Single Session with 100 Level English or Communication Class: Scholarly Process Focus

### Artifact

Coordinate with instructor to ask students to bring an artifact with them to the library session to share. Prepare a few artifacts in advance, or plan to ask students who did not bring an artifact to partner with other students. If you have videos introducing students to the library website or resources, consider including them with preparatory materials.

At the beginning of the session, introduce the session as the scholarly information production sped up. Narrate each step with the scholarly process corollary and what would be different in academic research. Ask students to switch artifacts, facilitating as needed. Give students a few minutes to read their new artifact. Ask them what about this topic interests you? Explore narrowing topics. From that interest, what are the Key or important words?

## Searching

Guide students to appropriate library resources based on their new topics and what they want to know. Allow students to search in their resource. The time students have for this will depend on how much you have for the session. Ask students to look for two relevant articles and to read the abstract for those articles, the full text if they have time. Ask them to look for a new tidbit or fact to add to the information they have.

### Peer Review / Scholarship as a Conversation

When you bring students back together, ask students to share out. Through your observation of the class, you may have seen a student who has a good example for sharing. You might consider asking students to share what they have learned to the student next to them, and ask a few students with interesting examples to share out to the entire class. When they do, ask the student who wrote the original artifact to weigh in- did they learn something new? Does this fit with what they already knew?

Widen the conversation to the process of scholarship as a whole. Do students see any issues with this process? How is this process more rigorous than for newspapers or magazine articles? Talk to them about who has historically been missing from this conversation, and why.

## Single Session with 100 Level English or Communication Class: Authority Focus

### Artifact

Coordinate with instructor to ask students to bring an artifact with them to the library session to share. Prepare a few artifacts in advance, or plan to ask students who did not bring an artifact to partner with other students. If you have videos introducing students to the library website or resources, consider including them with preparatory materials.

At the beginning of the session, ask students to switch artifacts, facilitating as needed. Give students a few minutes to read their new artifact. Ask them what about this topic interests you? Explore narrowing topics. From that interest, what are the Key or important words?

## Searching

Guide students to appropriate library resources based on their new topics and what they want to know. Allow students to search in their resource. The time students have for this will depend on how much you have for the session. Ask students to look for two relevant articles and to look for information on the authors of those articles. Does the article include information about who they are or their credentials? Can they find more information about the authors on the web? Are there other articles in the database authored by the same person?

### Authority

Discuss with students the different kind of authority their peer had writing their artifact, and the authors of the articles they found. Ask students to consider how this authority contributes to source evaluation. Is it the only thing to consider? Talk to them about who has historically been missing from this conversation, and why.