Unit 3 - Organization is Key

NHD in the classroom - Pacing Guides

One of the most common questions teachers ask about NHD is 'how long does it take?' Here again, NHD is adaptable and the length of time your class commits to NHD projects is up to you. There are, however, a number of pacing guides available that reflect one of three models:

1. A 6-8 week structure
2. A semester long structure (often fall semester with contests in spring)
3. A year long structure.

Other teachers opt for a 'check list' approach as opposed to a hard time table. Examples of each can be found by visiting the "Teacher" page and opening the "Getting Started" tab at the NHDGeorgia website. As you'll see, there is no one 'right' way to pace NHD so go with the schedule that works best for you!

Organization and NHD student research

As with any project (whether in school or out) it is essential that your students organize their work. Not only do they have to organize their sources for documentation purposes, they have to use a system of organization to be successful. An organized research process helps students manage the stress of a big project. It helps them make progress, complete tasks, and gain the confidence that comes with the realization that they can proceed through and complete a complex task. There are a variety of tools, approaches and systems out there. You will know what works best for you and your students.

Kathryn Holmes, author of *The Clever Researcher,* offers a summary of the best project organization advice she's received from librarians.   You might find some of this adaptable to your in-class discussions about the need to be organized throughout a research project. She writes (the following are extended excerpts from her blog post cited below):

"In the beginning…

1. **Do some preliminary reading**. Get a sense of your overall topic before really getting into the "heavy" research. [Encyclopedia et al introductory material]
2. **Research with your final product in mind**. As you research, think about what "subheadings" or chunks you may want to write about (even though you don't have all your information yet).
   - If you need help with identifying your topic chunks, you could try writing a concept map. For those of you unfamiliar with that term, concept mapping essentially involves writing down a term or idea (e.g. effect of exercise on mental health) and then brainstorming other concepts that come to mind within that topic (e.g. impact on self-esteem, exercise as treatment option).
3. **Keep a journal/Write a research plan**. Keep track of what databases you've tried, what keywords you've used, what didn't go well, your thoughts and ideas…

"Once you start finding good stuff…

1. **Organize by "subheading" or chunk**. There were *lots* of different ideas for how to do this:
   ○ **Write a working outline:** what will each subheading or part of your essay include? What will your arguments be? What sources support that point?
   ○ **Ignore the interesting-but-not-useful stuff:** what are your essay's subheadings? What is your argument? Read for that information, make notes on that information, and then throw everything else out.
   ○ **Colour code** (who's surprised that librarians do this?): assign a different colour to each subheading. Then use highlighters, post-its, tabs, or font colour to organize your notes and articles.
   ○ **Create different folders** on your computer or different Word files for each subheading. Or if you like to print everything else, have a different folder or binder tab on each subheading. The bottom line is: keep related things together!
   ○ One of our librarians also organizes **chronologically** within each chunk, because "each article/book may have been influenced by those that preceded it; even in a very short time-frame" and you may find overarching themes or arguments that you may not have noticed otherwise.

2. **Write notes, in your own words, on *why* your sources are helpful**. Again, there were different ideas for how to do this. It's important to also note that these techniques can be done by hand or on a computer!
   ○ **Use cue cards**: with the citation at the top (including page numbers!), write down the general ideas or concepts you want to use from that source. You may have more than one cue card for each source, if you're organizing your notes by subheading.
   ○ **Create annotations**: again, with the citation at the top (and, of course, with the page numbers!), create a summary for each article/book you want to use. Include the key parts/arguments/quotes that you liked from that source.
   ○ **Write your notes in your own words**: why is this source helpful for your essay? How does it support your thesis? Say it in regular language in your research notes, rather than writing out word-for-word what the book says.

3. **Save your research. You won't find it again.**
   ○ Email your search results to yourself, print them, write them down by hand, use Zotero/Mendeley/myBib Chrome Extension… anything but having to replicate your searches!
   ○ Create a working bibliography: add resources that you want to use to this bibliography as you research"

Holmes concludes: "When you're ready to write…

1. **Write out of order**. You don't need to write your introduction first and your conclusion last. You can fix transition sentences and weird phrases later. *(Additionally, don't be afraid to go back and change your intro at the end – sometimes your essay goes in a different direction. That's ok!)*

2. **Write down ideas as they come to you**.
   ○ As you finish up your research, full-sentence paragraphs may come to you. Write these down – even in your notes/working outline/cue cards, etc.
   ○ If you're working on the same project for a few days/weeks, you may get ideas as you try to fall asleep. Or in the shower. Or when you're talking to your mom. Keep a notebook or your phone handy to write these down as they come to you (and then go back to sleep!)." [1]

[1] You can find the full post at https://berylliveylibrary.wordpress.com/2018/02/13/organize-research/