

## Fall 2010 Assessment of Workshop P: Analysis of Errors Made on Practice Assignment

As part of the multi-methods assessment of Workshop P “Citing Sources to Responsibly Use Information” an analysis was carried out on a sample of 102 practice assignments completed during September – November 2010. The number of workshops completed online is nearly four times as great as those completed in-class. Even though the sample of in-class assignments is rather small (n=23 or 22.5%), the findings are separated below in Table 1. The highest number of errors was 20 (online group) and 19 in the in-class group. The scores were obtained by counting the number of errors. Repeated mistakes were counted each time (e.g. forgot final period, didn’t indent). If citations were corrected, the score was based on the original, uncorrected citation. Admittedly, scoring has its problems since it was not always possible to tell if the student had changed something after the correcting process with the librarian. I can’t stress enough how important it is for students to get individual attention at the Reference Desk with correcting workshop assignments. Especially for Workshop P, students will learn more if librarians ask them to rewrite citations that contain several errors, rather than the librarian inserting the missing pieces or correcting the error.

**Table 1: Workshop P Practice Assignment Number of Errors: Online Compared to In-Class**

Errors	In-Class Group	Online Group	Total
0 (100%)	2 (8.7%)	3 (3.8%)	5 (5%)
1 -2 errors	6 (26%)	8 (10%)	14 (13.7%)
3 -4 errors	6 (26%)	14 (17.7%)	20 (19.6%)
5 -6 errors	3 (13%)	15 (19%)	18 (17.6%)
7 -10 errors	2 (8.7%)	26 (33%)	28 (27.5%)
More than 10 errors	4 (17.4%)	13 (16.5%)	17 (16.7%)
Totals	23 (99.8%)	79 (100%)	102 (100.1%)

Since the scoring was quite “picky” and students knew this was a practice assignments rather than a test, it might be useful to look at the totals for 6 or less errors has an indication of satisfactory work. With this perspective 74% (17) of the in-class group did satisfactory work and 51% (40) of the online group did satisfactory work. What might explain this difference and what are the implications for the online workshop content?

There were three or four different librarians teaching the in-class workshops and at least one of them used class time to do as a group the first three items on the assignment, which undoubtedly resulted in less errors for these students. One implication for the online workshop content might be that it include at the end a “group” solution of a citation, using perhaps a question and answer format to model the “thinking aloud” process of preparing an MLA citation.

Perhaps more useful is the following analysis of errors that can inform both the in-class and online workshop content. Undoubtedly, both learning formats include this information, but like all learning more examples and emphasis may improve performance. I used these categories, although a more detailed breakdown of some of them might be useful in hindsight, such as the first category “Citation missing elements.” Notice that this category does NOT include missing date of access or name of the database, which occurred frequently enough to warrant a separate category. The fifth category,

“Volume, issue date, pagination format not 100% correct” includes both MLA and APA formats and means that all the element were present but not in the correct format or sequence.

**Table 2: Workshop P Practice Assignment: Analysis of Types of Errors**

Type of error (listed by number of occurrences)	Number
Citation missing elements (includes name of author, journal title, medium, page numbers, volume or issue number, publication date)	114
Final period missing	72
Lacking indentation	66
No date of access	56
Volume, issue date, pagination format not 100% correct	53
Editor, omitted “Ed.” or inverted editor’s name.	52
Unnecessary information (e.g. URL for database articles; c. for copyright, pp for pages)	45
In-text citation wrong (e.g. punctuation, included author when not necessary or omitted author when required)	42
Name of database missing	32
Capitalization of titles wrong (e.g. in MLA didn’t capitalize significant words in title and in APA did capitalize words in title)	29
Punctuation between citation elements incorrect	21
Publication date not in correct format for MLA and APA	19
Authors full names used incorrectly in APA	2

### Observations For Improving Instruction/Workshop Content

Since the great majority of errors reflect missing elements in MLA and APA citations, more time and emphasis may need to be spent on all the pieces of citations, using perhaps a revised MLA/APA citation guide. Admittedly this is very picky and rather boring for students, so in some way we need to make it more explicit and clear. I would also suggest trying to make the content of workshops more entertaining, but that seems like an oxymoron with this type of content. Since citation format is rather complex for different types of citations, sticking with just the three types we have now on the practice assignment makes sense: online database articles, essay in an anthology and webpage.

I’m not sure but I would bet that students can’t figure out how to “read” our MLA/APA style guides, so perhaps we need to be much more explicit guiding them in how to think and read it. Steps of the “thinking aloud” process might include:

1. What type of source do I need to prepare a citation for?
2. Where can I find an example on the citation guide handout?

3. What am I seeing? What are the pieces of the citation? What is the punctuation between the pieces? What are some overall principles I can remember, such as every citation ALWAYS ends in a period. The pieces of a citation have periods between them. MLA date format looks different. APA doesn't include the author's full first name, nor does it capitalize all the words in the title, but MLA does.

4. How do I apply what I see?

How can we revise the MLA and APA citation guides to make them clearer and easier to read? Volunteers to do this? More visual examples from other colleges probably exist for borrowing. Are there some active learning techniques we might apply? In the classroom would it be useful to ask students to first observe and write the generic names of the pieces of the citation – such as author, title, name of periodical, etc. Then ask them to go back and put the punctuation in. Then ask them to underline the pieces that would be italicized. Then ask them to exchange sheets with someone and ask that person to “correct” these generic citations. In other words, don't ask them to see everything at once, but rather to deconstruct the “infrastructure” of the citation.

In an ESL class, it might be useful to use a kinesthetic technique which I observed once in an ESL class where grammatical elements of a complete sentence were being taught. The instructor assigned students to be the subject, the verb, an adjective, an adverb, a pronoun, etc. and then asked them to go to the front of the class and arrange themselves in the correct sequence. Could this type of activity be used in classes to teach the pieces and sequence of a full citation for ESL classes?

Lastly, even though the number of errors with in-text citations is substantial, this point seems less problematic to teach, although I think we need more examples to emphasize when they need to use the author's name in the parenthetical citation and when they don't.

Finally, while this analysis has focused on the errors so we can learn from them, it must be remembered that 56% made six or less errors --- not bad at all for doing something picky, boring and probably new for most students.