

# Exploring Peer Reviewed Research Through Collaborative Group Work



**Josh Rose, College of Alameda Library**

February 2, 2024

SCILWorks 2024

# Outline

- Background
- Peer reviewed articles and empathetic communication skills
- Setting
- Activity / lesson plan
- Embracing improvisation
- Outcomes
- Resources

# Background

- Library and information literacy instruction often includes introduction to peer-reviewed journal articles
- Students may be asked to use these scholarly sources for a variety of research assignments
- Journal articles are difficult texts, particularly for first-year students who have no experience using them
- The result often is inclusion of peer-reviewed sources in assignments in a superficial way with limited engagement with the research described

# Peer reviewed articles and empathic communication skills

- To build skills for engaging with peer-reviewed journal articles, one can use empathic communication through collaborative group activities and gentle, structured guidance from a librarian to explore the features of journal articles and how they are used for scholarly communication within discipline(s)
- Features of journal articles for exploration may include:
  - Structure of the journal article: E.g. title, abstract, introduction/lit review, methods, results, discussion
  - Differences between primary and secondary research and clues that indicate one or the other
  - The journal that published the research and its aims, scope, and intended audience(s)
  - The problem or question(s) (big and small) that the research seeks to address and connections to previous studies through citations
  - Situating the article within a web of other sources related to this research topic

# Setting

Example lesson used for an ENGL 1AS class at the College of Alameda during the fall 2023 semester. College of Alameda is a two-year community college serving 5,000+ full- and part-time students earning degrees or certificates in a variety of academic and vocational programs. Diverse student body with 28% Latino students, 26% Asian, 16% White, 16% Black or African American. Sixty percent of students are female, 40% are male. Students range in ages from <18 (13%), 18-24 (48%), 25-64 (39%), and >65 (1%). Fifty-four percent of students receive grants or scholarships and 15% receive Pell Grants.

ENGL 1AS is a first-year English course with added support for students.

# Activity & lesson plan

- Students are provided a selection of difficult texts (i.e. peer-reviewed journal articles) from a variety of disciplines. Example collection can be accessed [here](#).
- After a brief lecture (< 10 mins.) about peer-reviewed research, students join groups of 3-4 and work collaboratively (30 – 40 mins.) to review a selected article and answer 3-4 worksheet questions. One student is assigned the role of scribe for writing their answers on a whiteboard, another presents the group's findings. Each group shares out information about their selected research article.
- Activities or questions can be tailored to specific levels or disciplines.

# Embracing improvisation

- As difficult texts, there are many potential stumbling blocks for students and librarians. These can be addressed collaboratively through discussion of students questions and interests. Articles that aren't interesting to students can be switched with something else.
- Students complete the worksheet as a group and the librarian does not provide further guidance or assistance unless requested.
- Librarians can model good research practices by acknowledging what they don't know about the specific research conducted or the research article as well as approaches for using the text or other sources to better understand the article.

# Outcomes

- In one class of 20+ students, each group successfully identified a research article of interest, answered questions about it, and presented their groups' findings to the larger class with applause and a supportive environment.
- Students gained exposure to research articles and had practice engaging with different sections to make sense of the research conducted and the findings and why they matter.



# Resources

- [Anatomy of a journal article \[ENGL 1AS Library Handout\]](#)
- Raff, Jennifer. (2013). Step-by-step instructions for reading a primary research article. Retrieved from [https://chem.utah.edu/resources/documents/undergraduate\\_site/How%20to%20critically%20read%20a%20scientific%20paper.pdf](https://chem.utah.edu/resources/documents/undergraduate_site/How%20to%20critically%20read%20a%20scientific%20paper.pdf)
- [Selected Peer Reviewed Journal Articles by Discipline](#)