Keys to a Successful Library Workshop

Q: What steps should I take to prepare for the library workshop?

Course Instructors are encouraged to prepare with students...

Consider timing.
When will the library workshop occur during the semester?

Pay attention to the dates surrounding your session. If a session is held the last day before fall or spring break, it is more likely that you’ll lose students who leave for break early than if you hold the session earlier. Consider if students will be prepared for the library workshop. Will they have topics selected and be able to begin finding resources for their assignment?

Set students up for success.
Be direct with students about the importance of the session. The tone and precedent that is set beforehand will have an effect on how engaged your students will be.

Consider what topics should be covered with students before the library workshop. Topic selection? Keyword identification? Source Credibility? Reading strategies? Note taking skills?

Make sure students are fully aware of the requirements of the assignment.

Course instructors are encouraged to prepare with librarians...

Provide information!
Send the assignment sheet and grading rubric. Think about what other information might be useful for the librarian to consider. Sending lesson plans or PowerPoint presentations from the days leading up to your session can give the librarian the context specific to your classroom.

Think about the characteristics of your classroom as well. If students need specific accommodations, pass those along to the librarian. Giving the librarian a general understanding of the classroom environment in your class (talkative, quiet, etc.) can also be useful.

Communicate about session content.
What topics do you want the librarian to cover? What topics are you comfortable covering before or after the workshop? Be as detailed as possible about your needs and expectations for the session. You are welcome to request activities to accompany the lecture or for more specific focuses on certain topics.

Plan to be flexible.
Sometimes workshops move unexpectedly quickly or slowly. Have Plan B activities or back-up questions for the librarian prepared. If the librarian runs out of time to cover everything during a session, work with them to find ways to get the desired content to students through a second class visit by the librarian or through online tools or tutorials.
**Q: How do I keep students engaged during the library session?**

**Be in the classroom.**
It is up to you to keep your students accountable.

**Lead by example.**
How you approach the library workshop will send a clear message your students. If you aren’t willing to pay attention and participate, it is likely they won’t be either. Model the kind of behavior you’d like to see from students when you are teaching.

**Be an active participant.**
Consider...
- Calling on students by name, if a question is given and the classroom is silent.
- Checking in with students during work periods to make sure they understand the content.
- Commenting on or re-emphasizing points that you want to make sure the students understand or remember. A dialogue is often more engaging than a monologue or a lecture.
- Developing your own topic and following along with the library session as though you were a student. This will give you additional examples to offer your students.

**Use assignments to reinforce content.**
Assign a task that students must complete during or after the library session based on what is covered during the session (i.e. creating source lists, answering questions about sources, etc). Librarians can provide or help you develop activities.

**Provide support for student learning.**
Help students create a few individual goals for the library workshop.

Spend the visit working one-on-one with students as they begin researching their topics.

**Q: How do I make sure library session content is relevant to all students in a class?**

**Communicate with the librarian.**
The needs of your students might change between when you schedule the appointment and the time of the workshop. Providing updates before the day of the session will allow the librarian to make modifications to session plans. Provide a list of student topics to the librarian before the visit.

**Gauge student progress and library knowledge.**
Be knowledgeable about your students’ progress. No matter what you do, student needs will vary. Have additional challenges ready for students who excel. Use periods of independent work to check in with students who are behind and offer them personalized suggestions.

Poll students ahead of time to see what students know and don’t know about library resources, but recognize their perceptions may be a bit skewed. Share your findings with the librarian prior to the session, so they can customize their lesson plan.
Tie library content to assignment requirements. Translate broad ideas into practical terms. You know the assignment and your expectations better than the visiting librarian. Help students make connections between what the librarian covers and what you’ve previously discussed in class.

Utilize Research Appointments. If students are absent on the day of the library session, ask librarian if they are willing to meet with students independently. Students can sign up for a research appointment and request a specific librarian to cover the missed information. A few things to consider:
- Make sure that you have a specific worksheet or assignment in place so that you can quantify that your student took the appointment seriously. Librarians can help you with this.
- Stick to a strict deadline. Three weeks later will be too late.
- Have a penalty in place for students who schedule an appointment and don’t arrive.

Q: How do I help students retain and utilize the information covered in the library workshop?

Plan activities or assignments related to the workshop. Work with the librarian to develop activities or assignments your students to complete during or after the session. Review the assignments and check in with students who don’t seem to understand the information that was covered. Make sure students are required to use the skills learned during their library workshop.

Debrief with your students. Consider devoting some of the following class period to Q&A, whether independently or with the help of the librarian, if they are able to return. This way, students will have had an opportunity to apply the skills they learned and may have more direct questions. Continue to review library information in later class sessions, as appropriate.

Ask students to free write about the experience afterward or create a document with their own “best practices” based on what they learned.

Make use of the reference desk and research appointments. Encourage students who continue to struggle with research to visit the reference desk to get help finding resources for their topics. Some students may benefit from one-on-one library research appointments, where they will receive personalized direction.

Q: What can I do if a library visit doesn’t meet my expectations?

Ask for additional resources. Be precise about which information wasn’t covered to suit the needs of the class. Ask to have a second visit to cover things that were missed. Be specific about what you’d like addressed. Alternatively, work on talking points or activities with the visiting librarian or Instructional Services Librarian Jenny Turner that you can cover with your students during following class periods.
Offer feedback to the librarian, Composition Director, or Jenny Turner about the visit.
Be constructive in your criticism. Keep in mind that a librarian doesn’t have the opportunity to build the same class rapport in one day that you’ve build over the course of the semester and builds their lesson plan based on the information you provide.

Dealing with the Unexpected

What if examples fail or the database we wanted to demonstrate is down?

Have a plan-b. Be spontaneous.
Use these as teaching moments. Help the librarian brainstorm new search terms or alternative types of resources that might be helpful to students.

Create a take home assignment. Ask your librarian for advice on what this should cover. They may have already developed an assignment you could adapt for your class.

If an example doesn’t adequately emphasize a point, help the librarian gather alternative examples from students’ search terms.

What if a student is disruptive?

Manage the situation as you would in your own classroom.
Ask a student to change his/her behavior, change seats, or leave the classroom, as appropriate.

Things to Remember

Communication, communication, communication!
Being on the same page with the librarian is key.

Request sessions at least one week in advance.
Earlier is great, too! The earlier you ask, the more likely you are to get your preferred date. Visit link.mnsu.edu/libworkshops to request a session. If you have questions or want help determining what session content is appropriate for your class, contact Jenny Turner at jennifer.turner@mnsu.edu or 507-389-2771.

You can request a specific librarian.
If you find that you’ve worked well with a librarian, don’t hesitate to seek them out for future sessions. Alternatively, ask your fellow TAs or Jenny Turner for recommendations, based on your teaching style.

Share session outcomes with the librarian.
If your students fill out a worksheet or complete a library-based assignment, offer to send results to the librarian. This gives them an opportunity to evaluate the session and make adjustments for future sessions. It also opens a dialogue about the effectiveness of the visit.

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