A ha!

A year of musings on collaboration and information literacy.
Our discoveries along the way and how they informed our practice.
By Harker Upper School Librarians Sue Smith and Lauri Vaughan

A ha!	What we did about it…
Teachers often ask students to bring in an article from a newspaper, but won't allow students to print out an article retrieved through a subscription database.	Changed our way of talking about resources. Now we talk about books, scholarly articles and mass media rather than books, databases and the web. We ask teachers to use the same language in their assignments and to consider accepting a reputable source from an electronic media.
We discovered .edu sites, while great for content, are notoriously bad at using and citing images correctly. On the other hand, web blogs are excellent sources of images.	Use the distinction as an example in our lessons about image citation and website evaluation.
Students we took to a university library were stunned at the amount of information they could find on very specific topics. (i.e. the books written about Indian dance).	Encourage students to get a San Jose Public Library card, which is a multi-use system with San Jose State University. In lessons, we show students World Cat to search for books and harvest subject headings – sort of the electronic version of that beautiful library shelf with all the books.
Kids confuse the words "cite" and "site."	Fondly recall the days when this confusion didn't exist, while smoothing our grey locks, sigh and provide an explanation.
Teens don't like to be singled out before class searching instruction. Cuts too close to the techno-cool nerve or feels too invasive.	Try to provide instruction in a class. Afterward, hover in a lab setting to provide specific troubleshooting recommendations.
Kids are too cautious about questioning websites and sources.	Basically, they need practice and criteria. We created website evaluation worksheets that can be used to assess any website. They are accessible on our website. Once teens learn how to criticize, they get very good at it.
Students tended to cite Ixquick or Google in an image citation.	Reinforce the concept that this is the pipe that delivered the image, not the owner of the image, in a lesson on citing images.
Students struggled with sequencing on library shelves. (Finding their books in a Dewey or LOC library.)	Set up a computer for students to search the OPAC themselves and provide help when needed. Provided an explanation about the two cataloging systems and who uses them.
Discovered many of our students did not know: citation, abstract, OPAC, peer-reviewed, etc.	Slowed down instruction to talk about definition of terms when appropriate.
None of our students had ever seen a scholarly journal and didn't know how to distinguish one from a popular magazine in electronic form.	We show kids physical examples during lessons and discuss ways to distinguish between the two when viewed electronically.
Kids' confusion about providing accurate citation is often reinforced by teachers' casualness about form of bibliography.	Reinforce with teachers at every opportunity that we don't much care about the commas and periods either, but proper citation forces kids to think about what kind of information they are looking at. This is especially true for information retrieved electronically. Providing just a URL should never be okay.

Citing electronically delivered information is hard. Most of our teachers don't do it correctly.	Heck, we can barely get it right. Consider this a teachable moment rather than an issue to sweep under the rug. Distinguish between how a document was born or first published and how it is being accessed.
Students in a class working on a long-term research project really came to own their work. They also wanted to hear about and celebrate the work of their peers – even if it was very different than the topic they studied.	Give students the class time to share their discoveries and experiences. There's rich opportunity for peer discovery here and the exercise reinforces the growing expertise of student researchers.
Some of our teachers actively lobbied against use of citation tools like NoodleBib. Others were reluctant to use it because they didn't know as much about as their students.	Present NoodleBib in appropriate department meeting, especially the note card feature. Volunteer to assess the bibliography portion of an assignment. Evangelize.
Teaching in the library is not always the best choice.	Discuss this with the teacher – allowing room for choice. If we can, try to get at least one day in the library which we like to think of as an information literacy laboratory.
Assignments that allow students wide latitude of topic choice are a great motivational tool and can draw upon a student's background knowledge. Allowed to self-select a topic, students tend to choose very broad areas of research.	Provide students with a lesson on narrowing (and occasionally broadening) their topic choice. Discuss narrowing by geography, type or time period. Once given the tools, students are pretty good at it.
When we talk Information Literacy with teachers, the vision of a full blown research paper is usually the form it takes in their brains.	Most students can accomplish the many small steps necessary if the process is broken down for them and they are afforded the time. Not all information literacy projects need to be a full-blown research paper. Info. Lit. CANNOT be restricted to just an enormous, time-consumptive research project. It should and must be incorporated into the curricula as smaller projects. We've started developing a list of these and promoting them as options with our teachers. (Annotated bibliography, presentation, etc.)
Students get lost and overwhelmed by the research process.	First, let them know this is typical and happens to the best researchers. Second, encourage students to develop an essential question to drive their research – rather than a thesis statement. Questions are less permanent, easier to change and demand answers.
Students are reluctant to ask for directions.	Encourage students to ask for help about any project often. Introduce each other when we can and with long-term projects, be sure we both get face time with the kids.
Students want to use Wikipedia; teachers are sick of seeing it used as the primary resource of a research assignment.	Discuss the use of the web frankly with teachers and students. We've often included a Wikipedia site on the top of a list of sources – to be used as an introduction to a topic. Wikipedia is less guilty than many, many web resources and the web is not going away. Our approach: 1. Use the web smart and 2. Wow students with the much better sources available elsewhere. (Not necessarily in that order.)
The "halo effect" OR My kids already know this stuff. Advanced classes have little time to accommodate Info. Lit. enriched curricula.	Yeah right. Still working on this one. Love to hear your thoughts… .LauriV@harker.org SusanS@harker.org.