Samantha Sigmon

Dr. Koster

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Title Goes Here:  How I Write an Essay

Technology has had great affect on my life and how I interact with the world. There are few aspects of my daily routine that exclude the computer and the Internet. This is inclusive of my school life where emails to professors and syllabi and assignments available online are staples of most courses.  This leads me to question how technology and the Internet have affected my research and the way I think as a student.  Nicholas Carr, in his article "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" poses a similar question. The way in which I go about researching a paper lends to the idea that my researching ability has been affected by the availability of resources for quick information.

To explain how I write a paper, I must explain how I commence. The beginnings of every paper are the same for me; they begin with Google.  I search the title of a work, an author, a subject to see what the first thing to pull up is. This first search helps me gauge how far I will have to dig for information.  I will not use this information during my writing but as a tool before I begin.

I googled Blake's "Garden of Love," and I immediately found the text of it.  "I'm feeling lucky" took me to exactly what I wanted.  I assume then that information will not be so hard to come by and sources will be easy to find.  This is encouraging.  If I have to click through pages of superfluous links about unrelated sites and articles, information

about my subject is more obscure. I know I will have to work harder to get everything I need to write a paper successfully.

The next step is to open Microsoft Word. I have settled down to research and write. There is no paper involved. What I want to say changes so quickly at times that I keep up faster typing. I can cut and paste instead of erase, rewrite, and fill up the margins. I fill in the appropriate MLA heading and "title goes here" where the title should go. I save this insignificant amount of work so that I can frequently click the save icon; my work will never be lost even though it is not on paper.

Now I make the decision about whether or not I will try to find all of my sources online or if some will come from books. This begins with all dependence on the assignment itself. Blake is from the Romantic period and not much analysis should have changed about it in the last few years, so books would probably be acceptable sources. If, however, the assignment is a comparison of a book to its recent movie adaptation, database articles might be better sources of information. After I have made this decision to use books to research Blake, I look on the Dacus Online Catalogue, see that I would have to go into the basement of the library to find the books, and decide whether or not they would be worth the trouble. Generally, they are not. This seems lazy, but is often a manifestation of my over-committed schedule common among college students not a show of my commitment to an assignment.

Now I pull up the list of databases from the Dacus Library website. This is merely a formality since I will be heading to JSTOR. Over the course of my scholarly research, it has proved to be reliable, always containing solid articles, most with full text. I will type in my most general search terms first, beginning with the author. "William

Blake" yields two promising articles that I open in new tabs to read later. These may provide background information and context to more specific criticism. I glance over them to make sure they are about the right person and not some other, unrelated William Blake, and I will take time to really read the articles when I have more. I need to do a more in-depth search first.

This is the first of many times that I tell myself, "You're doing great. All that research in a few minutes. Stay on track." Then I check my Facebook. I change my status and AIM away message to say something witty about school work and try to focus in on research again. I would leave this part out except that I cannot write a paper without checking networking sites or email. They are a part of my life as a college student that I cannot leave out, but I always know that I must get back to writing.

A second search of "William Blake and The Garden of Love" brings forth a few more articles. I again open them in new tabs to be dealt with later on in the evening. A new search is necessary since I probably do not have the required number of articles or much information yet. There has not been a good, solid article that jumps out at me. I search "William Blake love criticism." There are a few articles I may be able to use. I have around seven now. This is probably more than the requirement, but I leave myself room to dislike the articles; some of them may be of no use.

Now I begin to read the articles. I read at least the first three pages of all of them. I can use four, so I think to myself, "I may need to get that book from the library." Those articles I can use are printed out and read completely, one at a time with highlighter in hand. I highlight anything that may be of use later no matter how insignificant. Something we talked about in class a few weeks ago may seem pertinent as well, so

lecture notes are pulled out and read over.   This often leads to a slight change in my original paper idea, but since I have not written anything down, I am not fully attached to anything yet.  I decide on my basic points and how I will go about supporting them. I may go back to find an article about a specific aspect of one point, being very careful and specific with my search terms.  I may not need that book, although it will continue to cross my mind; I will see how writing progresses without it.  This is the moment where research ends and I begin to write.

The entire process I described above usually takes place in a day.  This is not because of a lack of dedication to scholarly work but an overabundance of lengthy assignments. My research style has conformed to a life of deadlines, overlapping assignments, text, print, and lack of sleep.  I do not, as Carr puts it, go to the Internet to "avoid reading."  I go to the Internet to do research quickly in order to get the paper finished and move on to the next assignment.  I have learned to use databases to do a week of research in a day, as Carr admits he does.  When something is of use to me though, I print it out and use it.  When something is deemed not of use, it is closed out and left behind.  I have experienced a move away from scholarly books, however, which are not instantly gratifying.  They do not contribute to my lifestyle of quick assignment turnover.

This is not to say that I no longer enjoy reading primary text.  I still reach first for a print copy of a book rather than skim online for the basic plot and character summaries. I still read the primary text of any assignment carefully, considering context and the beauty of the language itself.  I search later for articles, facts to ensure my papers are

understood after I have made meaning of a primary text myself.  Deep understanding is

not lost, so reading is not a pointless exercise.