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Client Diagnosis and Recommendation  
of Information Sources  
Sarah Tenfelde-Dubois  
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Emporia State University

Abstract

This paper reports on the database searching of one undergraduate student for two scientific authors and the outcome of those searches that resulted in a learning experience. It will cover the basis of the search method and the conclusion with findings related to the subject matter. It will also cover an evaluation by the undergraduate student on searching the databases and her reaction to the conclusion.

### Client Diagnosis and Recommendation of Information Sources

Ms. T., an undergraduate student enrolled in a beginning Psychology class was the subject of my client diagnosis. Ms. T's information need involved finding two specific sources for a paper she was writing for class. After trying to find the information she needed for her paper herself, Ms. T. became frustrated from shifting through numerous databases without success.

#### Interview

Interviewing Ms. T was informative because it gave insight to what her research techniques are and what information Ms. T. had ascertained from her previous database searches. The interview also provided a chance to understand what other search engines she was utilizing and what her feelings were on the information Ms. T. had uncovered in the database searches she had already preformed.

Also, it was discovered that her basic need was to formulate a specific focus for the paper. The professor had wanted a research report centering on two scientists. As Grover (1995) states, "The professional's role is to ascertain how the client perceives the problem and how s/he is impacted by it" (p. 5). After Ms. T. relayed the focus, we found she needed information written by Franz J. Gall and Johann G. Spurzheim, two pioneers in the field of psychology who lived in the late 1700s to the early 1800s. Background information was found relating to how they initiated research in Phrenology, which studies the development of mental abilities based on the external size and shape of the skull. This was originally called Cranioscopy but was later changed to Phrenology in 1800. Gall was the leader in his time for revolutionary ideas concerning the brain and contributed greatly to neurological science. Gall's work led Spurzheim to follow his radical theories, such as the heart was not responsible for the character, thoughts,

and emotions of a person, but rather, the brain, but both were criticized because of the lack of scientific proof.

During the course of the information needs interview, Ms. T. stated that she had already looked at several databases throughout her previous search and had concluded there was more information regarding biographies of Gall and Spurzheim than there was about what they had actually written during the course of their medical professions. Ms. T. again expressed becoming discouraged at the failure of not being able to find the information herself, but was willing to ask for help.

### Diagnosis

Diagnosing Ms. T.'s information need was finding articles written by these two scientists, not information about them, for her research paper. Finding data about the two scientists was not posing a problem for Ms. T., as there are many authors that have written about them. However, finding a book or articles written by both, or even just one of the scientists, was creating difficulties for Ms. T. because most databases do not carry articles dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. We also didn't know if this was science or more specific to Psychology so it was decided to search Psychology databases first and then move to science databases in the event the Psychology databases did not return and results.

### Search Strategy

The first step in finding the needed information for Ms. T. involved designing a search strategy that would implement searching the appropriate databases for articles by Gall or Spurzheim. It was decided to search databases by selecting "Databases A-Z" and then clicking on the "P" to locate the Psychology section of the databases, since it had been decided Phrenology would more likely be under that subject than any other. There were several to choose

from, including PLoS Public Library of Science and PsycINFO, which also includes PsycArticles. PsycINFO seemed promising because there are indexes dating from 1806, which would fit the time frame required for Ms. T.'s research.

It was also discussed in the interview that we would explore the database JSTOR, because Ms. T. had had good luck searching this catalog in the past. Another search tactic we employed was to search the databases by subject. Two subjects, psychology and medicine/health, fit the criteria for Ms. T.'s research paper, so it was decided to approach the searching by subject if the first databases were not producing results. Google and Wikipedia were also consulted to get background information on Gall and Spurzheim, but not for finding peer-reviewed academic articles.

#### Conducting the Search

To conduct the search, the first database searched was PsycINFO. Under the Quick Search Results, "Franz Joseph Gall" was entered as an exact word phrase. The result was 59 hits, but none were with Gall being the author of the articles. We then tried a command search with AU=Franz Joseph Gall for author. This search returned zero results. We also did an advanced search using Franz AND Joseph AND Gall, but no results were returned with Gall as the author of any works. Upon further investigation, PsycINFO carries information for 50 different titles of journals in full text; however, Ms. T. was not sure if Gall actually published articles in journals, but rather, books.

Because Ms. T. was not sure of the mode in which Gall published, we continued to browse the journal databases. The next database searched was PubMed by using the search bar set for "books" and "Franz Joseph Gall (au)". The "au" is the search field tag for author. This search returned zero results, and typing his name in as "Gall, Franz Joseph (au)" also returned

zero results. However, a search was done with just Gall's name in PubMed and one result was returned, "Searching for Memory in the Brain: Confronting the Collusion of Cells and Systems". Again, this was an article written by another author who had mentioned Gall's name in the first chapter.

The next database search was through PLoS. This database has Open Access, which had many free articles to download and use. Upon utilizing Open Access, it became apparent that while some articles had been published in journals, the majority of publications had been very recent additions by PLoS staff and board members. We abandoned researching on this database because we knew the information we were looking for was very old.

After not finding the information needed in the search process, we returned to the main database page and searched for databases by subject. Psychology was clicked on, and in that results page, ERIC was chosen. In ERIC, the advanced search option was picked because there was a better chance an author field was available. There was still only one search bar available but there was a very small link to field codes, which explained to use (au) when searching for authors. As Bell (2007) makes clear, "Field searching focuses your search and usually makes it more efficient" (p. 24). However, zero search results were presented using this field code.

After exhausting all avenues of searching in the Psychology subject, we tried the Medicine/Health subject. By reading the descriptions of the databases, it became apparent these records pertaining to the two scientists were not going to cover the date range needed. Biological Abstracts covered the most years, but it only had 1926 to the present on back file. The rest of the databases covered Sports Medicine, Consumer Health Medicine, and Nursing Medicine. WilsonWeb was also searched, but again, zero results were returned. JSTOR was also searched because it is a good source for scholarly journals for different subjects. However, it

did not go back far enough and there was a zero result return for the search. Books in Print did have one result appear after doing an author search on Gall, but the title was in a foreign language and it was not a scanned digital document of the book.

Searching through Dialog was another exercise in which the same results were displayed as the previous database searches. Dialog did limit the amount of items returned, so Ms. T. did not feel overwhelmed with information which did not necessarily apply to her research. Dialog returned two results in full-text format, but again, they focused on the works of the two scientists, written by other authors, not by Gall and Spurzheim.

### Ending Stages

Ms. T. was convinced by this phase in the searching that Gall probably had only written books, not in journals. We were also not sure if scientific journals were even published in the early 1800s so a search for books was the next logical step. After suggesting Google Scholar to search for Gall as an author, Ms. T. stated she had worked with Google Scholar in the past, and felt comfortable using this resource. In the search bar, we entered Franz Joseph Gall, author. On the first search in Google Scholar, the first return resulted in the book titled, "On the Functions of the Brain and of Each of Its Parts: On the origin of ..." written by Franz Joseph Gall and Winslow Lewis in 1835. It was originally located in the New York Public Library and was digitized to Google Scholar on July 25, 2006. This is also available for download into a portable document file (PDF), so a user can save it to their computer, or print it, and read at their leisure.

Spurzheim was also searched for using Google Scholar. Spurzheim's book, "A View of the Elementary Principles of Education" was written by him in 1835 also and was digitized on October 23, 2006. It is also available for download into a PDF file. What was interesting about this search is even though we had used the same search phrase, Johann G. Spurzheim, author, as

with Gall, this search result did not appear until number 13 out of 706. It was somewhat disconcerting to realize Spurzheim might not be found on this database either, until this title appeared.

Google Scholar will also return results to you even though there is no link to click on for a particular search. This result returned a book title that is not yet digitized, written by both Gall and Spurzheim in 1817 called “Observations on the Structure of the Brain”. Google Scholar did have a link called Library Search which enables a user to see other libraries that have this title in their collection for Inter-Library Loan (ILL) use through WorldCat. The University of Oklahoma, Washington University School of Medical Library, and the University of Minnesota Bio Medical Library are just three libraries carrying this title. It is also important to note Google Scholar searches for both books and articles, resulting in more opportunities to find the information needed.

#### Re-interview

Ms. T. started this assignment with a feeling of dread because her previous database search experiences involving this paper had resulted in results that were not accurate for her needs. With both of us searching through databases and coming to the same conclusion, Ms. T. felt even more disappointed with her paper. However, when asked if she was satisfied with the outcome of the search process, Ms. T. was enthusiastic about the ease with which we found the information we were looking for in Google Scholar. Ms. T. stated she felt most professors want students to use the academic databases, because as Bell (2006) states, when working with databases there “is a presumption that the material has been vetted somewhere in the process” (p. 215). But in her experience, Google Scholar is where Ms. T. finds most of her information because of the ease of searching within this database. As Ms. T. said most database searching is



confusing to the average student, especially beginning searchers, because of the field codes and Boolean terms that are employed to search. With Google Scholar, searching involves a one line phrase to get results.

Ms. T. also stated one specific barrier to her search process was that she did not know enough about the publishing of early 1800s literature. She expressed her wish to have researched this subject through Google before embarking on her database search, because this would have expanded her search options to include Google Scholar earlier in her process. Ms. T. also would have used the campus library to look for the two scientist's books since they would also have access to ILLs across the United States.

#### Evaluation

For Ms. T.'s project, researching through databases were, in the outcome, not the way to conduct a search. However, since that was not known in the beginning, the search process through those databases was a rewarding experience for Ms. T. She stated most undergraduate students are not taught the specifics on database searching, so going through the databases expanded her experience. The databases we searched had links to database help sites, and some even had question marks to click on next to items that might be confusing. Most databases provided us with examples of Boolean searching methods and what the field codes meant. Ms. T. did express her interest in database searching had been expanded.

Most of the databases we searched only went back to the 1960s, with only a few going back farther than that to the 1920s. Relevant and new information is important but for research projects such as Ms. T.'s, older information is valued also. Again, most of these databases deal with peer-reviewed journal articles, not books, which have been in the academic world a lengthier time. This may be the reason why Ms. T. could not find the published books from the

early 1800s in the databases, but this made her feel discouraged. Ms. T. feels earlier works should be in the databases also to ensure students the ability to find the information they need.

#### Conclusion

Database searching can be confusing if the correct methods are not applied, but having a search plan in place can help the researcher get started in the correct direction. Ms. T. learned that even though her answer was not found in an academic database, these do have a place in finding information in the academic world. Without databases, the information found on the internet might not be entirely accurate and there is some question of integrity. With peer-reviewed journal articles, the information is truthful and vetted, and is an excellent source to get the answers.

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