When There’s No Time to Cook, but There’s a Guest at Your House, Keep Something in the Freezer You Can Pop in the Oven

Christina Riehman-Murphy, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Penn State University, Abington Campus, cer20@psu.edu

NUTRITION INFORMATION
This recipe isn’t a recipe at all! It’s the box of pizza bites you keep in the fridge when your son’s friends come over to study after school but then casually mention they’re starving and they just can’t study until they eat something.

It’s what often happens in your one-shot library instruction. You’ve e-mailed with the professor who sent you the assignment for their six to eight page research essay and what (s)he was looking for in your class. Usually it’s an overview of library resources and a demonstration of databases that will be helpful for the students to answer their research questions. The professor is hoping they’ll leave your class with some good quality sources. You’ve prepared your lesson plan and your handouts and your search demonstrations.

On the day of, you begin the class, introduce yourself, and then ask if any of the students are willing to share their research questions. You mention as an incentive that if they do share it, you’ll do a sample search around it. A few hands go up and when you call on them, you hear a series of responses that go like this: “I’m doing my paper on... gun violence... Greece... teen pregnancy... homosexuality.” For each one of those students, you ask them to narrow it down: “What about gun violence do you plan on writing about?” And each student sort of shrugs.

That’s when you realize they will get little out of this instruction because they don’t really have research questions or topics for their essay. They need to narrow their ideas down. So you pull out your post-it note pad.

Learning Outcomes
Students will be able to:
• Narrow their topics by discovering new concepts and the relationships between them.
• Perform efficient and organized information searches that enhance their knowledge of their topics.

NUMBER SERVED
Up to 25, but the recipe could easily be adjusted to any number of students (just bring an extra post-it pad).

COOKING TIME
Prep time: 5 minutes is all you need
Cooking time: 15 minutes at the most.
You want to just introduce the tool and set them on the path to using it as they search. If they like it, they will use it as they search and take it with them when they go.

DIETARY GUIDELINES
Frame: Searching as Strategic Exploration
Knowledge Practice:
Design and refine needs and search strategies as necessary, based on search results.
Disposition:
• Exhibit mental flexibility and creativity.
• Recognize the value of browsing and other serendipitous methods of information gathering.

INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT
This is one-ingredient cooking! All you need is one 4x6 post-it pad. It’s preferable if students have their own computers, but it can easily be done just through the librarian’s demonstration of the task.

PREPARATION
Grab a marker and your post-it pad. Spend five minutes drawing ovals in the middle of each sheet. Keep your ovals around an inch. It’s enough room to write just one or two words. This helps guide students into thinking about keywords or concepts instead of
typing entire questions or phrases into the discovery tool.

**COOKING METHOD**
1. Hand out one post-it sheet to each student.
2. Ask them to write their topics in the oval. Tell them they can write no more than two words.
3. Have them draw four lines coming from their first oval and draw an oval at the end of each of those lines.
4. Students then open their laptops, go to the discovery tool homepage, and type the words from their oval into the discovery tool.
5. Students must scan results for two minutes before they write anything else down on their sticky note. Encourage them to search through at least two pages of results.
6. Time it!
7. When two minutes are up, ask them to write down four particular aspects of their topic that they discovered in their search that they found interesting (Figure 1). Again, limit them to no more than two words in each oval. For example, if football was a student’s original topic, after they scanned the results in the discovery tool then might add concussions or paid athletes to their ovals.
8. Now ask them to circle the one branch that they are most interested in.
9. Have them move on to using the advanced search feature. This time they should use their center oval term(s) in the first box and put their next oval term in the second box. The discovery tool helps them understand that there are hundreds of different ways to approach their topics with different arguments to be made around each of those aspects. Often times they start to narrow their topics even further.

**ALLERGY WARNINGS**
While this is simply teaching the students to concept map, I’ve found that the less jargon used, the better. Also, it’s important to use sticky pads! Tell them to stick theirs to their handouts when they leave.

**CHEF’S NOTE**
The great thing about this ready-to-go recipe is that although it’s just a simple concept map, it helps them narrow their topics, provides a search strategy, introduces the idea of searching using keywords, and makes them take notes. When the class period is a bit longer, I like to give each student two sheets. Instead of letting them start with their topics, I guide them through one that I’ve chosen, before moving on to their own topics.

**CLEAN UP**
Once students have finished the activity, take a few minutes to implement some formative assessment. I recommend asking at least five students to share the initial topic they began with in their first oval along with its two accompanying sub-ovals to see how they narrowed their topic down after using the discovery tool. Doing this allows the not only the chef, but also the other students to see more examples of the process.