

Kelly Drake

I have been required to write countless essays throughout my educational career, but until Fall semester of 2007, few had required mastery of research skills. Most of the papers I have written have had an analytical basis, usually with minimal research involved. In BIOL 322, Human Anatomy and Physiology, the class was assigned a research paper based on a neurophysiological disorder or phenomenon. The topic choice was not a hard one for me to make due a close friend being diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disease, Friedreich's ataxia. I wished not only to learn more about the disorder and its effects, but hopefully expand my knowledge to the extent that I will become better equipped to help others in understanding the disease and increase awareness.

Shortly after the essay was assigned, I spent time in the library attempting to begin the research process. Until then, I was unaware of my own cluelessness regarding research methods. I immediately found that I lacked the knowledge and skills to thoroughly explore the topic, and actually had no idea where to start. The professor, Dr. J. Rogers, scheduled a library instruction session in early October that focused on researching scientific journals and other sources in several different databases provided by Radford University. The instruction provided during the lecture, which included hands-on, interactive training on navigating the various databases, proved to be extremely beneficial to me in that after the class, I was able to effectively find and access hundreds of scientific sources. Along with general methods of exploring online databases, the instructors also provided information on how to obtain an article or journal source that is unavailable to McConnell Library alone from another library through the use of interlibrary loans.

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After learning the proper locations and methods from which to base my research, I initiated my search by accessing several databases and finding a few books that covered Friedreich's ataxia. Before beginning this assignment, I was under the impression that most research was based solely on books, and that much of the time researching would be spent making photocopies. I quickly learned that there are immeasurably valuable online resources that become easy to access once you learn the most effective methods of researching a topic, as those covered during the instruction session provided by the helpful library staff. I also learned the difference between primary and secondary scientific resources, and how to search for both in the online databases.

During my research, I took advantage of the services provided by Radford University's McConnell Library such as access to books and encyclopedias, online medical and scientific databases, online books, and an interlibrary loan. I found useful information in books such as *Physicians' Guide to Rare Diseases*, online databases such as *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, *MD Consult*, and *Health Reference Center Academic*, and in E-books such as *Triple Repeat Disorders of the Nervous System*. I requested an interlibrary loan for the journal article *Advancements in the pathophysiology of Friedreich's Ataxia and new prospects for treatments* from the journal *Molecular Genetics and Metabolism* that was cited in the *Health Reference Center Academic* database. I received the article only a few days after placing my request, thanks to the competent and dependable services of the McConnell Library staff. Overall, my research was a lengthy but worthwhile and beneficial process that was made possible by the teachings of Candace Benjes-Small and Eric Ackermann that enabled me to skillfully and efficiently navigate many of the resources provided by McConnell Library. While the

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research process proved to be difficult at times, I feel well-equipped to efficiently research for future tasks and assignments. The research skills and methods I obtained are immeasurable and have earned me the privilege to submit an essay of which I feel proud to have written. After receiving praise from Dr. Rogers based on the content and amount of research associated with my essay, "The Nature of Friedreich's Ataxia," I feel honored to have the opportunity to submit the paper in the prestigious contest for the Winesett Awards for Library Research.