What Do You See? Image Searching for Research Topic Selection and Development

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Introduction
Presentation divided into three main parts – The Rationale, The Process, and The What-ifs
Research tells us that students lack robust model of search. Tend to want to go directly from picking a topic to finding sources and would rather not spend time on non-pragmatic issues such as developing topics. Focused on search results.
The New Digital Scholar book - gamechanger! Particularly, Ruth Mirtz’s chapter on databases’ influences on students’ understandings of the research process. Students tend to lack context and background knowledge in relation to their research topics. Developing a focus takes time – must try on topic and wrestle with it. Needed to move beyond databases and tap into students’ behaviors and beliefs to create environment for learning. Students expect us to focus on words – why not images instead?
Use images for personal research purposes. New ACRL Information Literacy Framework helps remind us of other sources for research, beyond text. Neuroscience research shows us that images resonate with us from a biological sense – thought and vision connected.
Images tap into our sense of curiosity as we begin an internal, unconscious dialogue when we see images. We’re asking questions and making connections. Ties into New ACRL Framework – Dispositions. Creating an environment to support curiosity can help foster learning.
Images can also help provide necessary context for research topics.
Searching for information and winnowing results is a juggling act, especially when you don’t know much about your topic. Have to remember and revise search objective while constantly taking in new information and discarding others. Complex cognitive process.
We need to help scaffold the searching experience for students to help them monitor what they know and refine subsequent questions. Scaffolding can help provide a structure that permits students to focus on inquiry.
Scaffolding reduces cognitive overload.
The Process
Process focused on metacognition. Helping students to reflect on, monitor, and revise their learning process.
Three principles for metacognitive instruction:

✓ Integrate it into subject matter
✓ Explain how to use and apply strategies
✓ Provide sufficient practice time


How best to support metacognition? Three principles
Show's metacognitive challenges students face, broken down into categories, and how we can scaffold instruction accordingly.

University of Kentucky – 4 learning outcomes based on ACRL current standards. Instruction, mostly one-shot, driven by instructor request. Learning outcomes determined by assignment and the timing of the session in relationship to the assignment. At previous institution, had tried to teach Learning Outcome One (defining an information need) with concept maps but found most students didn’t have the necessary context or background information related with their topics to create them. Plus, students felt like they were wasting their time creating concept maps when they could be searching for information. Began to structure learning activity for Outcome One differently
Created this worksheet and use it as the primary learning activity in the class. Vary how I structure the class due to class size, topics, assignment. Begin class with a video and brief activity about keywords. Pass out worksheet. Model process of using each of the three sources (image search, Wikipedia, traditional reference database) to identify research questions and come up with keywords. Usually ask students to try any two of the three sources listed with their own topics. Topics don’t have to be inherently visual for the image search to work – have used it in classes focused on advocacy issues, food and culture, poverty, historical events, and classes where students’ topics didn’t seem to be related by any particular broad theme.
Ask students to write down their topic – it’s usually very broad at this point
Ask them to think about the kinds of images they’d expect to see if they did an image search on their topic
Have them do an image search with a general search engine on their topic
Ask them, “What do you see?” Encourage students to write down keywords associated with their topic as they see them in the search results. Encourage students to write down what they see and to be as inclusive in this process as they can be - treat it as a brainstorming, free-write session. This helps them to see visually an overview of their topic, helping to provide context and background information.
Ask them to develop research questions by finding answers to these questions first – “What differences did you experience in the types of search results you saw and the types of search results that you expected?” “If you look away from your search results, is there any image or images that you can still see in your mind? Why is that?” “What images made you feel something? Why?” “What images left you asking more questions?”
Now, have students choose one question that most interests them. Identify keywords from the question and then develop synonyms and related terms that can be used for searching.
Image search always the most popular selection, when given a choice of sources to use on the worksheet. Students are regularly able to come up with fairly complex research questions by asking themselves questions of the images in their results lists.
Another strategy for topic development using images – create a Padlet wall (padlet.com) and ask students to contribute one image that best represents their topic at that point in time. Ask students to identify keywords related to their image. Discuss image selection and keywords with classmates.
The What-ifs
What if students encounter disturbing images? Some topics lend themselves to potentially offensive images than others. Warn students of the possibility when introducing activity. Ask them to gauge what offensive images might surface with a search on their topic and how they sensitive they are to such images. Offer to work with students to think of other ways to search for their topics that might be less likely to produce offensive images.
What is students can’t get out of “right answer” mode? Or, they’re having a hard time channeling their curiosity and connecting what they see in the image search with their topics? Or, they think this approach to developing their topic is coming out of left-field and they just don’t get it? Introduce the activity as a creative process that may feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar to them . . . but that’s ok! Part of the learning process is to reach outside of yourself and stretch yourself.
By leading students to systematically question what they’re looking at in relation to their topics and providing the mental scaffolding to do so, curiosity can be reawakened, students can literally see the context of their topics, and developing a research topic can become a creative exploration.
Further reading


