



chapter 11*

Transitioning from Face-to-Face to Online with USER in Mind

Logan Rath

If you're like me, you need a quick way to churn out new lesson ideas because, let's face it, who has time to devote to full-on lesson planning? Add to this the demand for online courses and the increasing number of online sections of traditionally face-to-face classes and it quickly becomes completely overwhelming. This chapter will focus on how I was able to use the USER instructional design framework to redesign a seventy-five-minute, face-to-face information literacy session for the online environment.

My institution shares qualities with several others around the nation. The College at Brockport is one of fourteen comprehensive colleges in the State University of New York (SUNY) system. We have a blend of diverse programs, including teacher certification, business, and exercise science to name a few. Students at Brockport pursuing teacher certification can choose to focus in either childhood or adolescence education. Both undergraduate programs are inclusive, meaning that teacher candidates are eligible for certification in both their content area as well as certification in students with disabilities. Therefore, every student enrolled in a certification program must take Introduction to Special Education.

* This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License, CC BY-NC (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

This particular class is offered both face-to-face and online, with three sections of eighteen to twenty-four students typically enrolled. One full-time faculty member usually teaches two sections and the third is taught by an adjunct. I had worked with the face-to-face sections before but needed to get creative in order to reach out to the adjunct and support the students who chose to take the course online. After some discussion with one instructor of the face-to-face section, we decided to pilot an online experience for her classes through Blackboard, the campus learning management system. After reading Char Booth's book, *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning: Instructional Literacy for Library Educators*,¹ I decided to give her model a try. This is the story of that experience.

About USER

The USER model of instructional design helps librarians plan instructional interactions in an information-focused context. The model was developed in 2011 by a librarian for librarians—namely, Char Booth at The Claremont Colleges. I find USER to be a more accessible version of the popular ADDIE instructional design model. This might be because it's shorter, or because it reminds me to keep the user at the center of the learning experience. Char Booth describes the USER model as:

An instructional design approach that steps through understanding a learning scenario; structuring educational content; engaging learners; and reflecting on the knowledge that is built. This method can be used to facilitate any type of instruction in any medium. USER provides strategies for rapidly, reliably, and systematically producing teaching tools and information services that make more impact.²

Each phase of USER is broken down into two substages. The *understand* phase explains the qualities of the learner and educator as well as the context and content of the lesson. The *structure* phase lays out the goals and objectives of the lesson. The *engage* phase explains the actual lesson activities and navigation of Blackboard. Finally, the *reflect* phase discusses how the lesson was adapted and changed, based on feedback and assessments. The chapter concludes with a list of ideas on how one could adapt part of or the whole lesson to fit one's needs.

Understand

According to Booth, there are two parts to the *understand* phase of the USER model of instructional design. First, one must identify the problem and then analyze the learning scenario. *Understand* is similar to the *analyze* stage in the ADDIE model.

Identify the Problem

Booth describes identifying the problem as the answer to one question: “What is the challenge learners face, and how can I help them meet it?”³ In this lesson, students taking Introduction to Special Education face the challenge of creating a resource guide on the topics of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), English Language learners (ELL), and students with disabilities (SWD). These students also face the challenge of identifying at least eight academic sources, creating an APA-style reference list, and citing those sources in-text using APA.

Analyze the Learning Scenario

While identifying the problem focuses on the challenge to overcome, analyzing the learning scenario takes all of the affective variables into consideration. Booth presents four elements to help analyze the learning scenario: learner, context, content, and educator. Each of these elements must be thought through in terms of qualities and challenges. I will now discuss those qualities and challenges through these specific elements.

Learner. In this instructional design model, the learner is the person for whom the scenario exists. For the majority of instructional interactions, the term *learner* is synonymous with “student” or “participant.” The learners in this experience are at varying stages of their educational career and in varying stages of their pre-service teacher program (either childhood inclusive or adolescent education). While some may already be admitted to the program, others will be taking the class to get a jump-start on their coursework. Of those students who may be classified as pre-service teachers, they will be in different programs and at differing stages of their academic careers (undergraduate versus graduate, childhood versus adolescent). Those who are already accepted into the elementary education curriculum will be taking EDI330 concurrently, where they will have more chances to practice searching for scholarly books and articles as well as citing in APA for at least one major research paper on social constructivism. Finally, there will also be students who do not intend on pursuing teacher certification but are using this class as an elective to fulfill degree requirements. Through conversations

with the many instructors of the course as well as students who have taken this course in the past, I've learned that many students will have little to no familiarity with APA or research using education-specific databases. It is more common that the graduate students have some experience with APA depending on their undergraduate work. However, it is rare in my experience that a student takes this course knowing how to search using the discipline-specific resources as well as how to cite scholarly material using APA style.

Context. When reflecting on the context of the learning scenario, answer these questions: “What does the learning space look like?” “Does it introduce any constraints?” The lesson will be delivered online through the campus learning management system (LMS) with its own set of qualities and challenges. Online instruction is different than face-to-face instruction. There will not be a chance to check for understanding in the same way you would in a face-to-face class; however, there is more individual accountability. This lesson will be delivered in the format of a module (a folder in the LMS). Instructions for students need to be easy to locate, clear, and arranged logically. Since the learning management system is used to enhance the face-to-face courses, students should already understand how to access, navigate, and submit assignments for the module.

Content. When reflecting on the content aspect of the learning scenario, I consider this question: “What do the learners need to overcome the challenge posed as the problem above?” In order to complete their resource guide, students will need to know how to search for and access scholarly articles located in education-specific resources, and how to cite those articles in APA style. The answers to these questions will be fleshed out to become the targets during the structure phase of this process.

Educator. When thinking about the educator piece of the learning scenario, I ask what resources do I already have and what do I need to learn to effectively deliver the instruction? To construct this module, I have access to vendor videos, other videos libraries have uploaded to YouTube, and my face-to-face lesson plan from previous semesters. In this scenario, I already have the lesson set out, I just need to learn how to translate it to the online environment.

Structure

The structure phase of USER involves setting up your “targets—goals, objectives, and outcomes” as well “methods to involve learners” and strategies for “extend[ing] the interaction.”²⁴ When planning my goals for this session, I find it imperative to start with the external assessments. It is my experience that information literacy instruction works better when there's an external assess-

ment. So, if this is the case, I can then pitch myself as the coach to help them complete their project, thus demonstrating the tangible value of a librarian to the students. Fortunately, it happens to be the case here that there is a summative assessment built into the problem described in the *understand* stage. I will use that assessment to drive my discussion of targets.

Creating targets. It is my goal that students will become familiar with locating scholarly articles in a discipline-specific database during this lesson. The outcome is that students will submit, to their instructor, a properly formatted guide that references at least eight academic sources. While successful creation of the guide is the outcome, there are specific targets that the students must meet in order to produce the outcome. Instructor feedback from previous semesters shows that the APA style aspects of the assignment have proved the most difficult. Taking all this into consideration, my objectives are that students will be able to:

- Retrieve relevant results from *Education Source* by using effective keyword strategies.
- Create citations for articles that follow APA style.
- Format a Word document in APA style.

Involve and extend. Students will need to perform individual searches to hone their skills, but this also ties into another large part of Booth's book where she discusses learner self-interest through Bell and Shank's "What's in it for Me (WIIFM)" principle.⁵ To extend beyond this specific scenario, it will be important to make connections for the students about future assignments and how this truly is the first stone in the castle of information literacy. One way in which the assignment will be extended beyond the interaction is that they will have an opportunity to receive feedback as part of the objective of the lesson. The APA reference list will have multiple submission attempts with the ability to correct and resubmit twice.

Engage

The engage phase of USER is where all the magic happens. This phase involves "developing the materials of instruction" and delivering those materials.⁶ For this class, I need to create an online module that replaces face-to-face instruction. I know from the context analysis that this module will be housed in the learning management system (Blackboard) for each section of the course. Looking at my objectives, I decided that students will need practice and feedback on APA in order to be successful on their resource guide assignment. Instead of a quiz on APA, I came up with the idea to have students create and submit their reference list for the resource guide. In this way I can assess both the quality of the relevant results as well as the ability to format article citations in APA style.

Creating the actual module is relatively straightforward. First, I create a folder called “Library Resources for EDI 413/513” in my test course. Then, I populate the content items described below. The actual module starts with an item (see Figure 11.1) detailing who I am, along with my office address, phone, and email. After the introduction, there are two folders: Searching Library Resources, and Cite & Write using APA. The Searching Library Resources folder includes:

1. Directions for the folder
2. A library generated video to help students understand the idea of keywords
3. A vendor video from EBSCO showing the features of advanced search
4. A vendor video from EBSCO showing the MyEBSCOhost Folder
5. A hands-on activity where students generate their keywords for use in databases; this activity uses UT Austin’s *How To Generate Keywords* website (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/keywords/>). This activity also explains how students can access the research guide for education, which contains the link to Education Source.

The Cite & Write using APA folder includes:

1. An introduction to the folder
2. A library generated video to help students cite a journal article in APA; the video contains a note above the iframe with links to OWL at Purdue and Citation Fox
3. A library generated video to help students cite sources in-text
4. An item detailing the dangers of copying and pasting out of EBSCO
5. A link to a university-generated explanation of how to use headings in APA with examples
6. Directions to upload a properly formatted APA reference list of at least eight sources that will be used in the CRP/ELL/SWD resource guide; the reference list assignment includes a rubric to help students understand their score.

Finally, I copy the module from my test course to the destination course where I can create the actual assignment Dropboxes. Students are required to submit their APA reference lists one week before the assignment is due. The learning management system does not alert me to new submissions, so I have to remember to login and check the “Needs Grading” section for new submissions. If there is a submission ready for grading, I use the rubric and commenting features built into Blackboard’s Grade Center to provide feedback to the student. Students can then resubmit the reference list twice. In this way, if a student is not successful on the first try, s/he will have additional opportunities for success.

Reflect

The final phase of USER urges the instructor to “assess the impact of instruction” and “consider how [to] revise and reuse [the] content.”⁷ Overall, the lesson had a positive impact. Several inputs were available to analyze for success: emails directly to the librarian, librarian and professor discussion, discussion with individual students through research consultations surrounding the assignment, and the actual APA reference lists. The ability for students to resubmit their work helped students improve. Anecdotally, the majority of students who did not score at least 9/10 chose to resubmit their assignments.

The current version of the module combines what was learned from the first iteration of this project. The first version of this module had three folders (instead of two): developing keywords, searching and saving articles, and then citing and writing using APA. In this version, the students were responsible for completing the UT Austin keyword generation activity and then pasting their results into an assignment Dropbox. After grading the first set of reference list submissions, I realized that this rubric was grading-intensive, and it did not appear that the keyword generator activity did much for helping students uncover additional articles. This makes sense because culturally relevant pedagogy is a unique term in the field of education. Additionally, the rubric for the reference list looked more like a traditional rubric, with few rows and several columns.

For the second iteration of this project, I changed a fair amount of content. First, I condensed the folders within the module from three to two (as described earlier). Then, I replaced the videos with shorter, more succinct ones. These new videos concentrated on one specific aspect of searching and/or citing. So, while there were more videos overall, each video was shorter in length. Third, I added an introductory screencast giving an overview of the entire module so that students would know what to expect when completing the assignment. This helped reduce email questions about the module, especially in the fully online section. Lastly, I significantly changed the rubric for the reference list. The new version is more like a checklist with only two columns: Yes and No. There are ten rows each covering an individual characteristic of an APA reference list, such as journal title formatting and volume/issue/page information. The checklist version of the rubric resulted in higher grades on the first submission as well as reducing the need to type common phrases such as “your article titles need to be capitalized in sentence case.” While each submission took more time to grade, the overall time commitment was less.

Adapting or Customizing this Idea

While this instructional interaction is specific to the course and context, the instructional design method used was not. USER (understand, structure, engage, and reflect) can be used to redesign any instructional interaction. While this chapter applied each step to the creation of an online module for beginning pre-service teachers, the USER process can be applied to face-to-face, hybrid, and online modalities. As long as the process is followed, the outcome should be a well-planned lesson ripe for execution.

Although this lesson was created with specific goals, outcomes, objectives, and targets in mind, feel free to take specific pieces of the module and integrate them into your own teaching. Here are some suggestions for using parts of this chapter:

- Make use of course spaces in learning management system as a way to reach students.
- Create a page or item on the course page of the learning management system with your name, email, phone, chat info, and any other contact information a student may need to reach you.
- Work with faculty members to integrate participation points into your lesson. If you cannot explicitly include participation points, ask students to email the evidence of their learning directly to you.
- Provide descriptive feedback to students either via the learning management system or email. This will help you gain their trust for future interaction such as research consultations.
- Curate videos that replace lectures and assign those videos in place of readings before class. See Geneseo's Designing Resilient Video Tutorials by Brandon K. West at <http://libguides.geneseo.edu/video> for specific criteria.
- Find an interactive keyword generation activity that will walk through breaking out a topic into discrete keywords. (I used the one by UT Austin, but make sure you use one that works for you).
- Employ the use of an APA rubric when grading reference lists. My rubric is available at <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/drakepubs/27/>

Concluding Thoughts

Using the USER model to rethink the redesign of this lesson resulted in a product of which I am proud and is useful in multiple contexts. The module created for this course has become the base for any content I load into the learning management system. Personally, USER is easier for me to remember than ADDIE, and the name itself reminds me to focus on the students.

I have learned so much through this redesign. First, I learned the importance of simple, concise directions for students to follow. Uploading a screen-cast of the entire process helped students who had problems with written directions. Secondly, I learned that there is a lot of poor content on YouTube to help students. The first video I used had an error in the APA reference entry for a website. That one mistake resulted in almost everyone using a colon after “Retrieved from.” To be honest, if I had not found the series I currently use from Humber Libraries, I would have made a video myself. Finally, I learned that students did not want to submit what they thought was busywork (keyword selection). For this resource guide, the key words supplied in the instruction prompt were straightforward and worked well. With that being the case, it made the most sense to show students how to generate additional search terms only if they had trouble.

There is certainly room for improvement with this transition from face-to-face to online. The biggest area to address is interaction with the instructors of the course. While several students have sought me out for explanations of what they must do (even after uploading in an introductory video), it would deliver a more consistent message to students if professors were all on the same page with both the instructions and importance of the module. Feedback from students who understand the reason for the module has noted that having all of their sources cited first made the writing process easier. Every semester I tend to tweak the module based on email-based feedback from students. However, I still need to implement a more formal assessment process that receives input other than the raw scores from student attempts.

Notes

1. Char Booth, *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning: Instructional Literacy for Library Educators* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2011).
2. *Ibid.*, xii.
3. *Ibid.*, 95.
4. *Ibid.*, 96.
5. *Ibid.*, 13.
6. *Ibid.*, 96.
7. *Ibid.*

Bibliography

Booth, Char. *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning: Instructional Literacy for Library Educators*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2011.

