EMPHASIZING NOTE-TAKING AND OUTLINE MAPPING DEVELOPMENT FOR RESEARCH PAPER WRITING

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Abstract

University students are expected to produce lengthy research papers that synthesize information from multiple sources. Note-taking skills are a vital part of the process of collecting and organizing information for these research papers. Note-taking is usefully integrated at different levels within the research writing process; both at the individual text level and at the larger collective information level. While note-taking strategies for research paper writing are often noted within overall guidelines of online academic writing centers, writing instructors often simply refer to this information rather than actively practice these skills in class. As advocated by Matt Birkenhaur’s 2011 article “The lost art of note taking when writing a research paper” in Teaching and Learning, it is clearly beneficial to explicitly focus on note-taking within the process of research paper writing. This note-taking process not only prepares students for similarly expected research assignments in future academic courses, but more importantly highlights the steps often necessary to avoid plagiarism.

The highlighting of various note-taking steps have been incorporated into a first-year undergraduate English Composition course for Engineering students to help them better organize and integrate information from multiple sources into coherent research papers. The note-taking begins within the text-marking of sources by highlighting and/or underlining of key information within a text as well as writing margin notes. The prescribed system then moves on to producing outline formatted notes on a separate piece of paper, specifically encouraging the use of abbreviations and symbols and without full sentences. After multiple sources have been collected, the use of concept mapping of the information is introduced and emphasized to organize the full range of information from various sources. Importantly, the use of various free online mapping tools has made this particular outline format easier. It has been found that the final concept mapping of the overall information gathered often has a significant impact on preparing the students to better organize and use paraphrasing within their research papers.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Note-taking, Concept-mapping.