

Research Reflection

The discussion we had in class was the major inspiration for my research: where do you envision yourself in 3-4 years, and what knowledge or resources would you hope you have learned? I see myself as a journalist in the future. In 3-4 years, I may be applying to journalism school or directly diving into the industry of news reporting, both of which would require turning in a journalistic writing sample. Since UC Berkeley only offers a summer Journalism minor and no other journalism-related courses for undergraduate students, I really hoped to find resources that would help me to prepare for news writing. The first thing that came to mind was to google “How to write a news report,” and looking at the numerous results, I had the idea of examining the strength and limits of online “how- to guides” on news writing, hoping the results I found were able to help prospective journalists like me when evaluating what sources to refer to when writing, probably their first, news report.

At the start of my research, the most exciting thing was to be able to get in touch with news reporters at The Daily Californian, an organization I hope to join in the future, and have them answer the survey that points to my research question: are online “how-to guides” effective? Meanwhile, I was also worried that they may not reply to my survey. Initially, I sent an email explaining the goal of my research to the news department at DailyCal, but got no replies. I then decided to start with individuals. I went on to Facebook and sent messages to people who are in the DailyCal group if they would like to participate in the survey. Similar requests were also sent to people who identified themselves as news reporters at DailyCal on their Twitter bios. Some of the reporters leave their contact information on DailyCal’s website, and I contacted them as well. I almost felt like a reporter exploring different possibilities of connecting sources throughout this process. When I was ready to initiate the backup plan, to print out surveys and bring them to the DailyCal’s office myself, one of the reporters I contacted via Facebook said he was familiar with the staff representative of news reporters and gave me her contact information. This friendly representative then agreed to include my survey in the newsletter to the staff members of the news department.

Further, my views about research deepened during my work. When reading research articles on academic journals, I used to take the data and results scholars gathered for granted and focused on their results and conclusions. After conducting a research by myself, I realized that besides the results, the process mattered as well as I came to understand how every step comes together to contribute to the final results. The conclusion is not determined by a single piece of evidence but rather the complex process of designing methodology, analyzing the data and so much more. Having this in mind, at the Research Festival, when I listened to a presenter explain Obama’s motivation drive from a cultural and literary analysis point of view, I asked follow up questions based on his research process and why he design the methods in a certain way. He was glad that I was not just interested in what conclusions he found, but how he reached those conclusions.

Regarding my own research process, discovering unexpected evidence is quite exciting. Initially, I believed my research would lead to the conclusion that online “how-to guides” are unreliable, and I was surprised to find that the writing conventions suggested by “how-to guides” actually matched what appear on reputable newspapers and what news reporters include in their writing. The brief interview I had with one of the reporters enabled me to think about the limits of the “how-to guides” not regarding their inaccuracy I initially assumed but regarding what aspects of news reporting that cannot be taught and must be learned through practice.

In addition to developing a more in-depth understanding about the research process and discovering surprising information, I also gained pride and satisfaction of learning how to write a news report after reading ten “how-to guides” and making the convention list. Unlike at the beginning of my research when I knew almost nothing about news writing, I am now confident to write a standard news report that follows the expectations of the field of journalism. It could also possibly be submitted as my sample in my application to DailyCal next semester. Talking to the reporter through email also enabled me to learn that in order to be a professional news reporter, learning to write a news report is far not enough because soft skills such as connecting sources and sorting information are also necessary. I now know what aspects I need to work on in the future in order to become a better news reporter: to keep practicing and learning from mistake through hands on experience. In the end, I found the motivations of doing this research project as not only endeavoring to get a good grade in this course, but also digging into the field I wish to join in the future and gaining useful information that would help me move towards the right direction.

As my research allowed me to find the strength and limits on “how-to” guides on writing a news report, I hope to expand the scope of my research in the future and investigate the effectiveness of guides and even courses on other forms of journalistic writing. In this way, I wish to help my peers who also want to work in journalism find appropriate resources that lead them closer to their dreams.