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Reflective Essay

I wrote “The Biological Basis for Alzheimer’s Disease” as my term paper for HDE 117 (Longevity) in Fall 2019. The purpose of this assignment was to utilize the library databases for research, improve both my writing and editing skills, and broaden my understanding of longevity with a topic of my choice. Moreover, this research paper served to expand my communication skills and bolster my intellectual confidence. A key requirement for this paper was to use at least ten sources, seven of which needed to be primary sources such as a research article or a review paper. Initially, I was quite daunted by the prospect of this assignment because I had only modest experience reading research papers or using the online library databases. I distinctly recall reading about this assignment on the syllabus and questioning if I was capable of such an onerous task. To my surprise, by the end of this quarter and after countless hours exploring the online library reserves, I completed my assignment and felt confident in my ability to utilize the UC Davis library resources.

This research term paper was broken up into multiple assignments, so it allowed me to thoroughly understand the process of writing a research term paper. Furthermore, attempting to take on a big assignment all at once is often overwhelming, so this approach eased my stress and helped me solidify the importance of breaking down a large assignment into multiple smaller and more manageable tasks. For the first assignment, I was required to compose a working title as well as find three primary sources I would possibly use in my paper. When choosing my topic, it soon became evident that simply focusing on Alzheimer’s disease would be much too broad. As a result, I sought assistance from my professor by viewing his various writing videos affiliated with this assignment. These videos provided me with a much-needed source of direction and helped me narrow my topic to the biological basis of Alzheimer’s disease. Due to my minimal experience searching for primary research articles, I referred to the UC Davis Subject Guides, specifically those on psychology and neurobiology and physiology, for guidance. These sites directed me towards utilizing databases like Google Scholar as well as journals such as *ScienceDirect* and *Annual Reviews*. Initially, it was challenging to develop an acquisition strategy

because of the large volume of subscriptions the UC Davis library has to scholarly journals and databases. Despite this, I knew I would be able to effectively approach my topic of interest once I learned how to properly make use of these web sources.

To begin my exploration, I used key words in my searches to narrow down the various papers available to me. I quickly learned that I was using too broad of language such as “biology of Alzheimer’s disease.” Searches such as these resulted in a surplus of sources, but most of these were often too widespread for what I was seeking out. After trial and error, I began to identify more specific terms such as “amyloid-beta peptides and Alzheimer’s disease” or “apolipoprotein E and late-onset Alzheimer’s disease.” Once I adjusted my approach, I started to find relevant articles and papers for my assignment. This allowed me to pull some preliminary sources to begin the second writing assignment for my paper: creating an outline. In the beginning, I was unsure how to decide what my various headings and subheadings should be. After reading a few review papers, I examined how these documents classified each section and used these breakdowns as guidelines for my own paper. Originally, I only considered primary sources written within the last ten years, but I found a few articles I felt were fundamental to the composition of my paper that extended beyond this timeframe. As a result, I refined the years of publication to the last twenty years in my search for scholarship. In addition, I was encouraged by my professor to focus on more recently published work because I wanted to focus on valid and current research in the field.

For the next few portions of my research paper, I needed to compose a strong introductory sentence, have at least ten references in my bibliography, and have approximately two hundred to three hundred words in the body of my paper. After looking at the first sentences from over twenty scientific research papers for inspiration, I was able to generate a strong topic sentence for my research term paper. I utilized papers from journals like *Neuron*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, and *Nature* to aid me in writing a clear and descriptive opening sentence. Furthermore, by continuing to use strategic phrasing in my searches, I was able to find new papers with additional ideas I had not thought of before such as having a subsection

focusing on early-onset Alzheimer's disease. As a result, I was able to continue to expand my research paper with supplementary scholarship.

For the remaining assignments regarding my research paper, I composed a working draft and eventually a final draft of my term paper. I had reached my minimum of ten sources but wanted to expand upon my paper more and continued to seek out additional rich literature. The method I employed the most when searching for extra sources was referring to the citation sections of papers I had already referenced. This directed me to similar, yet distinct papers related to my topic of interest. At this stage of my writing, I occasionally stumbled upon an article the university was not subscribed to. While I was unable to access these papers, I pulled key ideas and phrases from their abstracts. With this material, I continued my search and sought out similar information in journals I could read in full. Also, I wanted to use the most impactful papers in the field, so I often referred to the number of times a paper was cited (i.e. the impact factor) via Google Scholar.

Despite being intimidated at first, this paper provided me with an extremely valuable experience. I was able to explore and read rich academic scholarship in a way I never had before. Furthermore, this assignment pushed me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to utilize the vast source of information that was at my fingertips. By the end of this assignment, I created a scholastic work of twenty sources that spanned across eighteen years of research. Consequently, I have a much better idea of how to approach reading research articles and have employed this knowledge in following classes and as an undergraduate research assistant. In conclusion, because of the resources and tools provided by the UC Davis library and the continual support of Dr. Carey, I have grown more confident in my ability to delve into academic scholarship. I know I will employ these skills throughout the remainder of my undergraduate career and beyond.