

Organizing Your Research

[00:00:00] [Beginning of Recorded Material]

Anne Graf: Hi, my name is Anne Graf. I am the first year experience librarian at Trinity

University and, in addition to supporting student research projects, I also work on my own research and I've been thinking a lot about the process of organizing research and organizing sources for writings more specifically and I was thinking about a time that that was really challenging for me, which was an article that I wrote a couple years ago with a couple collaborators, a former Trinity staff member and a former Trinity student, and that's made me reflect [00:00:30] on how difficult it might be for those of you working on research projects right now given that we are in a really different kind of time. I was intending to do some kind of tutorial on tips for organizing anyway but I was motivated to, get it, get it going and to think about it in context of how do you focus on research and how do you keep things moving forward when you feel overwhelmed. Maybe you feel stuck, maybe you have a hard time paying attention at all, and you need [00:01:00] ways to kind of break things up into really manageable steps so that's what I'm going to bring you through sort of through the story of how my collaborators and I managed to get our research from you know point A to B to published. I'm not suggesting that these are the tools that you need to use in the order we use them and I'm also not going to go into great detail about the specifics of each tool. I am going to provide some links to that at the end. What I want you to see is how the process of [00:01:30] organizing your sources can actually help you think about what you want to say and break up the process of doing a lot of research and writing something as substantial as an article, a literature review, paper, whatever it is that you're working on, so this is the last you'll see me for a little bit face to face. I'm going to flip it around so you can see some documents that I have and we'll take it from there. All right, here we go. So, the article that I am

going to talk about [00:02:00] the research for is this one: "Listening to Undergraduate Peer Tutors: Roles, Relationships and Challenges". It was published in the *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. The part that I'm going to focus on is what ended up becoming the literature review here so if you're kind of skimming this you can see in here that there's a lot of areas where there are lots of names, dates. These are obviously all the articles and works that we consulted that we eventually organized into our own [00:02:30] literature review. I'm not going to talk a lot about really what this article is about or how we did the rest of it because my goal here is to help you think about when you're writing from and with sources how to organize them to make that process more manageable. So, what we did is a step that many of you are probably familiar with from your assignments. We decided to do a bibliography together. When you're working with other people, I think it can be helpful, especially if you're all finding different sources, [00:03:00] to put them in the same spot so we didn't do anything that fancy. We just used Google Docs and this is what we decided to do for them. We did a short summary. We also decided to list out specifically what we did not want in our bibliography and that was information that we didn't have initially but after we looked at a few articles, did a few searches, we realized we didn't want [00:03:30] information that was a little bit outside our scope and so we have our articles, we did our citations right at the beginning so we would have those done, a step I highly recommend, and we summarized them for each other so that everybody would know what we were dealing with and we used the comments feature in Google Docs you can see off to the right there as well. This is a helpful way to kind of generate work to start from but what we found is it didn't necessarily help us see [00:04:00] the relationships between sources or how many we had on different topics so we moved into something called an article matrix, literature matrix, synthesis matrix. You might hear it called different things. It's really a spreadsheet so don't get too intimidated and what we did here is we listed each

source in a column so B is one article, C is a different article, the author and date published are at the top and then what we put in the rows are information we wanted to track on each source. [00:04:30] This might be totally up to what matters to you. These are the kinds of things we wanted to make sure we looked at. One of the things I want to draw your attention to are what we call t1 t2 t3 t4. Those are the themes. By listing out different themes, what we were able to do is think about how did different articles relate to themes we saw emerging so we actually had to go back and forth between making notes and creating themes and sometimes [00:05:00] breaking out a new theme. This is a really helpful step as you think about what are sort of the components of the paper or literature review that you're working on so that you don't end up writing a paper that's just sort of one source after another but things are organized in a, in a, cohesive and thoughtful way. The other thing I want to highlight here is that we also found it very useful to [00:05:30] put notes and quotes in and not just brief descriptions. The quote I think is one of the most sort of evocative ways to recall what an article is about versus sort of a basic summary so that is something I recommend if you did our article matrix and again if you want more thoughts about how to create these I will share some good resources for that at the end. From this point, we wanted to kind of see this in a narrative form [00:06:00] so we started an outline. You might be thinking that is not much of an outline and it's true it's not. We actually didn't get much beyond this when we decided that each person could kind of break out the outline as they wanted to just start writing. You might do a much more elaborate outline where you put in all the sources that are going to go in paragraph one, all the sources that are going to go in you know paragraph four or whatever. In our case, [00:06:30] we all just kind of worked all that stuff out through drafting and so we had many different drafts and what I actually want to show you is that we had one-two-three version, recorded versions, of our literature review. We had our matrix, we had our outline that I showed you, we had our

bibliography, we had a general document about themes, and those were just some of the kinds of work we created before [00:7:00] we even really had anything that approximated our finished product. All of that thinking, which actually joined even more thinking for the rest of the article here as you can see, all of that thinking that we used to organize our sources helped us determine what we wanted to say and helped us get to the point of publishing our article in the journal. Here it is here. So, [00:07:30] here I am again. What I'm hoping that you will consider if you're feeling stuck on a research project, feeling like you don't know how to take the next step, or maybe you sort of know what it is but you don't want to do it anyway is that you think about is there a way that I can move forward organizationally that could also help me move forward mentally, emotionally, whatever it is you need to get your research project in motion again. Staying in motion is an important thing. That said, [00:08:00] sometimes if you're stuck for a while it might mean that an insight is around the corner. The next day you might feel differently so I wouldn't berate yourself or panic if you feel like but I am stuck. That's okay. I think insight is probably coming your way and these are some tools that you can use to kind of help that happen a little bit faster. So to recap the tools that we used and how they helped. We started with the bibliography just to generate sources. [00:08:30] We used a matrix so that we could see what we had on different topics and what were the main ideas we really wanted to deal with. We used the outline to at least start organizing those in a narrative way and we moved pretty quickly to drafting but you might choose to spend more time on the outline or not. All along we were talking a lot to each other. That's one thing that's not really represented here that I would highly encourage if you're working on a project even if you're just talking to a friend. [00:09:00] That can be a very useful way of thinking through your ideas and realizing maybe you know a little bit more than you thought you did. To finish, I just wanted to show you real quick what I promised, which is a page where you can go to find out more about how to

outline, how to create a synthesis matrix, some other great tips if you're actually doing like a particular kind of research project like a social science research project, bibliography information, [00:09:30] tools I did not use, Zotero and Trello, I'll let you discover those but they can be incredibly useful for both organization and citation, and the links to that page are here for the organizing research page. If you want one of your steps to be to help have a librarian help you kind of figure out what's next for you, you can go to this page at the bottom and find the person who's working in the subject that you're working on and we would be more than happy to help you [00:10:00] especially now, especially while things are tough, but always because that's our job. Thanks, bye.

[00:10:07] [End of Recorded Material]