

Maxwell Forman

Reflective Essay Library Research Award

The process of generating ideas is rarely linear. Solid research paper ideas usually end up being a combination of your own underlying interests plus themes in the class, but to get there requires both focused and associative thinking. When I was brainstorming a topic for the final paper in FISH 464, I started by connecting themes from class about Indigenous advocacy and climate change to food systems. My first step, once I had a rough idea, was to open as many tabs as possible on my computer through Google Scholar. I searched key phrases such as “Inuit food sovereignty”, “Arctic food insecurity”, and “Arctic food networks and climate change” and then control-clicked each related article. Starting this broad helps me understand if my topic has an appropriate scope for the resources already available to me. At one point, I had upwards of 50 tabs based around my research idea. I researched geopolitical power and texts about colonialism in the Arctic as well to gain context. As I began to lay the groundwork for my paper, I learned how to identify research gaps in order to build an original argument, new methods for resource exploration, and how to account for my subject position when researching.

I have been studying food systems since freshman year of college, and I was interested in the Inuit fight for self-determined food. A challenge quickly arose in how little was written about food sovereignty in the Arctic specifically, although studies addressing food insecurity were prevalent. Through the library research process, I realized that this was the research gap where I could build my argument. I did a preliminary read through to get an understanding of the current literature on my topic. I read abstracts, took note of publishing dates, and eliminated articles that seemed irrelevant, outdated, or otherwise inappropriate. For articles where I could only see the abstract, I would paste their titles into the UW Libraries site to find a research platform that provided access through UW. I had to request a few in advance and used interlibrary loan for one of my sources. Once my sources were narrowed down, I compiled them in a document and wrote a quick summary of each to keep track of them.

In the last few weeks before my final was due, I honed my research to find specific examples of the approaches I was planning on discussing. To do this, I scanned the bibliographies of my main sources for other relevant articles. I also checked the suggested section of the research portals I frequented (Taylor & Frances is particularly good at offering related articles, they are the Spotify Discovered of journal platforms). These techniques provided a few more specific articles, and I then had a comprehensive database for my research paper.

As a non-Indigenous researcher advocating for food equity, it was important that I was conscious about my subject position as well as my sources'. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference Alaska food sovereignty report (ICCA 2020) was the first source I had found on my topic, and I based my argument around what they were advocating for. Not only did the report provide key search terms, but it also helped me ensure that I was using language and solutions that were proposed by the affected community. I also had the opportunity to interview Dr. Shari Fox, an Arctic scientist specializing in collaboration with Inuit communities. She was able to provide an on the ground perspective to the research I was doing remotely and pointed me towards the Qikiqtani Inuit

Association report as well as the EALLU cookbook. In working with sources outside of academic journals, I developed an understanding of how to use a diversity of sources to explore an original argument at the intersection of Indigenous studies, political geography, and resource management.

In addition to the ICCA report, the Gerlach and Loring (2013) article, “Rebuilding Northern Foodsheds” was key in the development of a conceptual framework for my research. Food is a multidimensional issue, and I was becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information I had collected. Gerlach and Loring’s (2013) concept of a diverse portfolio of approaches helped me realize I was better suited to provide an overview of current approaches to food insecurity rather than focusing on one specific element. I then shaped my paper to appear as a portfolio that lays the framework for future in-depth research on transformative food systems in the Arctic. In this way, I learned how a key text can act as a structural guide for research, and how to deal with informational overload.

Writing and research are metacognitive processes. Throughout this project, I thought critically about my subject position, research methods, and writing process in order to create a study that advocates for Inuit self-determination and the rebuilding of local food networks. I am passionate about food sovereignty, and I believe that a writer’s interest in their work shines through. Researching and writing “Who Decides? Inuit Food Sovereignty in a Changing Arctic” was a fun process of discovery, growth, and challenge. I thought about it almost constantly, and even dreamt about it a few times. Moving forward, I have a stronger understanding of how to create a cohesive narrative based on a diversity of sources. I also am inspired to continue to apply transformational, people-centered thinking to the way I research issues of environment and justice. I am proud of what I have written, and I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to have it archived at the UW Libraries. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.