

## Library Research Award Reflective Essay

By Cissy Dai

In my research as a first year student, I had the opportunity to first independently choose a topic in class ENGL 299. During this quarter-long project, I was tasked for three assignments - the proposal essay, the Library research essay, and the Showcase Text project. After the peer review and conference with instructor Sarah on my proposal, my research question: “Would people be happier if they eat more sweets every day?” started its journey. I had a list of essential points to begin with and I thought I was fully prepared. However, during the weekends when I first used Google Scholar and typed in my focus to look for articles, I was entirely overwhelmed by all the irrelevant and possibly relevant pieces of information. I skimmed through some of them but in the end, nothing really stuck in my brain or on my paper. Then, in the first week of drafting the Research essay, Sarah encouraged me to talk with a UW Library search expert for sources.

I found and set up an appointment with Leah DeSantis, who is a nutritional science specialized librarian working at the Health Science Library. After I went through the fundamental structure and the thesis of my essay with her, we first talked about the research question because it needed adjustment due to the lack of sources and vague targeted audience. She provided me with a helpful research question guide from the Health Science Library website, which includes PICO and SPICE frameworks that I later attempted. During the process, I also tried testing new vocabulary by researching different keywords before applying. Eventually, the word “sweetness” was changed to “sugary foods” because the second one provided me with condensed materials that were more connected to my topic. Even though “happiness” was an important topic to focus on, I decided to use the term “mental health” to broaden it a little bit more. Accordingly, I could discuss the issue in a more comprehensive way that includes both the positive and negative aspects such

as depression or anxiety, and I would also be able to find more supporting studies or research. The final research question that came to consensus was: “How does the increased daily sugar intake impact mental health?” I thought this transformation even stimulated me more than the previous one as it’s one of the popular issues in society now and could be life-threatening.

Leah also introduced me to a lot of searching techniques on Pubmed for me to find better sources, like utilizing “AND” from Boolean search terms. Through Limits and Filters, I narrowed down my search and I could find specific academic papers and retrieved peer-reviewed items. I located several related experiment papers like the study by Bailey RL et al.. Starting with this article that emphasized the sugar intake that the public would normally consume and categorized the participants by age from young children to adults, another study by van Strien T et al. looked for the connections to the mental health side of my study. It brought out the idea that the response of eating reacts differently to different emotions, and it acted more intensely in negative compared to positive moods, especially in sweet rather than salty food. After viewing this, I wondered if there could be more articles supporting the same idea.

Correspondingly, I adapted what Leah introduced to me and used Google Advanced Search from the toolkit in Health Science research guidelines to find another study. Applying the TRAAP Test to further evaluate the materials, I was able to rationally rule out some interesting topics that caught my eyeballs but were unnecessary or unhelpful at the moment. Oliver, Wardle, and Gibson verified that “stressed emotional eaters ate more sweet high-fat foods and a more energy-dense meal than unstressed and nonemotional eaters”. This conclusion also reminded me of my own experience in high school. While I could use myself as an example in this issue, there is a fair amount of evidence above that can support my behavior was not a perverse logic, but instead a public consensus. Therefore, I think it was time to dig deeper into my research, such as what

influences brain functions when eating desserts? And additionally, why is it a common thing in the society?

My search direction was then adjusted to a more scientific area as my research questions were changed. This transition increased the difficulty of my article processing, but I also found them appealing to read due to its close relativity with my brain. Jacques and others demonstrated two main ways that sugar provides emotional support - reward pathway and stress response system. I individually learned the most throughout this paper because of how academical and deep it is, and it also has the potential to be a useful source for other related subjects. Inspired by the relative term “addiction” with the reward pathway mentioned in the paper, which was added into my keywords, I started another round of the research.

But I still felt like something was missing. I thought about another way of trustable evidence that can be utilized in my paper: numerical data. I asked Leah if there were any efficient data engines, and she introduced a data web page to me, which has resources that include a variety of fields. Starting from the National Center for Health Statistics to the CDC, Leah showed me the resources guide from the Health Library which contains countless types and fields of numerical results, allowing me to find more accurate information. This adjustment filled in the evidence gap that made my research more interconnected and harmonious. I was fully surprised that our UW library website contains so many helpful guides.

After reviewing the gathered research papers, I thought about using a video format to show my findings and gradually had my audience built up. It would be the young populations who treat sugary foods as a daily treatment for their mental health issues that they consume excessive amounts. Finally, I decided to record a vlog of a person’s normal sugar intake in daily life, as it would be more effective to widely send out my message, while attaching my Writer’s Memo

below. In the process of creating the visual presentation, I met with Natalie from the UW Design Help Desk for advice since it was my first time designing a video. We came up with important components of the video such as the cup of sugar that keeps filling up and drafted out the basic layout of the scene. I also spend a fair amount of time looking up materials for film editing techniques. To make the production more efficient for showing the excessive sugar that people are consuming, I did further research on the database of Dietary Guidelines for American to get the limited amount of daily sugar.

This research experience provided me with a lot of new insights and the opportunity to practice my database and research skills. I didn't realize that I've earned so much until I looked back when writing this essay. I noticed how the logics of the research progress are connected with each other like a spider web, but I also realized the development in my own logical thinking. The more I found in the materials, the more hungry I am to continue digging in. As my first research project, I'm aware that there's much space for improvement, and I'm excited to apply them and keep learning more searching strategies in my future projects to make myself a better scholar in the field.