



**Linnæus University**

Sweden

Mini Report

# Exploring students' needs from a holistic view on the write- and search process



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## 1. Introduction

The library and writing center at Linnaeus University provide services to support students in the writing and research process. This support includes developing information literacy and academic language competence. According to our pedagogical mission we should “develop the educational services, insuring that they are well-known and in demand and choose the most appropriate service based on the student’s needs” (Linnéuniversitetets bibliotek, 2015). Coming from a holistic approach on the write- and search process, this study examines the needs of the students with the aim of developing an integrated pedagogical support. One of the main questions we are attempting to answer is: what kind of challenges do students face when writing academic texts and searching for scholarly information in higher education and how can we as librarians and text-tutors collaborate together in order to meet those needs?

The University Library offers students the service of tutoring sessions in information search with a librarian and tutoring sessions in academic writing and study skills through the Academic Support Center (ASC). These services are booked through a web-based booking form which is submitted to the tutors. In the booking form for information search the students are asked to fill in an answer to the question: “Which problems have you found while searching on your own?” In the booking form for text tutoring students need to answer the question “What kind of help do you need with your text?”

In May 2014, the librarians and text tutors discussed a chapter by Sheril Hook, “Teaching Librarians and Writing Center Professionals in Collaboration: Complementary Practices” (2005). The discussion was primarily about how we can create a holistic experience for the students. The discussion was based on different models of the search- and writing processes, as well as Hooks concept about the search- and writing process as an interwoven experience and that “any attempt to separate writing from research fractures the learning experience” (Hook 2005, :25).

The library and ASC are committed to helping students achieve success in their academic studies. The main objective of this study is to assess the needs of the students in order to give insight into how librarians and text-tutors can offer an integrated pedagogical support in a way that will be most valuable for students.

## 2. Method

The study was conducted with data being gathered via statements from a web-based booking form for write and search tutoring. The data was collected from students in all programs, courses and levels. In order to identify the needs of the students these statements have been gathered, analyzed and categorized to establish a thematic framework. The method chosen was inspired by previous studies conducted at Malmö University Library.

The first step in the analysis was to tag and colour-code the student statements from the booking form. Thereafter the statements were grouped in loose patterns which later became categorized into defined concepts using grounded theory. Gradually, the analysis revealed what the students' greatest needs are in the research and writing process. The needs initially expressed by the students through the booking form have been compared with how the librarians and text tutors have perceived the needs during the tutoring sessions.

### 3. Results and analysis

Overall, these results indicate that students most frequently ask for help to find relevant scholarly literature and support in language and structure of their academic writing. There are common areas, such as reference management and the demands of scholarly status, where both text tutors and librarians give pedagogical support, but from different perspectives. Together these results provide important insights into the diverse expectations among students, librarians and text tutors, raising the question: is the main purpose of tutoring to help solve the task or develop academic literacy?

For the purpose of analysis, two segments were used to identify the needs of the students.

#### The first analysis (based on the students statements)

##### **Search tutoring**

The material for analysis consists of 151 booking forms. Through our analysis 11 broad categories were formed. All in all, the material is based on 173 student statements.

The categories are presented below according to size:

Unable to find the information needed (49)

Scientific material (38)

Keywords / search terms (25)

Search technique (19)

When reflecting on this result we find that the students emphasize words like *relevant* and *adequate*. Other words that also appear are *scientific* and *research*. It seems these words have become a marker for quality, probably reflecting the words and terms that teachers use in the classroom.

We also see a dependence on keywords. Several times it seems that the student thinks that the search problems will be solved when the correct keywords or search terms are found and that may be linked to language problems connected to scientific discourse.

##### **Text tutoring**

The material for analysis consists of 227 booking forms. Through our analysis 11 broad categories were formed. All in all, the material is based on 334 student statements.

The categories are presented below according to size:

Language and style (102)

Structure (64)

References (48)

Upon reflection the statements show that students are aware that academic writing has its own set of rules but have difficulty distinguishing what those rules are. Similarly, the analysis indicates that the students are aware about flaws in their written language. However, the students are often not able to express what these flaws are.

In both text tutoring and search tutoring it is evident that students need help with aligning their work with academic standards. However, the students tend to use generic terms when expressing their needs and there is often a clear focus on a specific assignment they are working on. What type of questions should be answered in a text tutoring session, in an information search session or by digital learning resources? Is there a way librarians and text tutors can collaborate together so that students receive a more interwoven experience?

The second analysis (based on a comparison between the students statements and a description of the session from the tutors point of view)

A comparison has also been made between the needs expressed by the students in the booking form and the librarian/teachers experience of that need. The analysis is based on 126 tutoring sessions: 39 tutoring in information search and 87 tutoring in academic writing.

We categorized the tutoring sessions in four different analytical categories to examine how the expressed needs of the students compare with what was noted by the tutor:

1. The expressed need of the student correspond fully with the tutor's notes
2. The expressed need of the student correspond in part with the tutor's notes
3. The expressed need of the student does not correspond with the tutor's notes
4. The tutoring session could not be compared with the expressed need of the student

The fourth category comprises tutoring sessions where the expressed need of the student is missing or where the tutors notes aren't sufficient.

### **The analysis of text tutoring sessions**

The analysis of the text tutoring sessions shows that nearly half of all tutoring sessions have a correspondence between the expressed need of the student and the tutor's notes which indicates that the students understand what the service contains. There are only a few examples where the student's need and the tutor's notes do not correspond, that is, where the students express totally different needs than what the tutor assesses. In those cases where the need corresponds in part to the notes of the tutor, there is more often a situation where the tutor singles out a certain need to

focus on rather than expanding the conversation to encompass more aspects than what is expressed in the students booking. A presumption that we make in these cases is that there may be an expectation from the students' part to get as much vital information from the tutoring as possible.

The current study found that students often describe their need in general words and concepts. This has been clear since the first part of the investigation. One unanticipated finding was that bookings made in English were generally more specific and well-defined in contrast to the Swedish ones and that the tutor's notes show that a large part of these sessions were preceded by lectures. Another interesting point is when comparing bookings made for text tutoring and search tutoring, the text tutoring shows more specific statements, leading us to the question: is text tutoring more in phase with students' expectations on the service?

#### **The analysis of information search sessions**

In summary, the result could be interpreted as if the tutoring in over 50 % of the sessions corresponds, fully or in part, with the student needs and that only a lesser degree of cases show flaws in communication between librarian and student. The high degree of sessions that could not be compared (category #4) indicates that the tutor describes the session in a vague manner. It is not possible to assess whether this is dependent on inexplicit instructions by the tutors, compliancy in the description of the tutoring or that the method of tutoring is more assignment-centered rather than tutoring for long-term understanding.

## **4. Discussion and conclusion**

The present study was designed to examine the needs of the students with the aim of developing an integrated pedagogical support. The findings suggest a possibility to further develop an integrated support for the students. It can thus be suggested that in order to adapt the interwoven nature of the write and search process a greater collaboration between text tutors and librarians is beneficial.

The way students describe their need for tutoring mirrors their attitude towards the library and their expectancies for help and service. Their expressed demands and needs are mostly fair and relevant and indicates an understanding for what we can offer them.

How we present our services almost certainly affects how the students state their needs and how the bookings were done. In short, how we present our services affects how students state their needs. The questions and descriptions in the booking form affect the student expectations for the tutoring sessions and we have a responsibility to ensure that our services are presented in a distinct and understandable manner.

We have also gained insights into differences in the approach to tutoring between students, text tutors and librarians. A continued collaboration will enrich our pedagogical approach and tutoring skills. Librarians and text tutors have a lot to learn from each other.

Most students are focused on the specific assignment they are working on - finding relevant information on a chosen subject and reworking the language and structure of their text. There are also students who express an interest for the continuous search- and writing process and developing long term skills in these areas.

The tutoring in both academic writing and information search approached the same problems from different perspectives, namely the understanding of the construction of the academic text. This should be an interesting possibility for collaboration in a joint educational effort.

Despite the fact that reference work is not mentioned in the bookings of tutoring in information search, we consider it important that text tutors and librarians collaboratively think about how the students' needs can be met in this area.

The purpose of the current study was to determine how librarians and text tutors can gain a more integrated pedagogical support system through identifying the needs of the students. Our hope is that this report can add to the continuous work to increase our understanding of student needs and encourage the collaboration between text tutors and librarians in order to enhance student learning.

## References

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