

Information Search Process (ISP) Research Planner

Teacher’s Guide for Supplementary Use

**Background:** Carol Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process (ISP\*) is a *6-stage model* for guiding students through research by mapping out the process along their *affective* (feelings), *cognitive* (thoughts), and *physical* (actions) experiences. Based on studied patterns of uncertainty, the ISP offers teachers and librarians critical points of intervention where students need extra help to stay on the process:

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| --- | --- |
|  | ISP Stages |
|  | **Initiation** | **Selection** | **Exploration** | **Formulation** | **Collection** | **Presentation** |
| Actions | Brainstorming  | Seeking, organizing information | Documenting |
| Thoughts | Exploring ideas | Developing understanding | Increasing focus |
| Feelings | *Uncertainty; Disinterest* | Optimism | *Confusion; Frustration; Doubt* | Clarity; *Urgency* | Sense of direction; Confidence | Satisfaction; *Or, maybe disappointment* |

**Introducing the ISP to students:** While the ISP was designed as a supportive reference for teachers, it can be adapted for student use. Recommendations for introducing the research process in the classroom:

When: At the same time as a new research project is introduced.

Where: In the LHS Library Learning Commons. An ISP bulletin board is available as a visual aid.

How:

1. Introduce research as “a process, not a goal”: We go through stages during research, some more frustrating than others. We learn and share new information throughout the process.
2. Provide ISP Student Planner to students (editable for teacher needs) and introduce each stage following the bullets on Page 2 of this Guide and the ISP Bulletin Board in the library.
3. Follow-up with students throughout the research process, using the Planner to track their progress, organize their research, and reflect on the process.
4. Assess student understanding by incorporating select Planner activities into the rubric(s) of the research project – NOTE: The Planner is designed not as *extra* work, but *to* *be* the work.

**Intervention**: A key element of using Kuhlthau’s ISP in the classroom is *intervention*:

* Teachers are advised to observe and ask students about their feelings as they progress through each stage in the research process (as a class, in groups, or one-on-one);
* Feelings of doubt/frustration/disinterest/etc. (the “*pitfalls*”) should be acknowledged & accepted as normal experiences in the research process;
* Methods/resources (the “*survival plans*”) for students to overcome the *pitfalls* should be discussed, promoted, and put into practice in order to keep students “on track.”

*\*For more info on the ISP & original models, go to:* [**http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/information-search-process/**](http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/information-search-process/)



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**Stage 1: Initiation**

Definition: Student becomes aware of a lack of knowledge & need to conduct research.

Actions: Familiarizing with the research/project/assignment instructions, timelines, and

requirements, and forming a research plan.

Pitfalls: Feelings of uncertainty, apprehension, and disinterest are common.

Survival plan: Review/clarify research expectations and familiarize with the ISP Planner.

**Stage 6: Presentation**

Definition: Student has completed research and is preparing to present the work.

Actions: Editing drafts, refining details, practicing/rehearsing.

Pitfalls: Students are either feeling satisfied or disappointed in their work, and can be

stressed about meeting deadlines, getting a good grade, or performing.

Survival plan: Allow for ample time to polish details – do not overlook or rush this step!

**Stage 3: Exploration**

Definition: Student has identified at least 1 topic to develop and begins the research.

Actions: Searching using library materials, databases, or internet; taking good notes.

Pitfalls: Students become overwhelmed with information & have difficulty identifying what

to include or exclude. *May withdraw from the work – low point of confidence*.

Survival plan: Be open to changing plans or main ideas – it is ok to go back a step!

**Stage 5: Collection**

Definition: Student has taken ample notes and identified many relevant sources.

Actions: Synthesizing information, developing main ideas, refining/weeding sources.

Pitfalls: Increased confidence and eagerness to present the final product; may lose focus

on details in an effort to get it done, especially as deadlines are approaching.

Survival plan: Build complete thoughts, write rough drafts, organize & cite sources.

**Stage 4: Formulation**

Definition: Student has decided on a focused topic and outlined main ideas.

Actions: Outlining research notes, identifying gaps in sources or understanding,

developing a presentation concept (essay structure/presentation format/etc.)

Pitfalls: Increased clarity and focus may lead students to rush to a final product.

Survival plan: Slow down, build upon ideas, analyze sources, fill knowledge gaps.

**Stage 2: Selection**

Definition: Student identifies a general area, topic, or problem for the research.

Actions: Brainstorming research topics and where/how to locate information.

Pitfalls: Students feel mostly optimistic about making a plan but may have trouble coming

up with ideas.

Survival plan: Use multiple brainstorming techniques – all ideas are welcome!