

ADVENTURES IN RESEARCH COMMUNICATION: WRITING, DESIGN, AND DISCOVERY

By Paul Butland

As a student at the Faculty of Communication and Visual Arts, I have studied as a communications major at Thompson Rivers University for the last four years, where I pursued my degree while navigating both academic and workplace environments. Being a communications student has been challenging, rewarding, and sometimes intimidating, but I achieved top marks and balanced part-time work successfully. Throughout my studies, I completed courses such as Research Methodology, Introduction to Communications, and Organizational Communications, all of which involved research projects, applied research, and elicitation techniques for interview practices. Additionally, I worked through three Co-op terms that included paid projects, research tasks, and Riipen Level Up projects, which developed my communication and research skills further. Coming from a background in visual arts and computer graphics, I realized that my true passion was in communications writing. Returning to university helped me refine my skills, better prepare for a workplace increasingly influenced by AI-generated technology, and equip me with valuable writing skills for this evolving landscape.

Before returning to university, I was diligent and skilled in research and project work, but I misunderstood some aspects of research and approached personal growth with caution. My time at TRU has increased my confidence and research abilities, thanks to guidance from courses and professors. I have developed skills in both quantitative and qualitative research, as well as academic writing styles and formats such as APA, MLA, and Chicago. This experience has

strengthened my confidence as a knowledge creator and improved my communication skills. Two courses, CMNS 3000 (Research Methodology) and CMNS 4530 (Organizational Communications), provided a strong foundation in research practices and methods relevant to both academia and the workplace. An example from my research course CMNS 3000 is the paper titled "*An Integrative Assessment to Analyzing Effects and Production in Digital Media.*" Its purpose was to examine three scholarly articles that explore how electronic media and content influence behaviour and the importance of digital communication. The study outcomes demonstrate the parallels between content creation and identity management. Through this assignment, I realized I had previously assumed research was primarily conducted online. I learned that traditional methods, such as reading articles and journals, are equally important for gathering information. Another example from my experience is my TRU Co-op position with the BC Wildfire Service in Kamloops during the summer of 2024. In this role, I researched and collected information for a proposal with a strict deadline. While my university research skills were helpful, I found that effective teamwork and the ability to communicate research to different audiences were essential for obtaining accurate government information. I also learned that evaluating and synthesizing qualitative sources is crucial for documenting and recording research.

Through my academic studies and work placements, I continue to strengthen my research, communication, and writing abilities. Over time, I am becoming more deliberate in how I approach information gathering. Rather than relying on surface-level sources, I am learning to review scholarly articles carefully, compare perspectives, and maintain accurate records of references. This process has improved both the organization and credibility of my work.

In my research coursework, I applied quantitative, qualitative, and rhetorical methods to examine how meaning is created and interpreted in everyday contexts. One project required my group to

observe facework at the Campus Activity Centre at Thompson Rivers University and conduct photo elicitation interviews based on those observations. This experience required patience, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis. It also reinforced the importance of concluding directly from evidence rather than assumptions.

Working through the stages of observation, data collection, and reporting has helped me understand research as a structured and collaborative process. Instead of viewing research as simply gathering information, I am beginning to see it as a method of asking focused questions, interpreting findings responsibly, and communicating results clearly to different audiences. This shift in mindset has shaped how I approach both academic and professional work.

Research has transformed how I ask questions, communicate ideas, and approach both communication and identity. I am learning to address uncertainty and complexity using professional methods that were unfamiliar to me before university. I now see myself not only as a student and researcher, but also as a more effective communications practitioner within the university and local community. Previously, my shyness limited my participation in activities that could have developed my abilities. Through communications research and writing at TRU, I have gained a clearer understanding of my skills, which has increased my motivation to pursue my goals and further develop my research abilities as I work toward a Bachelor of Arts in Communications. My courses, Co-op Work Terms, and Riipen Level Up projects have helped me build confidence, become a more discerning consumer of knowledge, and contribute meaningfully to both the university and the broader community. Research has strengthened my confidence and decision-making, supporting my academic, professional, and personal growth. These experiences will guide my future studies, career goals, and commitment to lifelong learning and problem-solving. I plan to continue developing my writing and design skills, whether in the workforce or through freelance

opportunities. My research journey will extend beyond the RESL 1500 Research Certificate, further shaping my skills and perspective as a knowledge creator.

Reflecting on my experiences, I recognize that my proficiency in writing and design has grown as I have matured as a student. This growth has increased my confidence and made my research skills come more naturally as I pursued my degree. Developing these abilities has transformed me into a more effective student and prepared me for both university and professional environments. As a result, my work is now more organized and credible. Networking with peers and professionals has further strengthened my research, writing, and design skills and has helped me communicate results clearly to diverse audiences. I now understand that research is more than gathering information for assignments. It involves asking meaningful questions, evaluating credible sources, and communicating ideas clearly and ethically. Research has become the foundation for my critical thinking and lifelong learning, rather than just a means to earn a grade.