Going into my final research assignment for my Introduction to Environmental Health class, I had trouble identifying a topic to write about. I spent a few hours reading a variety of popular sources on Environmental Health News, until I finally found a troubling article about how occupational lead exposures continue to pose a significant threat to American workers. Specifically, the article discussed how occupational blood lead levels continue to be unacceptably high, due to outdated standards enforced by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). I was truly interested in using this source as the foundation of my research essay, because I recently heard about disastrous environmental lead exposures in Flint, Michigan and was surprised to find that occupational lead exposures were also of concern. However, before I settled on this topic for my essay, I made sure to locate some peer-reviewed journal articles that reflected my developed argument that OSHA needs to lower their blood lead level exposure limit for occupational workers in order to protect them and their families from experiencing adverse health outcomes. I did this first to prevent myself from running out of things to write about to avoid getting stuck in the middle of my paper. I additionally completed a previous library modules assignment for my Introduction to Environmental Health class. The assignment included helpful tools, such as how to create APA citations and how to properly use research databases to find articles of interest.

To locate my sources, I mainly used the University of Maryland library website and typed in different key words and phrases into the search bar to find evidentiary support for my paper. For example, I searched “occupational lead and disease” and “OSHA lead standards,” and would then narrow down my results by selecting to only show me peer-reviewed articles and journal entries. I also used Google scholar to find sources and if I was unable to access them for free, I used their title to find them on the UMD library engine. I did not get a chance to use the database search tool available on the UMD library website, because I did not have a difficult time discovering supporting sources. Going forward, I might try to find a database that reflects my assignment topic, such as the public health ProQuest database, because it will potentially be a quicker and more relevant source finder.

I have completed other research assignments in my previous classes, so I was already comfortable with locating peer-reviewed primary sources for my essay. A majority of my sources were published in renowned medical and scientific journals, and included research processes and results of the authors’ studies on different occupational lead experiments. My other text support came from data collected by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention and other government agencies, which are also considered as primary sources.

Unfortunately, I got stuck towards the middle of my paper, because I had trouble identifying how lowering OSHA blood lead levels would be a sustainable practice. Making this connection in my paper was crucial for my overall grade, since it was emphasized throughout my essay rubric. Luckily, my TA Katrina helped me during my class discussion. She told me to refer back to our lecture notes that highlighted environmental justice issues within environmental health. Specifically, she gave me the idea that only laborious occupations are affected by occupational lead exposures and are therefore disproportionately at risk for experiencing negative health effects compared to other jobs. With her assistance, I was able to successfully address this concern in my paper and receive full credit for my analysis.

One thing I learned from this research process is to take advantage of the database finder option on the UMD library website, in order to find a database that connects more closely to my essay topic. I potentially could have found and used a public health database, which may have
helped me find sources regarding occupational health issues more quickly. Going forward, since this is my last semester at UMD, I have to write a senior thesis to fulfill my capstone requirement. With this in mind, I will definitely utilize this resource, considering I need to find at least 20 peer-reviewed sources to support my thesis argument. Lastly, I think this assignment overall made me more comfortable with writing a research paper, even though I have written many similar essays throughout my time at UMD. I feel that I now fully understand APA style writing requirements and will no longer have trouble with providing proper in text citations or finding primary sources.