Why we ask students to integrate source material

(and how we can help students succeed)

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A legitimate question:

Why do we ask students to write source-based documents?
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A social response:
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• Writers can help readers find pertinent sources that might help them follow up on ideas of interest.
• Writers should acknowledge or establish bias in their texts, and source material can clarify such bias.
• Knowledge construction is a collaborative endeavor that students can learn through engagement with source material.
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A rhetorical response: Writers often include “expert” testimony or other evidence to build their *ethos* and substantiate *logos* claims in texts.
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- Showing that students have read widely and critically demonstrates their engagement with academic writing as well as the topic at hand.

- Writers often use sources to establish a persona for readers – as an expert, friend, coach, “technical translator,” etc.
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A discourse community response:
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Another discourse community response:
Drawing on source material helps students acquire agency as they move from the periphery of the community into more central positions as knowledge contributors.
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A disciplinary identity response:
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A second disciplinary identity response might be called a genre response:
Within our discipline, we have certain ways of situating what we know in relation to what’s already known, and we have accepted “moves” for challenging what’s already known.
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• Working with source materials facilitates more analytic or critical engagement with others’ ideas leading to possible synthesis or creative problem-solving.

• Working with source materials helps students complicate their thinking to avoid false binaries.
A cognitive framework - Bloom’s *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956)

You’ll often see this taxonomy represented as a hierarchy of learning with knowledge at the bottom as the foundation for higher cognitive functions:
A cognitive framework re-envisioned:

A group of cognitive psychologists, curriculum theorists and instructional researchers, and testing and assessment specialists published in 2001 a revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy with the title *A Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. This title draws attention away from the somewhat static notion of “educational objectives” (in Bloom’s original title) and points to a more dynamic conception of classification.
Unfortunately, students often perceive our advice about how and why to use sources as filling in still more information at the lowest levels of this hierarchy. So, for instance, teachers often focus on the specifics of citation practices, in effect asking students to “know” or “remember” how we cite parenthetically and then construct a Works Cited list.

If these levels of cognitive work are not our primary focus for a source-based writing task, then we should be sure that our teaching doesn’t reinforce only those levels.
A second cognitive framework – knowledge telling vs. knowledge-transforming

Bereiter & Scardamalia (The psychology of written composition. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987) describe knowledge-telling as more of a transcription of available information, usually from memory. Knowledge-transforming reshapes information for purposeful communication with a target audience. To borrow from Galbraith & Rijlaarsdam, knowledge-telling writing from sources could be described as “a text which is encyclopedic in style: it covers relevant material (in the best cases very comprehensively) but lacks a distinctive point of view or evidence of reflection upon ideas.” Knowledge-transforming results instead in a “more reflective text, which shows evidence of design, and in which ideas are selected and presented in the service of a higher level goal.”

What might help students move from knowledge-telling to knowledge-transforming as they write from sources?

Work with a partner to brainstorm specific strategies, including the ways we frame source-based writing assignments in a syllabus, assignment design, and other elements that your discipline emphasizes about source-based writing.
How can we cue students about cognitive, social, and disciplinary emphases in our source-based writing tasks?

1. Be explicit about your main goals for the assignment.
For students the connections between writing tasks and learning aren’t always obvious. Prain and Hand note that “Although students had an awareness of what the task was, how the task helped them, and of their enjoyment in involvement with the task, they were unable to outline clearly the broader learning purpose(s) of the task.”

“Students tended to focus on a perceived teacher-oriented purpose for writing, such as computer use or assessment, rather than understand how the demands of the particular writing task required them to undertake a range of cognitive operations. Even though the teachers indicated the purpose of the task and provided some basic framework to assist students in planning, students did not move past surface-level understanding of the writing as a strategy to enable them to ‘think more clearly.’”

How can we cue students about cognitive, social, and disciplinary emphases in our source-based writing tasks?

1. Be explicit about your main goals for the assignment.

2. Design your assignment with Bloom’s taxonomy or some other cognitive framework in mind.
Use Bloom’s “action words” to describe the cognitive processes by which thinkers encounter and work with knowledge:

- **Remember** – Recognizing; Recalling
- **Understand** – Interpreting; Exemplifying; Classifying; Summarizing; Inferring; Comparing; Explaining
- **Apply** – Executing; Implementing
- **Analyze** – Differentiating; Organizing; Attributing
- **Evaluate** – Checking; Critiquing
- **Create** – Generating; Planning; Producing
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3. Spend class time dissecting a disciplinary sample and discussing textual elements that students should pay particular attention to (but not simply focusing on citation practices).
Think explicitly about the ways that your teaching and your assignment design can help students build disciplinary identity.

Ivanic (1998), for example, has argued that knowing how to reproduce written academic norms is not an issue of literacy as much as it is one of identity, where students struggle as writers because they are also struggling to learn the beliefs and practices of their disciplines. In contrast, experienced writers use their disciplinary knowledge pragmatically to “construct a credible representation of themselves and their work, aligning themselves with the socially shaped identities of their communities” (Hyland, 2002, p. 1091).


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2. Design your assignment with Bloom’s taxonomy or some other cognitive framework in mind.
3. Spend class time dissecting a disciplinary sample and discussing textual elements that students should pay particular attention to (but not simply focusing on citation practices).
4. Support research and writing processes along the way. These processes are not intuitive to beginning undergrads who may view the writing tasks as largely knowledge-telling activities. In other words, don’t just hand out the assignment with a due date several weeks in the future.
“One strategy is to make the tasks which students are required to undertake more authentic. The general aim is to construct tasks which embody the process which the product-based approach is trying to describe. The idea being that the goals and problems which emerge will be equivalent to those which actually occur within the process, but that these will not depend on a second-hand description (which might be incomplete or overly general). Instead, in authentic tasks, writers will experience for themselves the process of transforming their knowledge, not towards some abstract, externally described goals, but rather towards a set of emergent goals generated within a microcosm of the discourse community itself.”

How we can help students succeed with source-based writing – Specific writing strategies

- Situate the source material within what students already know. Start with informal writing that collects students’ prior knowledge.
- Use Write to Learns that ask students to synthesize what they learn from a source or set of sources.
- Consider group work to help students evaluate credibility of sources and then select those sources that the group will summarize and synthesize.
- Have students keep a paper or project log that documents and engages with the research process and what they are learning.
- Have students do metacognitive postscripts or reflections that probe their processes and thinking at various stages of the project.
Improving the design and sequence of assignments

- Design assignments that require students to explore a subject in depth and to report on their inquiry processes.
- Consider using a small number of selected readings that the class can work with together before students turn to additional source material.
- Start discussing possible topics early and set up a timeline.
- Have students first do a summary of a **single** source to determine summary, paraphrase and quoting ability. Anticipate and intervene where problems are likely.
- Develop schedules that allow students enough time and the right support to accomplish the task.
- Show students models of writing that accomplish what is sought in the paper assignment. In general, get students reading academic writing so that they internalize the practices and conventions involved with source use in the ways that your discipline values.
- Consider using a course theme that changes regularly. Have it connect to a local issue and expect students to refer to local sources.
Think about staging the assignment

Break the assignment into parts that are to be turned in at different stages of the process. Examples of parts include short Summary/Response papers for each source or a set of sources or an Annotated Bibliography. The Annotated Bibliography can be broken down into sets of sources as well. For example, students might be required to turn in 3-4 sources at the end of the first week of the assignment, 3-4 at the end of the second, etc. As Reade W. Doman *et al.* points out, the individual parts do not need to be graded, but they will help hold the student accountable and will also familiarize you with the student's thinking and writing about the subject (146). Portfolio grades, or, as Robert Harris suggests, assigning points for each component so that a student without them will not pass the portfolio, are also helpful.
Show students where their source work falls on Bloom’s taxonomy.

The next two slides, adapted from an article looking at new graduate students’ work on a review of literature, could help students understand how to move their work from a current understanding of using sources to a more sophisticated understanding.
Adapting Bloom’s taxonomy – Looking at organization and content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remembering</th>
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<th>Analyzing</th>
<th>Evaluating</th>
<th>Creating</th>
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<td>Organized by articles read, rather than topic. Simply give a listing of what others have found with no summative comments, no integration. Information contained is not necessarily based on main ideas of source articles. There is an overuse of quotations from others; unable to capture main ideas in own words.</td>
<td>Able to distinguish main ideas of the articles reviewed. Therefore, although the organization of the paper may be similar to a student at the &quot;knowledge&quot; domain, the content will be based on main ideas from source articles, not just recitation of all they have read.</td>
<td>The paper is still organized by source articles, rather than topics or themes. With each article reviewed, there is a direct and explicit link from the source article to the current paper (e.g., &quot;Therefore, the findings of Smith and Jones support the premise that differences in age between the counselor and client can affect the counseling relationship.&quot;)</td>
<td>Each article is directly and explicitly linked to the topic of the current paper by identification of the specific components of the source article that are relevant. The findings from the source articles are not linked to each other.</td>
<td>The paper is organized thematically, rather than by source articles. Main ideas are presented, and source material that supports and questions those ideas is discussed. At the end of each major theme, a discussion of the results from the source articles is included, but this discussion still does not include a systematic objective evaluation.</td>
<td>Paper is thematically organized. Source articles are analyzed and critiques based on strengths and limitations. When findings are in conflict, this conflict is acknowledged. Whenever possible, the quality of the source articles is discussed, particularly when research of differing merit produces contradictory results. Both sides of an argument are presented, with minimal researcher bias.</td>
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Adapting Bloom’s taxonomy – Advice for moving to the next level

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<tr>
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<td>As each article is read, before beginning to write, summarize main ideas from each article <em>in own words</em> on note cards.</td>
<td>At end of each summary, develop an explicit and direct link from the source article to the paper being written. For each summary, ask &quot;How does this relate to my topic?&quot; If it doesn't, or the relationship is strained, then exclude it from the paper.</td>
<td>Add to the summaries all the details that are necessary to make decisions about the merit of the source article. Develop a list of questions that can be asked of every source article to determine essential components. Assess internal and external validity and whether conclusions are based on findings.</td>
<td>Review all source materials thoroughly; develop summaries with detailed information. From these summaries, develop a comprehensive and detailed, thematically based outline <em>before</em> beginning to write the paper.</td>
<td>Determine beforehand what constitutes a strong versus weak source article. Use information gleaned from courses to determine methodological soundness of research and results of source articles.</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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