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Learning to Incorporate Source Material with a Full Menu of Options: Developing a Discrete Skill in Isolation

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Overview

Writing assignments often require students to perform a complex array of interrelated tasks all at once. For example, when composing a typical researched argument essay, students must keep their eyes on higher-order concerns like thesis, organization, and finding and evaluating evidence, while at the same time they must manage many smaller tasks related to voice, tone, diction, paragraph structure, documenting sources, formatting, punctuation, mechanics, and more. Added to this are issues of self-regulation, time management, and even computer hardware and software use as they work through their writing processes. All told, it's a lot of balls to keep in the air while juggling, so I'm not surprised when the balls they've dropped are the ones I hoped they'd juggle more successfully.

To bring my expectations more in line with students' abilities, I find it helpful, whenever possible, to help students develop discrete skills in isolation—to have them juggle just one or two balls at once in a low-stakes situation that allows them to critically reflect on their skill development before employing the skill in a higher-stakes assessment. One area where this is particularly helpful is incorporating source material into writing.

Some writers seem to learn to incorporate source material into their writing in an organic way—primarily through reading enough that they learn to mimic the patterns and techniques that they see

(Roozen). However, it is not uncommon these days for students in high school English and first-year college composition classes to have read too little professional and academic material to have adequately developed this ability. Even if they have, additional development is needed as they learn to enter new discourse communities related to their majors and careers (Lombardi).

Therefore, I use the following guide to help students learn to better incorporate source material into their writing. Students are presented with a menu of six common integration methods (summary, paraphrase, embedded quote, full quote, and block quote) as well as information about the use of attributive tags to signal the inclusion of source material and establish context and credibility. Students explore the advantages and disadvantages of each method in a set of low-stakes activities and discussions so that they can more conscientiously choose the best integration method in their own writing. The activities can easily be adapted for use at various levels and for writing in various discourse communities.

Time Commitment

Three class sessions for the complete activity as presented, but instructors can easily adapt portions of the activity to meet their students' needs and available time.

Materials

Students should be provided with the guidelines for both homework assignments (see Appendix A: Source Integration Analysis Assignment Instructions and Appendix B: Incorporating Sources Practice Assignment Instructions).

Activity Process

The following process is what I typically use in my first-year writing courses to help students develop their source integration skills. It

involves (1) an introductory lesson in which the menu of source integration options available to writers is presented; (2) a homework assignment focused on analyzing how a professional writer has employed that menu, followed by a class discussion; and (3) a homework assignment that asks students to write a paragraph incorporating material from three provided sources, followed by a class exploration of the results. Depending on your students' specific needs and the time you have available, portions of these activities could be condensed, omitted, or changed into in-class activities, all of which I have done in various iterations.

Introductory Lesson

- Lead students in a discussion wherein you present, define, and explore the advantages and disadvantages of the main options for source integration. Here are some key ideas you might convey:
 - **Summary:** A summary puts someone else's ideas into your words in a form that is shorter than the original version. A key benefit is the ability to overview a lot of material in a short space, but disadvantages include how much work it can require of the writer to produce and how easy it is to misrepresent the source if one isn't careful. Summaries are often used to introduce a source that will then be paraphrased or quoted at length.
 - **Paraphrase:** A paraphrase puts someone else's ideas into your words in a form that is roughly the same length as the original version. Benefits include being able to simplify technical or difficult language for your reader, to drop unneeded or distracting details, and to present a consistent tone and voice for your reader without major interruption. Disadvantages include how difficult it can be to paraphrase without

unintentionally plagiarizing and the potential loss of the original writer's voice and verve.

- **Embedded Quotation:** An embedded quotation includes key words or phrases from the author into a paraphrase of your own (e.g., Abraham Lincoln states at the beginning of his Gettysburg Address that, 87 years prior, “our fathers” had founded the United States as a nation “conceived in liberty.”). The advantage is that this method combines the paraphrase ability to modulate details and context with a quotation's ability to preserve an author's most powerful wording; the result is highly readable and is not easily skipped as the quoted material forms part of the grammatical whole. The disadvantage is the effort it takes to choose the best bits to quote and work them into a sentence of your own making; also, there is a risk of taking an author's words out of context and misrepresenting their meaning or intent.
- **Full Quotation:** A full quotation typically uses a grammatically complete attributive tag to introduce a grammatically complete quotation (e.g., Abraham Lincoln begins his Gettysburg Address, “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”). The advantages are that quoting an author at some length preserves their voice and the power of their phrasing and that doing so makes it more clear to the reader that you are not misconstruing their meaning or intent. The disadvantage is that quotations must be carefully chosen, trimmed, or integrated so as not to overburden the reader and to work within the grammar of one's own writing.

Additionally, readers may skip quotations, especially if they are over-long or overused, eroding trust in the writer.

- **Block Quotation:** A block quotation is a quotation that is so long that it needs to be set off as an independent paragraph (different documentation styles, such as MLA and APA, have different rules about this length and proper formatting). This is done as a typographic courtesy for the reader, who may get distracted waiting for the closing quotation mark on a long run-in quotation. The advantages and disadvantages of full quotations are even more applicable here.
- **Attributive Tags** indicate source material is being used, telling the reader whose words and/or ideas are being shared. At its simplest an attributive tag might just say “Abraham Lincoln said,” but they can also provide context, credentials, and connections to other sources, such as in “Abraham Lincoln, our nation’s fourteenth president, reminded his listeners about the core principles upon which the United States was founded when he said...” Tags can come before, during, or after the integrated material and even in a separate sentence. Tags are often paired with citations to bookend source material, showing readers where a summary or paraphrase begins and ends.
- It’s important to help students understand that no one option is “best” and that this is merely a menu of options they can choose from to fit the needs of a particular writing situation.

Analysis Homework and Discussion

- Students are then assigned to read a work of modern nonfiction writing and analyze how the author has used the menu options to incorporate source material effectively and ineffectively (see Appendix A for assignment instructions). While a piece of contemporary magazine writing—such as from *Slate* or *The Atlantic*—can provide a good, general example of source integration, it may be beneficial to choose a work that more directly represents a particular discipline if students need to learn to write in a disciplinary style (e.g., English majors might be assigned a scholarly journal article, engineering students an industry white paper, or marketing students a press release or a company newsroom post.).
- In the class meeting following completion of this assignment, lead the class in a discussion of their findings, opinions, and questions to deepen and complicate their understanding of the advantages, disadvantages, and optimal uses of the menu options.

Synthesis Homework and Discussion

- Students are then assigned homework to practice choosing and incorporating source material on their own (see Appendix B for sample assignment instructions). In the assignment, students are provided with a page of excerpts from three imaginary sources. They are instructed to compose a body paragraph as if for an argumentative essay and are given a topic sentence to start from. They must then choose what information from the sources to use, how best to incorporate each item, what order to present the information, and what additional context or commentary to add to their paragraph.
- In the class meeting following completion of this assignment,

put students into small groups and have them present their paragraphs to the group. Have them compare and contrast how they each solved the same writing problem differently and ask them to identify particularly effective instances of source integration and attributive tag use.

- Have groups share their findings with the class, using it to lead a discussion that revisits and deepens their understanding of the key concepts in practice.
- Time permitting, you could have students then rewrite their paragraphs using what they learned in comparing their work to others'. Alternatively, you could have groups draw from the best pieces of all members' work to create a new paragraph.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of the major options for source integration and explore the advantages and disadvantages guiding the use of summary, paraphrase, and quotation
- Analyze how established authors incorporate sources into their writing using a mix of methods as well as clear attributive tags to provide readers with context
- Practice incorporating sources into their own writing and critically evaluate their success

Learning Accommodations

- Students will benefit from knowing that the homework assignments or any graded participation are low-stakes assessments based on engagement with the concepts rather than on doing the work "correctly." Full credit should be

given, therefore, for active participation, and points should not be deducted for mistakes or the quality of source integrations produced.

Works Cited

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- Roosen, Kevin. "Journalism, Poetry, Stand-up Comedy, and Academic Literacy: Mapping the Interplay of Curricular and Extracurricular Literate Activities." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2008, pp. 5–34. doi: 10.37514/JBW-J.2008.27.1.02.

Appendix A: Source Integration Analysis Assignment

Instructions

For this assignment, you will pay close attention to how one professional writer incorporates source material into an argument. Please read “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” by Nicholas Carr. As you read, complete the following steps.

You can mark the text either by printing it out and highlighting/annotating it or pasting the text into a Word or Google Doc and annotating it electronically.

Step 1: Examine Quotations

Mark all the places where the author quotes someone. Consider these questions:

- Do quotations come at the beginning, middle, or ends of sentences?
- Are quotations ever presented as their own complete

sentence without any words from the writer?

- Are there any block quotations?
- What punctuation or formatting is used to mark different kinds of quotations?
- How does the author lead into the quotations in a smooth and understandable way?

Step 2: Examine Summaries and Paraphrases

Mark all the places that the author summarizes or paraphrases someone. Consider these questions:

- How do you know the author is drawing from a source here even though there's no quote?
- Is it possible to tell the difference between what is summarized/paraphrased and what are the author's own ideas? How does the author accomplish this?

Step 3: Examine Attributive Tags Mark all the attributive tags.

Consider these questions:

- Does the author always use an attributive tag when incorporating source material?
- What kind of info does the author give about each source?
- Where is this info placed in relation to the quote/summary/paraphrase?
- Does the author give the same information for each source? Why or why not?

Step 4: Reflect

Finally, write a paragraph reflecting on what you've learned by examining Carr's methods of incorporating course material.

**Appendix B: Incorporating Sources Practice Assignment
Instructions**

For this assignment you'll create a pretend paragraph for a pretend paper using some pretend evidence.

Step 1: Examine the Evidence

Read over the three excerpts found in the "Evidence" section below.

Step 2: Consider the Argument

Now imagine you are writing a paragraph for an argumentative research paper about open adoptions. The paragraph you'll be writing begins with this topic sentence:

Research generally agrees that open adoptions are beneficial for the adopted child.

Consider which parts of the provided evidence will be most useful to you in backing up the claim that open adoptions are beneficial for the adopted child.

(Just so you know, "open" adoptions are those in which the adopted child can have contact with their birth parents. Also, please note that these sources are entirely made up and are not meant to be realistic representations of the actual, real-world effects of open adoptions.)

Step 3: Write a Paragraph

Lastly, write the rest of the paragraph that comes after the opening

line given above, incorporating the fake evidence to support the claim.

You'll need to choose carefully what to include; whether to summarize, paraphrase, quote, or mix methods; and what order to put things in to make the strongest argument in your paragraph. Also consider how best to use attributive tags to give your reader necessary context and help establish the credibility of the sources.

Evidence

Sarah Conner, a social worker and mother of two from Albuquerque, is in the process of adopting a young boy named John and says his adoption will be an open one, meaning John will know and have contact with his birth parents. Ms. Conner is an enthusiastic supporter of open adoptions, having been adopted herself as a baby and raised knowing her own birth parents. She described her experience this way: "Knowing who my birth mother and father were even from a young age had an enormously positive impact on my life. There were no secrets, no sense that something was being withheld from me. My adoptive parents talked with me early on and together we built a relationship that both acknowledged and benefitted from the fact that I was adopted."

She went on to note how her relationship with her birth parents made her more empathetic than her peers: "Though I didn't understand fully at first the reasons why my parents had given me up for adoption, and though that made for hard days sometimes, as a teenager I started to see my mother in a new light. I saw peers making bad decisions, some of which led them to similar situations my mom had found herself in with me, and this helped me understand my mother and also my friends, to appreciate the difficulty we each have growing up. This led me to my current career as a social worker."

—Miles Daniels, "Adoption's Hidden Strength is in Its Openness"
Time, 24 March 2008

Overall, 3406 cases were analyzed—1657 were from open or semi-open adoptions and 1749 were from closed adoptions. The results of the analysis are summarized in tables 2, 3, and 4...

Children of open adoptions included in this meta-analysis exhibited overall less troubled behavior than those from closed adoptions. As table 3 shows, they were 34% less likely to have been arrested for misdemeanors or felonies, 23% less likely to have abused drugs or alcohol, 21% less likely to have exhibited antisocial behaviors, and 15% more likely to have graduated high school by the time they were 19. Additional analysis revealed that only 26% of open adoptees had had psychiatric counseling during their teens while 37% of closed adoptees had.

—Kyle Reeves, “Risk Behavior and Adoption: A Meta-Analysis”
Social Behavior Journal, volume 27, 2007

We administered a questionnaire to former adoptees asking them to rate their experiences as an adopted child. Participants were recruited through the listservs and mailing lists of several major adoption social groups operating across the United States (see Appendix A for more info). The response rate for the questionnaire was 37%, well within the norm for this kind of instrument....

Open adoptees overall rated their experience of being raised in an adoptive home more highly than closed adoptees did. Analysis of the written responses suggests that, at least for a sizable portion of the participants, knowing their birth parents led to greater stability and satisfaction with their lives, although several noted having, in the words of one respondent, “a difficult year or two along the way.” The average response for open adoptees on a five-point scale ranging from “1 – Very unsatisfied” to “5 – Very Satisfied” was 3.8....

When asked what made their experience positive, 57% of open adoptees chose “my relationship with my birth parent(s)” among other things, making it the most cited reason among respondents....

It should also be noted, however, that a significant number of open adoptees wrote extended, often vehement responses about their negative experiences with open adoption, suggesting the need for further studies analyzing why some children respond well and others respond poorly to the system. Also, high ratings and detailed responses were not unknown among the closed adoptee respondents.

—Sue Graves, “Satisfaction with Open and Closed Adoption”
Sociology, Volume 24, 2011