

ULO1: Information Literacy

Assessment Report

Summer Assessment: June 12-13, 2023

Submitted by Sarah Dahlen, Information Literacy Assessment Coordinator, Oct. 20, 2023

Assessment question: From their perspective, how are students using information from sources in their papers and what motivates their choices?

Faculty scholars

Sarah Dahlen, Library

Aimee Escalante, Liberal Studies

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Background

In 2022, our assessment project investigated how students use information from sources in their assignments by evaluating papers from GVAR classes in each college. Our most recent assessment builds on that information by asking students for their perspectives on how they use information from sources and why.

Process

During the Spring 2023 semester, faculty scholars from our group (Sarah Dahlen, Nelson Graff, and Kelsey Nordstrom-Sanchez) facilitated sessions that were both focus groups and instructional workshops with GVAR classes from the following departments (one from each college):

- Business (2 sections)
- Communication Design (1 section)
- Kinesiology (1 section)
- Liberal Studies (2 sections)
- Social and Behavioral Sciences (1 section)

Sessions ranged in length from 1 hour 20 minutes to 1 hour 50 minutes, and were conducted primarily in person, with the exception of two sessions that occurred during winter flooding and were conducted concurrently in person and online. To encourage participation from all 100 student attendees, we asked them to respond to prompts by individually writing on sticky notes, posting those notes to chart paper for each prompt, and then identifying patterns in the responses to provoke discussion and reflection (online students followed the same process using jamboards). Each set of prompts was followed by a presentation of best practices by the facilitators. We received a “not Human Subjects Research” designation from CSUMB’s IRB.

The general outline of the session was as follows:

- Obtain participant consent
- Prompt set 1:
 - When you have an assignment for a class, and you see that you're required to cite information from outside sources (such as library research), what's the first thought that goes through your mind?
 - What's the most challenging part of completing an assignment that requires you to use outside sources?
 - What's the most rewarding part of completing an assignment that requires you to use outside sources?
- Discuss responses
- Prompt set 2:
 - Why do you think your instructors ask you to bring information from sources into your papers?
 - When you're asked to cite sources for an assignment, what purposes will that information serve?
 - What do you do while you're researching to ensure that you keep track of which ideas are yours and which come from your sources?
 - Which parts of a quote sandwich are you least likely to do?
- Facilitators present:
 - Quote sandwich as best practice
 - Bizup's (2008) BEAM framework for what writers can do with information from sources in their papers
 - Zotero as a tool for managing information from sources
 - Definitions/examples of direct quote, paraphrase, summary
- Prompt set 3:
 - When you use a direct quote in your paper, why do you choose that over paraphrasing or summarizing?
 - When you paraphrase in your paper, why do you choose that over summarizing or using a direct quote?
 - When you summarize in your paper, why do you choose that over paraphrasing or using a direct quote?
- Facilitators present:
 - When it is appropriate to use a direct quote
 - The difference between paraphrasing and patchwriting
 - Summary as a best practice
- Prompt set 4:
 - What do you wish instructors would include in their assignment prompts/instructions?
 - What is one thing you learned today that you will likely use in the future?
 - Any other thoughts you'd like to share?

Student responses were transcribed by TLA student assistant Erika Perez. Faculty scholars analyzed a sample of responses in Spring 2023 to create a codebook for qualitative analysis.

The analysis was conducted over two days in June, with responses to each question coded by two faculty scholars. Due to time constraints, faculty scholars were able to discuss coding discrepancies for only some of the responses. Cohen's kappa coefficients were calculated by NVivo to measure the coding agreement between the two faculty scholars scoring each question's responses. The agreement was in the "very good" range (0.75-1.00), for each question except one, for which the coordinator served as a third coder to resolve discrepancies.

Following the summer assessment, the assessment coordinator reviewed and clarified the coding, making modifications to the coding hierarchy and ensuring consistent application of codes. For each question, a table was created to define the relevant codes, indicate the frequency of their occurrence, and highlight an illustrative quote.

Results:

Abbreviated tables are presented here that include only the most frequently occurring themes for select questions.

1: When you have an assignment for a class, and you see that you're required to cite information from outside sources (such as library research), what's the first thought that goes through your mind? (n=100)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Logistics	n=63 63%	Student's first thought relates to how they are going to complete the assignment. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to find sources • Citation formatting • Assignment criteria 	"The first thing I do is try to think of the best keywords to search to try to find an appropriate source."
Difficult or time consuming	n=50 50%	The student anticipates the task to be challenging or take a lot of time/effort.	"My first thought when learning that I'll need outside sources is that it's going to take a lot of time to find a good one."
Source evaluation	n=31 31%	Student's first thought relates to needing to evaluate sources, which can include finding sources that meet certain criteria. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Relevance 	"Which sources should I use?" "I wonder if I will be able to find articles/sources that are relevant to my topic (I begin to worry)."

Negative emotion	n=28 28%	Negativity is expressed by student in describing their first thought.	“The first thought that comes to mind is I hate citing sources and having to find my own reliable resources.” “I tend to feel anxious at first.”
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2: What’s the most challenging part of completing an assignment that requires you to use outside sources? (n=94)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Finding sources	n=60 64%	Concerns about the student’s ability to find sources.	“Getting to the amount of sources I need (ex. need 15, but only have 13).” “Having to actually look for articles or outside resources pertaining to my subject.”
Source evaluation	n=57 61%	Challenges related to evaluating the quality of sources. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance • Credibility • Other criteria 	“Finding the right source for what you want to say.” “Reading through a ton of sources to find good ones.”
Citation concerns	n=26 28%	Any concern regarding citing sources in the assignment.	“Making sure I’m using the correct format!”

3: What’s the most rewarding part of completing an assignment that requires you to use outside sources? (n=89)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Finding sources	n=32 36%	Finding sources for the assignment. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant sources • Credible sources • Enough sources 	“Managing to find the right sources.” “Knowing that you have reliable information.”
Academic	n=29	Academic or school-related	“The most rewarding part

concerns	33%	concerns. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment completion • Good grade 	would be feeling accomplished on managing to complete it and get a good grade.”
Learning	n=26 29%	Learning new things. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content knowledge • Process knowledge 	“To see some cool research stuff that I am interested in.”

4: Why do you think your instructors ask you to bring information from sources into your papers? (n=100)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Improve student learning	n=82 82%	To have students engage in activities that will improve their learning. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside information • Preparedness (for academic work) 	“To teach us how to research and learn about the topic.” “To make sure research/related info is being brought into your thoughts.”
Improve paper	n=42 42%	To improve aspects of the students’ papers. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Other points of view 	“To make your paper stronger.” “To make connections/the result or findings/people have written about it already/take advantage of info out there.”

5: When you’re asked to cite sources for an assignment, what purposes will that information serve? (n=95)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Support claim	n=40 42%	To support claims made by the student.	“It will serve as evidence to support your thesis in an essay.”
Attributes of information	n=29 31%	To use information with particular attributes.	“Their purpose is to give relevant information on our

		Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Accuracy 	topic.”
Attribution	n=32 34%	To attribute information to sources. Responses may be a misunderstanding of the question to be about the purpose of citations rather than the purpose of information. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow readers to access or evaluate information • Avoid plagiarism 	“Give credit to the author. Makes the paper reliable. Allows the reader to go back and read/analyze the sources used.”
Present new ideas	n=22 23%	To present new ideas or information in the paper. (This is in contrast to supporting a claim that the student has already presented.) Includes building on the ideas of others.	“Their purpose is to give relevant information on our topic.”

6: What do you do while you're researching to ensure that you keep track of which ideas are yours and which come from your sources? (n=100)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Categorize ideas as belonging to self or others	n=75 75%	Any system/practice for categorizing ideas as “mine” or coming from “others.” Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate documents • In-text citations • Labeling • Direct quotes • Other visual strategy • References • Link to source 	“I keep them separated by stating which is mine and which are outside sources.” “Only directly cite the sources, don't paraphrase the source.” “Creating a source page with notes on each source to distinguish which ideas are mine versus from others.”
Notes (general)	n=26 26%	Uses note-taking to keep track of the origin of ideas.	“I take notes from the sources and refer back to them.”

7: Which parts of a quote sandwich are you least likely to do? (n=92)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Unlikely to explain	n=45 49%	Student is least likely to explain the quote.	"I am least likely to explain it (sometimes, not always, I don't understand the quote myself)."
Unlikely to introduce	n=32 36%	Student is least likely to introduce the quote.	"Put the quote but not introduce it. I've never seen a quote sandwich before."

8: When you use a direct quote in your paper, why do you choose that over paraphrasing or summarizing? (n=100)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Author says it best	n=69 69%	The original author best articulates their ideas. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate • Impactful • To the point • Definition • Primary source 	"Because the direct quote is right on the money and I couldn't paraphrase it in a way to make it any better or to get my point across better."
Efficiency	n=32 32%	Using a direct quote is more efficient. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier • Other efficiencies 	"When what I want to convey is clear in the source I can just copy/paste (easier)." "I think it's because it's something we're taught early." "Because it gets the word count up."

9: When you paraphrase in your paper, why do you choose that over summarizing or using a direct quote? (n=94)

Theme	Count & percentage	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
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	Percentage of responses		
Efficiency	n=41 44%	Paraphrasing is more efficient. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify • Easier • Meet requirements 	“It allows me to get the information out quickly.” “It's the simplest thing to do.”
Alternative to quoting	n=35 37%	Student views paraphrasing as a good alternative to using direct quotes, sometimes including recognition of a preference to put ideas in one's own words.	“Paraphrasing allows the information to be in your own words.” “I've used too many quotes already (it's ideal to paraphrase).”
Style or impact	n=35 37%	To improve the flow of the paper, the impact of the statement, or the clarity of the idea.	“My wording of the information will flow better in my paper.”
Focus	n=21 22%	To focus the reader on specific points or to add the student's ideas to those of the author.	“I choose to paraphrase when I want to give my perception of the information.” “You hit the key point of what is being said instead of writing a long and lengthy quote.”

10: When you summarize in your paper, why do you choose that over paraphrasing or using a direct quote? (n=93)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Efficiency	n=60 65%	Summarizing is more efficient. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify • Easier • Meet requirements 	“When I want to get the ‘big picture’ of the paragraph or topic.” “When it's quicker, so I don't have to read the article.”
Writing goal	n=40 43%	To achieve a specific purpose within their writing.	“When summarizing we connect points and

		Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support claims • Add student thoughts • Emphasis • Background information • Conclusion 	understand what we read.” “Summarizing helps go over the most important parts.”
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11: What do you wish instructors would include in their assignment prompts/instructions? (n=71)

Theme	Count & percentage of responses	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
Greater detail	n=32 45%	General expression of desire for greater detail in assignment prompts. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step-by-step explanations • Useful resources • Grading rubrics 	“Clear instructions on what they want from the paper.” “Requirements paragraph by paragraph...something to help understand what is needed in each paragraph.” “Places to get help.”
Provide examples	n=30 42%	Desire for instructors to provide examples of completed assignments or sections of completed assignments. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of good work • Examples of bad work 	“EXAMPLES. It's hard for me to understand prompts, but if I see it it's easier.” “Sample of student work to understand what their expectations are.”
Sources	n=22 31%	Desire to have more information about sources to be used for the assignment. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding sources • Source criteria • Using sources 	“How to find the right sources and to use them in papers.” “Teach how to paraphrase better or correctly.”

12: What is one thing you learned today that you will likely use in the future? (n=78)

Theme	Count &	Theme description	Illustrative quote(s)
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	percentage of responses		
Incorporating sources	n=61 78%	How to incorporate information from sources into their assignments. Sub-themes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to quote, paraphrase, or summarize • Quote sandwich • How to paraphrase • Paraphrasing versus summarizing 	“Learned I might want to apply more than direct quotes.” “I did not know patch writing was plagiarism so I'll be sure to avoid that in the future.”
Resources	n=18 23%	Awareness of resources related to writing, citation, or using information from sources, particularly Zotero.	“How useful Zotero can be.”

Discussion:

There is some negativity associated with assignments that require information from outside sources, with 50% of participants anticipating the task to be difficult or time consuming and 28% describing a negative emotional reaction. Some of this seems to stem from uncertainty that they will be able to perform well on the assignment. Participants identified the most challenging aspects as finding sources (60%), evaluating sources (57%), and citing sources (26%). They wished that instructors would provide greater detail in their instruction prompts (45%), along with examples (42%) and additional information related to finding, evaluating, and using sources (31%).

Despite the negative sentiment, participants recognized the pedagogical importance of such assignments, noting that faculty assign them to increase student learning (82%) and to improve the quality of student papers (42%). Participants also acknowledged the rewarding aspects of assignments using outside sources, such as successfully finding sources (36%), completing or getting a good grade on the assignment (33%), and learning new things (29%). Participants were able to identify some purposes that information could serve in their papers, such as supporting claims (42%) and presenting new ideas (23%).

Students in GWAR classes are not new to writing papers with information from outside sources, having done this in high school and in lower division college courses, and they have practices and habits they have developed, such as the diverse array of practices for keeping track of information from sources (see question 6). However, there was evidence of unfamiliarity with best practices such as the quote sandwich, with 49% of students saying they were unlikely to explain the quote and 36% saying they were unlikely to introduce it. This aligns with our finding

in the [2022 information literacy assessment](#) that quote sandwiches were only used for ⅓ of direct quotes.

Participants had a variety of explanations for when they use a direct quote versus a paraphrase versus a summary, but one theme that arose in each of these categories was efficiency. Students clearly value efficiency and often choose the method of source incorporation (direct quote, paraphrase, summary) that they find the most efficient for the task. Some participants identified additional reasons to choose one method over another, such as style, impact, focus, or credibility. Our 2022 analysis of student papers found an overreliance on direct quotes, which were generally used when a paraphrase or summary would have been more appropriate. GWAR students have more to learn about source incorporation, and 78% of participants mentioned learning something new about this in the workshop, including when to quote, paraphrase, or summarize, how to paraphrase (and not patchwrite), and how to use a quote sandwich. Faculty teaching GWAR or other upper division courses should not assume that students have these skills and knowledge, or that they know disciplinary conventions for incorporating information from sources into their writing.

As a possible antidote to the emphasis on efficiency, faculty should ask ourselves the extent to which we help students see our assignments as a path to lifelong learning, and not merely as busywork that must be completed as a part of “doing school.” This is not an easy task, but we might start by determining whether our assignments provide meaningful practice and whether we are effectively communicating that meaning to students. Creating real-world contexts and audiences for assignments may be useful in this regard, as may the tenets of [transparent assignment design](#).

Conclusion/Next Steps:

Conducting student focus groups provided useful insights into student perspectives on completing assignments using outside sources. Hopefully these insights can help faculty mitigate negative feelings about the process by supporting students as they learn disciplinary writing conventions. One way to accomplish this is for faculty to make clear their expectations for incorporating information from sources into written work.

The workshop facilitators received a great deal of positive feedback from the student participants and their instructors. This speaks to the need for information literacy instruction that goes beyond finding and evaluating sources of information. While these are important steps, students also need to be able to effectively use information from sources in their assignments. Workshops such as the ones we conducted appear to be an effective way to introduce that information.

What faculty can do in their classes:

- Consider whether the level of detail in your assignment prompts and/or instruction is sufficient to communicate your expectations to students. Specifically:
 - When it is appropriate to use a direct quote, to paraphrase, and to summarize
 - How to paraphrase without patchwriting

- How to appropriately introduce a quote and to contextualize it. Is the author the subject of the sentence, or only mentioned in the in-text citation?
- Provide scaffolding for finding sources to mitigate the anxiety around this task. Having students submit some preliminary sources for feedback may allow them to incorporate your suggestions and build on some initial success.
- Encourage students to visit the library's Research Help Desk for assistance finding sources, evaluating them, and citing them.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to provide examples of student work in a way that could be a model (not a template) for other students.
- Show students what appropriate introduction and explanation of information from sources looks like in your field.
- Invite a [librarian](#) to conduct an information literacy session for your class.