

Developing Skills for Synthesizing and Integrating Sources

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How can you develop strong skills for synthesizing and integrating sources of information?

To strengthen your skills at synthesizing and integrating sources of information, use four strategies.

Strategy 1: Evaluate the reliability of each source.

Strategy 2: Evaluate multiple sources of information to determine if they contain corroborating or challenging information.

Strategy 3: Evaluate multiple sources of information to understand how they reflect the author's point of view.

Strategy 4: When synthesizing multiple sources of information into your writing, use a standard format for citation.

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Strategy 1: Evaluate the reliability of each source.

- Check a Web site's *About* page to learn about the group behind the site. Read the mission statement to identify the group's viewpoint.
- Check the credibility of the writer. Find out if he or she has expertise in the area you are researching.
- Check the date of the article. Always use current information.
- The three letters at the end of a Web site's domain name can suggest the site's reliability. The reliability of common domain names are described in the chart on the following slide.

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Domain	Organization	Reliability
.com	for-profit company	may be unreliable because they usually focus on selling a product or service
.edu	educational body	often reliable, although pages of individuals reflect their personal perspectives
.gov	government	generally reliable
.org	nonprofits and other groups	reliability varies greatly

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Directions: Which Web site would have the most reliable information about the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II?

- an entry found on wikipedia.org

Wikipedia is widely used, particularly for noncontroversial information. However, since it allows anyone to contribute and it does not list authors, the reliability of any one article is uncertain.

- a personal blog about why America dropped atomic bombs on Japan

Bloggers often combine facts and opinions to advocate a position, so they are usually less reliable.

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Directions: Which Web site would have the most reliable information about the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II?

- the White House Decision Center Web page, which contains information President Truman and his advisors used when deciding whether to use atomic weapons against Japan (trumanlibrary.org)

The .org on the domain name indicates that the Web site is maintained by a nonprofit. Since the Web site is for the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, it will contain many reliable historical sources, but will most likely present President Truman in a positive light.

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Directions: Investigate five Web sites that present information about an important world, national, or local decision such as the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the building of the Alaskan pipeline, or the invasion of Iraq after 911. Include a mix of sites, including ones from educational institutions and the government.

Categorize each one as

- highly reliable
- fairly reliable
- not reliable

Write a short explanation of your evaluation.

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Strategy 2: Evaluate multiple sources of information to determine if they contain corroborating or challenging information.

A fact, opinion, reasoned judgment, or other piece of information may make a claim seem either more or less reliable.

- If information supports a claim, it is corroborating.
- If information causes doubt about a claim, it is challenging.

The next screens show examples.

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Claim: The United States spared the lives of many people by dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To what extent do the following statements corroborate or challenge the claim above?

A. An invasion of Japan would have caused casualties on both sides that could easily have exceeded the toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This statement strongly corroborates the claim.

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Claim: The United States spared the lives of many people by dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To what extent do the following statements corroborate or challenge the claim above?

B. At least 200,000 men, women, and children were killed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This statement challenges the claim. The bombings saved the lives of American soldiers, but at the cost of thousands of lives of Japanese civilians.

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Strategy 3: Evaluate multiple sources of information to understand how they reflect the author's point of view.

When researching information, it is important to understand the point of view of the writer. Read texts carefully and then identify the author's opinion. Evaluate the reasons the writer gives to support his or her point of view. It is also helpful to evaluate the writer's background or any unique information he or she has that influences his or her point of view.

Directions: The following screens contain different points of view about the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Explain the different point of views. Discuss why the writers have different perspectives on the bombing.

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A. From the memoirs of Admiral William D. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff:

[T]he use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender. . . .

[I]n being the first to use it, we . . . adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children.

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B. In his “third person” autobiography (co-authored with Walter Muir Whitehill) the commander in chief of the U.S. fleet and chief of naval operations, Ernest J. King, stated:

The President in giving his approval for these [atomic] attacks appeared to believe that many thousands of American troops would be killed in invading Japan, and in this he was entirely correct; but King felt, as he had pointed out many times, that the dilemma was an unnecessary one, for had we been willing to wait, the effective naval blockade would, in the course of time, have starved the Japanese into submission through lack of oil, rice, medicines, and other essential materials.

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C. Richard B. Frank, a historian of World War II, writes an article explaining why Truman dropped the atomic bomb:

The Japanese did not see their situation as catastrophically hopeless. They were not seeking to surrender, but pursuing a negotiated end to the war that preserved the old order in Japan, not just a figurehead emperor. Finally, thanks to radio intelligence [intercepted in 1945, but not made public until many years after the war], American leaders, far from knowing that peace was at hand, understood . . . That “until the Japanese leaders realize that an invasion cannot be repelled, there is little likelihood that they will accept any peace terms satisfactory to the Allies.” This cannot be improved upon as a succinct and accurate summary of the military and diplomatic realities of the summer of 1945.

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Directions: Explain the different points of view. Discuss why the writers have different perspectives on the bombing.

Possible Responses: The writer of statement A was violently opposed to bombing Japan, mainly for moral reasons.

The writer of statement B believes that the attacks were unnecessary because the naval blockade of Japan would have ended the war if the United States had been patient. His viewpoint may be influenced by the fact that he was head of the Navy.

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Directions: Explain the different points of view. Discuss why the writers have different perspectives on the bombing.

Possible Responses: The writer of statement C believes that Japan was not ready to surrender based upon intelligence reports available to President Truman, but not made public until many years after the war. His point of view is contrary to the writers of statements A and B. Statement C could be used to support the decision to drop the bomb. It gives evidence that Truman's decision was based upon information to which writers A and B may not have had access.

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When you find sources with information that does not agree, try the following:

- Evaluate the sources. Is one more reliable than the other? Use the information from the most reliable source.
- Find more sources and evaluate which information is more commonly cited.
- Consider the date of your source. If your subject is historical, records from people who were alive during the time are generally more accurate. If your subject relates to modern times, use the most recent, up-to-date information available.

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Strategy 3: When synthesizing and integrating multiple sources of information into your writing, use a standard format for citation.

When you use various sources of information, you should

- reproduce the information accurately
- acknowledge the source appropriately

The following screens provide examples of how to integrate three commonly used types of information.

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Whether you get information from printed books, online sources, or personal interviews, you want to use it accurately and acknowledge the source appropriately. The following slides provide examples of how to integrate three commonly used types of information into your writing:

- short direct quotations
- long direct quotations
- paraphrases of content you read

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The following excerpt is from *Why Choose This Book?: How We Make Decisions* by Read Montague.

The screens following the excerpt will demonstrate how to integrate the information into an essay.

Two questions face every creature on our planet every moment of every day. “What is the value of my available choices?” And beyond that, “How much does each choice cost?” For a mobile creature, choosing is not optional. All outcomes, including doing nothing, are choices. At its core, moment-to-moment living is a problem of investment and returns, and we all want to choose so as to get the most return for the least investment.

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Writers generally include a list of works cited at the end of a paper. The entry for *Why Choose This Book?* would look like this:

Montague, Read. *Why Choose This Book?: How We Make Decisions*. New York: Dutton, 2006. Print.

Parenthetical Citations: Identify the source in parentheses by listing the author's last name (or the organization's name) and the page number (if available). If you mention the author in the text, list only the page number.

All outcomes, including doing nothing, are choices (Montague 2).

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Short Direct Quotations: These are word-for-word quotations that are four lines or shorter. To tell your reader exactly where the direct quotation begins and ends, use quotation marks before and after the passage.

At its core, moment-to-moment living is a problem of investment and returns, and we all want to choose so as to get the most return for the least investment (Montague 2).

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Long Direct Quotations: If a direct quotation is four lines or longer, set it off as a block quotation. It should be indented one inch from the left margin, double-spaced, and include a reference to the source. Since the text is set off visually, you do not need to use quotation marks around it. Do include a parenthetical source.

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Example of Citation of a Long Direct Quotation

Making choices is simply a part of being alive.

Two questions face every creature on our planet every moment of every day. “What is the value of my available choices?” And beyond that, “How much does each choice cost?” For a mobile creature, choosing is not optional. All outcomes, including doing nothing, are choices. (Montague 2)

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Paraphrases: These are passages written in your own words that express information that you learned from another source. Do not use quotation marks with these but do include a parenthetical citation.

Humans live by making choices. Even doing nothing is a choice (Montague 2).