

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 battle of Gettysburg?

- an entry on Gettysburg 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 Web page on Gettysburg's history and culture maintained by the National Park Service's Web site (www.nps.gov)

As a government Web site, this is factual and reliable.

- a blog about the battle of Gettysburg on someone's personal Web site

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

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Directions: Investigate five Web sites that present information about the modern symbolism of the Confederate flag. Include a mix of sites, including ones from educational institutions, and advocacy organizations. 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 the claim, it is challenging.

The next screen shows examples.

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Claim: The South fought the Civil War to maintain the institution of slavery.

Do the following statements corroborate or challenge the claim?

A. Confederates fought for independence, to defend states' rights, and for their very survival as a nation.

This fact challenges the claim.

B. Vice-president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens stated “Our new government is founded . . . upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.”

This fact corroborates the claim.

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Directions: Evaluate whether claim A is challenged by or corroborated by statement B.

A. The Civil War saw the greatest loss of American lives of any of the wars our country has fought.

B. Over 625,000 men died in the Civil War. In fact, recent scholars suggest the number could be as many as 750,000. In World War I and World War II combined, 521,915 American soldiers died.

The statistics used in statement B agree with the statement made in A, so B corroborates A.

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

The author's purpose will influence which facts he or she emphasizes or downplays. Advertisers often do this to highlight the strengths of their product.

Directions: The following slide contains different points of view toward the draft instituted by the North in 1863 and the riots that followed. Read the first statement for context. Then decide how each writer's point of view influences the facts he emphasizes.

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Context: Under the [Northern] draft, all white men age 20 to 45 were in the draft pool. But there was a catch. Any man who paid \$300 cash to the government was excused.

A. President Lincoln: “I can not consent to suspend the draft in New York . . . Time is too important. We are contending with an enemy who drives every able-bodied man he can reach into its ranks.”

B. From a draft rioter’s letter to the editor: “That 300-dollar law has made us nobodies, vagabonds and cast-outs of society, for whom nobody cares when we must go to war and be shot down. . . . We love our wives and children more than the rich, because we’ve not got much besides them; and we will not go and leave them at home for to starve.”

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In statement A, Lincoln sees the importance of winning the war. He believes that a draft is needed to keep up the strength of the Northern army.

However, the letter writer in statement B sees the unfairness of the draft, since rich men have the means to pay to avoid it. From his point of view, the draft is unfair. His claim that the poor love their families more than the rich, however, is unfounded.

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Strategy 4: 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 slides 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 *The Civil War*, by Joe H. Kirchberger, page 11. Kirchberger is analyzing the issues that led to the Civil War.

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

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The policy of Congress had been to sell the land of the Western territories to settlers in small lots—or in large lots to speculators—first for \$2.00, then for \$1.25 per acre. This provided a substantial revenue for the federal treasury. Modest as this price seems to us now, many poor farmers or city workers who wanted to settle in the West found raising such sums difficult. Voices asking for a sharp reduction of the price and finally in favor of giving land away free in lots of 160 acres grew louder. Planters of the South opposed this movement, fearing that it would establish a supremacy of the slave-free states, particularly as more land was available in the Northwest than the Southwest.

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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).

Example: If your source was page 11 of *The Civil War* by Joe H. Kirchberger, your entry in your works cited list would look like this:

Kirchberger, Joe H. *The Civil War*. New York: Facts on File, 1991. Print.

Your on-page parenthetical citation would look like this:

(Kirchberger 11) or (11) if the author's name is mentioned in the text

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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.

Example of Citation of a Short Direct Quotation

Southern farmers opposed the government practice of giving away free land in the Western territories, believing “it would establish a supremacy of the slave-free states” (Kirchberger 11).

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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

Another issue that caused animosity in the South was the movement to give away plots of land in the West for free.

The policy of Congress had been to sell the land of the Western territories to settlers in small lots—or in large lots to speculators—first for \$2.00, then for \$1.25 per acre. This provided a substantial revenue for the federal treasury (Kirchberger 11).

However, if land was given away, the South feared that new states would be formed, resulting in more free states than slave states.

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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.

Example of Citation of a Paraphrase

Kirchberger says that the South was opposed to giving away plots of land in the West. Southerners feared that this would result in the establishment of more slave-free states than slave states (11).

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Statistics: Integrate statistics just as you do text. For example, the chart below shows the number of soldiers killed in American wars.

War	Number of soldiers killed
Civil War	620,000
World War 1	116,516
World War 2	405,399
Vietnam War	58,209

Source: Congressional Research Service

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Here is an example of how the information in this source would be integrated into a sentence.

Approximately 620,000 lives were lost during the Civil War. That's more than the number of soldiers killed in World War 1, World War 2, and Vietnam combined (Congressional Research Service).

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Directions: Use the statistics in the following chart to write a statement comparing the number of troops available and the tide of the war.

Troops Available for Duty (January 1)		
	Union	Confederacy
1862	527,204	209,852
1863	698,808	253,208
1864	611,250	233,586
1865	620,924	154,910

Source: digitalhistory.uh.edu

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The Union troops outnumbered Southern troops 527,000 to 209,000 in 1862. By 1865, the tide of the war had turned in favor of the North; the South had only 154,000 troops while the North had 620,000 (digitalhistory.uh.edu).