

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 screen.

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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 mystery writer Sara Paretsky?

- an entry on Paretsky 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 college professor's Web page about the works of Paretsky

Scholarly sites are usually reliable for facts. They may also include reasoned judgments that other scholars disagree with.

- a blog about Paretsky's latest book

Unless you can identify the blogger, postings on blogs are not reliable.

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Directions: Investigate five Web sites that present information about one of the topics addressed in the book. Try to include a mix of sites, including ones by individuals and by 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, an opinion, a reasoned judgment, or another 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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Directions: Explain whether each statement corroborates or challenges this claim: Arthur Conan Doyle is the greatest mystery writer of all time.

Statement A: Doyle's character, Sherlock Holmes, continues to inspire movies, video games, and other forms of art today.

This statement corroborates the claim by pointing out the long-term success of Doyle.

Statement B: Doyle, unlike Holmes, did not always note details. For example, one character's wound moves from his shoulder in one book to his leg in another book.

This statement challenges the claim by pointing out that Doyle was not as careful as some other writers.

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

A point of view can be a basic way of looking at the world that shapes how one interprets observations. The following slides present two views of the difference between literary fiction and genre fiction.

- Literary fiction is often shelved in a bookstore under the heading of Literature and includes works by critically acclaimed writers.
- Genre fiction is usually shelved under heads such as Mystery, Science Fiction, and Women's Fiction, and the books are often very popular.

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Selection A

Even good genre [fiction] . . . is by definition a constrained form of writing. There are conventions and these limit the material. That's the way writing works and lots of people who don't write novels don't seem to get this . . . If you are following conventions, then a significant percentage of the thinking and imagining has been taken out of the exercise. Lots of decisions are already made.

Edward Docx, “Are Stieg Larsson and Dan Brown a Match for Literary Fiction?” *The Observer*

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Selection B

Here's the thing about working within a "formula" for fiction: in order to create good genre fiction, you have to be original despite the "constraints" imposed upon you by the conventions of the genre. But even those constraints are pretty basic. In mysteries, the only true constraints are that you need a mystery to solve, and your protagonist needs to solve it. How you go about that is entirely up to you.

Cameron Chapman, "Genre vs. Literary Fiction: A Rebuttal," cameronchapman.com

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The first selection is by Edward Docx, a writer of literary fiction. On his website, he notes that his works have been considered for several prestigious literary awards. He points out that his writing has been compared to that of Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Joseph Conrad, and other famous and well-respected writers.

The second selection is by Cameron Chapman. On her Web site, she notes that she writes “genre fiction . . . mostly speculative fiction and women’s fiction.”

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Directions: Discuss how each writer's point of view about genre fiction reflects the type of writing each does.

Docx, who writes literary fiction, attacks genre fiction as easier to write. Chapman, who writes genre fiction, argues that it is as hard to write as literary fiction.

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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 screens provide examples of how to integrate 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 excerpt below is from an online magazine article by Michael Lipkin in *New York Journal of Books* on March 23, 2010. It is a review of *Known to Evil*, by Walter Mosley. The screens following the excerpt will demonstrate how to integrate the information into an essay.

There is excellence in *Known to Evil*—the usual Mosley excellence; but with perhaps a less-than-excellent conclusion. Read *Known to Evil* and see what you think.

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Works Cited: If your writing includes a list of works cited, it would include the following information. The date at the end of the entry indicates when the article was accessed.

Lipkin, Michael. "Known to Evil." Rev. of *Known to Evil*. Walter Mosley. *New York Journal of Books*. 23 Mar. 2010. Web. 2 Aug. 2012.

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Parenthetical Citations: If you do not identify the source in the text, identify it in parentheses right after the information from the source.

One reviewer found the conclusion a bit weak (Lipkin).

If the source is printed, include the page number after the author's name.

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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.

Reviewer Michael Lipkin praises the book for elements of “excellence,” but sounded a little disappointed with a “perhaps a less-than-excellent conclusion.”

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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 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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Walter Mosley is highly regarded as a mystery writer. However, few books are perfect. Here is how one reviewer felt about a recent work by Mosley:

There is excellence in *Known to Evil*—the usual Mosley excellence; but with perhaps a less-than-excellent conclusion. Read *Known to Evil* and see what you think. (Lipkin)

I took Lipkin's advice and read *Known to Evil*. I agreed that the conclusion seemed weak. Still, I want to read more books by Mosely—and more reviews by Lipkin.

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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.

Mosley is a top-notch mystery writer, although his book *Known to Evil* could use a stronger conclusion (Lipkin).