Embedding the New Information Literacy Framework in Undergraduate Political Science Courses

Melissa Harden, University of Notre Dame
Jeffrey J. Harden, University of Notre Dame

Forthcoming, *PS: Political Science & Politics*

**Abstract**
What information can I trust? What sources should I include in my paper? Where can I find a quote that fits my argument? Undergraduates ask instructors, classmates, and/or librarians these questions. Meanwhile, instructors bemoan the gap between their expectations for student writing and the finished products. Navigating a large volume of scholarship and critically evaluating potential sources is straightforward for faculty who have long passed key information literacy thresholds. However, students usually have not reached these thresholds themselves. We offer practical tools—grounded in a new framework for teaching information literacy—to address these challenges. We demonstrate how instructors can (and should) teach information literacy skills, with or without direct assistance from librarians. We recommend encouraging students to build context around information sources and slow down as they search. Implementing these tools moves students from passively synthesizing a limited set of (possibly biased) materials to engaging in genuine scholarly inquiry.

**Keywords**
Information Literacy; Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education; Undergraduate Research

**Author Information**
Melissa Harden is First Year Experience Librarian, Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame (mharden@nd.edu). Jeffrey J. Harden is Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Notre Dame (jeff.harden@nd.edu).
Introduction

Political science faculty often express discontent over undergraduate students’ lack of preparedness for college-level research and writing. A common reason for such complaints is students’ difficulty in demonstrating command of the material they use to support an argument. Perhaps they rely on sources that are known in the field as untrustworthy or select only those books and articles that favor their stated position. Similarly, students may cite only one viewpoint in a larger scholarly discussion about a topic. These problems, which reflect the need to develop students’ information literacy skills, stand out starkly to faculty who have been writing for many years. However, they are not always obvious to students, who may not have passed key thresholds of expertise in working with information. In this paper, we discuss recent changes in academic librarians’ perspective on information literacy and present simple solutions that can be implemented by instructors on their own and with minimal advanced preparation.

Information literacy—the ability to successfully and ethically engage with information and understand how it is produced and valued—is a crucial skill for undergraduates to develop. When students can critically evaluate sources, they better recognize the characteristics of the information ecosystem in which they engage on a daily basis. Yet in a recent national survey only about half of students and less than one-fifth of faculty claimed that students are able to “confidently” evaluate information sources (Credo 2015). This problem may arise because faculty have spent years advancing their own information skills, and thus are susceptible to assuming that students hold similar abilities. We contend that information literacy (IL) cannot be assumed at the beginning of the term nor should it be left only to librarians to teach. Instructors must actively work to advance students’ information skills—including allocating some class time—if they want to bring output from the course in line with their expectations.
Importantly, we discuss these issues in the context of a recent and major change in how academic librarians (especially in the United States) approach IL. In 2016, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association, adopted the “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education” (hereafter “the Framework”). The Framework’s content reflects a notable perspective shift from ACRL’s previous document, the “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” (“the Standards”, see ACRL 2015). Not surprisingly, then, the Framework reflects a significant shift in how many academic librarians approach IL instruction.

Below we address three objectives. First, we formally introduce the Framework to the literature on political science education. Second, we describe how IL skills can (and should) be taught by disciplinary faculty, with or without assistance from librarians on campus. Third, we provide illustrative examples of practical activities aligned to the Framework that instructors can quickly implement with minimal startup cost in the political science classroom. In discussing these points, we make the case that teaching IL facilitates deeper engagement with course content and ultimately improves the educational experience for students and instructors alike.

**Background**

The Framework defines IL as “[t]he set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning” (ACRL 2015). The Framework is comprised of six interconnected core concepts, or frames, that represent big ideas related to the use and production of information:

- Authority is Constructed and Contextual;
- Information Creation as a Process;
● Information has Value;
● Research as Inquiry;
● Scholarship as Conversation;
● Searching as Strategic Exploration.

These frames encourage students to explore the complexity of encountering, using, and creating information. Each frame contains a set of knowledge practices and dispositions. They are written such that faculty can apply them to their teaching in disciplinary courses.

**Political Science and Information Literacy**

Disciplinary buy-in to teaching IL is critical because undergraduates across a variety of academic fields generally lack advanced IL skills (Flierl et al. 2018). Moreover, teaching IL is perhaps even more important for political science faculty compared to those in other disciplines. Williams and Evans (2008) make the case that “political science and information literacy seem inherently linked” (117). Political science courses regularly provide forums for undergraduate students—including majors and non-majors—to address important and complex issues facing society. Distilling these issues down to their most essential components is critical to fruitful dialogue in class discussion and students’ written work.

However, current practice in political science does not typically match this significance. Williams and Evans (2008, 117) explain that the discipline “lags behind” other fields in consistently incorporating IL into instruction. They also demonstrate empirically that, prior to receiving any such instruction, the IL skills of undergraduates in general—and political science majors specifically—are quite limited. As a result, the typical students enrolled in political science courses often cannot search effectively for the information they need, evaluate the relative authority of various sources, and/or conceptualize scholarship as a conversation between different
perspectives. In short, the current state of the discipline reflects a problematic tension. While IL is universally important and particularly critical to political science, students taking courses in the discipline (majors and non-majors alike) often do not have the necessary skills.3

Fortunately, past research also demonstrates that dedicated IL instruction can be effective in improving students’ work across a variety of disciplines (Flierl et al. 2018) and specifically in political science courses (Williams et al. 2006; Williams and Evans 2008; Gilbert et al. 2012). For instance, Shannon and Shannon (2016) compared two iterations of the same course on international politics—administered once with and once without an IL component—and found that IL instruction improved student papers on several dimensions, including the use of source material and overall quality (for another example, see Marfleet et al. 2005). However, to our knowledge the Framework has not yet been formally introduced to political science. Instead, the current literature reflects the old Standards that were phased out in 2016 (Stevens and Patricia 2008; Gilbert et al. 2012). The notable differences between the Framework and the Standards (see Foasberg 2015) warrants an update that encompasses current best practices.

Additionally, the extant literature in political science places a strong emphasis on direct librarian involvement in IL instruction. For instance, Gilbert et al. (2012) describe the benefits of adding a library lab component to a political science course and Shannon and Shannon (2016) evaluate the effect of “embedding” a librarian in class over an entire semester. In general, these authors take the position that even the “one-shot” library session, in which the class visits the library on a single day, is not enough (Stevens and Campbell 2008; Shannon and Shannon 2016). In our view, the embedded approach is useful under the right circumstances. However, it also presents challenges that might prevent faculty from adopting IL instruction at all.
Specifically, relying too heavily on direct librarian interaction requires substantial startup and continued investment of instructors’ and librarians’ time (Gilbert et al. 2012, 117; Shannon and Shannon 2016, 466). This issue alone may be enough to dissuade faculty—who are also trying to publish, teach other courses, and complete service work—from adding IL into their curricula. Further, embedding librarians in courses may not even be possible at colleges and universities with small library faculties that are already stretched thin by their many responsibilities. Moreover, exclusively outsourcing IL instruction implicitly states that only librarians can teach those skills.

Using the new Framework as a guide provides an opportunity for political science instructors to incorporate IL into their course plans. These efforts could include library collaborations, but our emphasis is on tools that do not require direct librarian involvement. Instead, we focus on instructional methods that faculty can quickly add to their syllabi before the course begins or even with little additional planning during the term. We contend that IL is important enough that it should be taught by political science instructors alongside substantive content, with or without librarian involvement (see Gooblar 2018; Cassell 2018). We anticipate that these low cost approaches to doing so are more feasible for a wide range of instructors in political science.

The Framework in the Classroom

Our strategies for teaching IL are rooted in the Framework and designed to address low or non-existent IL skills in the political science classroom. Teaching IL need not involve elaborate overhauls of courses or frequent collaborations with librarians. Instead, instructors can scaffold assignments and activities to allow students to engage with information relevant to course material as well as other areas of their lives. We briefly summarize several simple, but effective, activities below; see the supplementary materials for complete details.4


While all six frames of the Framework can provide inspiration for instructors, we focus here on two frames that are particularly relevant to undergraduate political science courses: *Scholarship as Conversation*, and *Authority is Constructed and Contextual*. In doing so, we encourage faculty to focus on two crucial habits related to information creation and use: building (or rebuilding) context and slowing down.

First, the need to build context stems from the fact that a common first stop for student researchers—an online search engine—often produces results that are removed from their original contexts. Entries might include blog posts, scholarly articles, and social media links, all on the first page. While determining which ones are valuable is often second nature to faculty, they appear the same to students. Likewise, the initial results page in library catalogs or academic databases are snippets of information rather than complete entries. Journal articles appear outside the rest of the journal and may be mixed in with newspapers, books, or other resources. Understanding each resource and identifying the larger conversation(s) to which it belongs takes practice.

It is also important to build in opportunities for students to slow down when engaging with information. Indeed, they often have the endpoint in mind (i.e., their thesis statements or conclusions) before they have really gotten started, which incentivizes “cherry-picking” quotes from articles or refusing to acknowledge information that does not conform to their ideas. Slowing down and engaging with information in a meaningful way allows the research process to move them. In other words, they are able to identify the variety of perspectives on a given topic and think critically about where gaps may still exist in the literature, which perspectives they agree or disagree with, and how they might proceed in pursuing a research question.
Scholarship as Conversation

Thinking about scholarship as conversation can help students understand the importance of building the context of information sources they find in the course of a research project or other assignment. A description of this frame is given below.

Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations (ACRL 2015). When students begin to understand this concept, they see information sources as part of a larger dialogue rather than as isolated artifacts. Faculty should demonstrate how researchers communicate through their scholarship, agreeing or disagreeing with each other and building from previous work. Students will then begin to learn the importance of seeking out multiple perspectives on a topic and even recognize themselves as contributors to the conversation.

Activity #1: The Scholarly Dialogue

One way to teach students to “listen in” on the scholarly conversation about a topic involves assigning published “back-and-forth” articles that address a specific research question as class readings. These scholarly dialogues are common in several political science journals. They are useful pedagogical tools because they provide examples of researchers directly engaging with each other. Students can pick up the conversation by reading a few articles rather than an entire literature. In our suggested activity, students read one such conversation outside of class. Then, the instructor can devote some or all of class time for small group and full class discussions about how the researchers interact with each other, modeling how to analyze this conversation.
Activity #2: Follow the Conversation

Another way to help students understand the idea of scholarship as conversation while teaching them to build context is to ask them to track down a resource cited in an assigned reading (i.e., follow the conversation back in time), then search for the assigned reading in Google Scholar and find additional work that has cited it (following the conversation forward). Then the instructor can ask students to analyze how these sources were used and/or cited by others. Importantly, this activity demonstrates to students that the scholarly record may leave out certain voices or perspectives. In fact, peer-reviewed journal articles need not be the only types of sources students use in this activity. Often, newspaper articles or longform journalism will also work, demonstrating how the concept of conversation plays out in the non-scholarly sphere.

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

A description of this frame is as follows.

Information resources reflect their creators’ expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required (ACRL 2015).

Students should consider who is an authority regarding a topic of interest and why. This focus can also lead to discussions about how the ways in which we grant authority may be flawed.

Activity #3: Who is an Authority?

An easy in-class activity involves asking students to think about specific markers of authority, in their own lives and in scholarship. For instance, asking students about areas in which they are experts themselves helps them broadly recognize factors that confer expert status.
Additionally, demonstrating that academic researchers may not be the only experts on a topic can be illuminating. Often, instructors notice that students use sources that are not widely considered to be authoritative. This activity helps build requisite background knowledge for beginning to identify authorities in the field and lead to discussions about how authorities are identified in the discipline. Additionally, like Activity #2, the discussion could emphasize ways in which the scholarly record may leave out some perspectives; for instance, some individuals who are considered authorities in certain communities may not publish in the scholarly record. Furthermore, the instructor can emphasize in class that someone considered an authority in one context is not necessarily an authority in another context.

*Activity #4: Assessing a Source*

An additional activity related to this frame that is particularly useful for helping students slow down involves working through a series of questions on a worksheet about a particular journal article, book chapter, or other source they have read thoroughly. Answering these questions not only provides students the space to determine how a particular source informs their research, but also helps them explore whether or not it is an authoritative source (and how it fits into the conversation on that topic). The questions can be modified to make the activity appropriate for a particular assignment or for upper-level students. The central idea is to provide a structured outlet for the students to engage with sources and see the types of questions they should be asking themselves as they read and research. Students could be assigned this worksheet after reading an article they find on their own in the research process or one that is an assigned reading in a course.

If activities like these are part of a lead-up to a research paper, they act as stepping stones in teaching students the type of analysis expected in their final document. They also give students practice in engaging with sources in a meaningful way rather than cherry-picking quotes to support
initial thoughts, allowing for deeper engagement with course material. Finally, these activities inspire critical thinking in that students are asked to consider multiple perspectives and assess which ones are more or less credible.

**Conclusions**

Students often enter the college classroom with plenty of room to grow in their research and writing skills. However, faculty often place such a high premium on substantive material in their classes that they overlook the need to help students develop those skills over the course of a term. This tension stems from the fact that faculty who have made professional careers out of their ability to evaluate and communicate information have long passed key thresholds of information literacy. In contrast, the typical student has likely received little to no such training. Expecting students to produce research papers that draw correctly and comprehensively on scholarly and/or non-scholarly sources is unrealistic if instructors do not help them develop IL skills. Moreover, students need to practice these skills many times over the course of their undergraduate careers concurrent with substantive material; one writing class in their first year is not enough experience.

Our discussion of the importance of teaching IL in political science classes merits an additional point about faculty relationships with libraries on campus. On one hand, we encourage political science instructors to collaborate with librarians. They are trained to meet IL needs and can serve as a key resource in helping students pass the thresholds that faculty passed long ago. Indeed, librarians can assist at the assignment design stage as well as with instruction. However, we also contend that instructors are responsible for embedding IL into course material on their own. Doing so can help bring students’ work in line with the instructors’ expectations for writing assignments. The activities described here could be executed with or without direct instruction from a librarian and do not require a massive overhaul of course content.
We have made the case for incorporating a new formal framework of information literacy skills into undergraduate political science courses. We have discussed two frames from ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and provided practical advice for implementing them in the classroom. We recommend that faculty include IL on the list of concepts that must be taught over the course of a term, similar to substantive topics. Instructors cannot assume that students learned how to engage with source material in high school or other college classes. Instead, as experts in information themselves, they must take on some of the responsibility to educate students in this area. We anticipate taking these steps will improve students’ writings and allow faculty to focus more attention on students’ substantive arguments when evaluating their work.
References

May 6, 2019.

Cassell, Mark K. 2018. “When the World Helps Teach Your Class: Using Wikipedia to Teach

Caulfield, Mike A. 2017. *Web Literacy for Student Fact-checkers.*

Credo. 2015. “Credo Survey: Faculty Teach Information Literacy in Response to Lack of Student

Flierl, Michael, Emily Bonem, Clarence Maybee, and Rachel Fundator. 2018. “Information
Literacy Supporting Student Motivation and Performance: Course-level Analyses.”

Addresses Critiques of the Standards.” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 15(4):
699-717.

Library Component to an Undergraduate Research Methods Course.” *PS: Political
Science & Politics* 45(1): 112-118.

Gooblar, David. 2018. “How to Teach Information Literacy in an Era of Lies.” *The Chronicle of


Endnotes

1. More specifically, the Framework represents a set of interconnected big ideas related to information discovery, use, and creation. It is descriptive, as opposed to the prescriptive Standards before it. Moreover, the Framework conveys information as contextual and socially constructed rather than as an objective, external commodity like the Standards (Foasberg 2015, 702).

2. Furthermore, the debate about “fake news” in modern politics directly underscores the Framework’s value and further highlights the importance of teaching IL in political science courses. Applying lessons from IL around content found on the open web or social media can help students navigate the current information ecosystem (see Caulfield 2017).

3. This problem is especially acute in lower-division courses with larger proportions of first- and second-year students. However, even students well into the college careers suffer from low information literacy (Williams and Evans 2008).

4. Instructors may also wish to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities in their courses. A simple and informal comparison of student work in terms with and without the exercises may be sufficient. Alternatively, with some initial preparation the instructor could implement a more formal quantitative design to evaluate the impact of the exercises on students’ IL skills. For examples of these designs in political science, see Williams and Evans (2008), Gilbert et al. (2012), and Shannon and Shannon (2016).
Embedding the New Information Literacy Framework in Undergraduate Political Science Courses

Supplementary Materials

Melissa Harden, University of Notre Dame
Jeffrey J. Harden, University of Notre Dame

Summary
The following activities are designed for implementation in the political science classroom for instructors interested in incorporating information literacy instruction that is aligned to frames of the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education into their courses. Instructors need not use these activities exactly as described here (although doing so would certainly not be a problem). They are intended as illustrative examples that could be modified to suit a particular instructor’s needs. For instance, we offer alternative approaches for scaling the activities to fit a large lecture course. Additionally, if an instructor was concerned that an activity posed too much of a challenge for a specific class, he or she could ask students to complete only parts of the activity and/or go through some parts with the instructor’s assistance.
Activity #1: The Scholarly Dialogue

Preliminary reading (homework)
First, ask the students to read two or three articles outside of class that represent a debate on a topic related to the course material. For example, the three articles listed below represent a recent scholarly dialogue in American politics on voter identification laws and minority turnout. Emphasize that students should not get bogged down if they cannot follow every detail in them. Rather, it is most important for students to follow the general arguments of each article and note how the authors respond to each other. Ask students to come to the next class ready to discuss all of the articles.


Small group questions
Organize the students into small groups (e.g., 3-4 students in each group) to discuss the following questions. For large classes, students should talk with 1-2 students seated near them. The questions should be projected on a screen or board to guide the small-group discussions. Students could then respond to questions 4-5 using an online polling platform (such as Mentimeter). The instructor can use the responses to guide a discussion with the whole class.

1. What is the conclusion of the first paper?
2. What aspects of the conclusions found in the first paper does the second paper challenge? What aspects does it ignore?
3. What evidence does the second paper use to support its argument?
4. If the authors of the first paper respond to the authors of the second paper, does the response accurately address the critiques? Explain your reasoning.
5. Which authors do you find more convincing? Why?

Full class questions
Bring the full class back together and discuss the following questions. For large classes, students may respond to the questions (and each other’s responses) in an online forum in the course management system. Alternatively, these questions can be used by the instructor to guide a class lecture after asking the students to complete the previous steps of the activity outside of class.
1. How does a scholarly conversation like this one help us better understand the research?
2. What problems might arise from publishing a back-and-forth dialogue?
3. Are there perspectives we are missing from this format?

Optional Extension
For upper-division undergraduate courses, ask students to find an additional article on their own that engages with the conversation represented in the selected articles. They could then be asked to reflect on how the article they found agrees, disagrees, or otherwise engages with the dialogue.

Considerations
Instructors should encourage students not to completely dismiss or completely accept a source, but rather to explore the conditions under which they agree or disagree with that source. This is an opportunity to explore the gray areas in scholars’ arguments (as opposed to seeing arguments as only having two sides, such as pro or con). It is possible that they will agree with parts of one author’s claims, but not others.
Activity #2: Follow the Conversation

Citation assignment (in class or outside of class)

1. Ask students to search for and acquire a citation that interests them from the reference list of an assigned reading. This will most likely be an academic book or journal article, but could also be a different type of source. Refer to this step as “following the conversation backward.” If necessary, the instructor could demonstrate for students how to find the full text of a source in the references list using databases available through the library.

2. Next, ask students to search for the original assigned reading in Google Scholar and find another work that has cited that reading using the “cited by” link. This step is “following the conversation forward.”

3. Ask students to write a brief summary of the citations they found. This summary can be very short based on the abstracts. Alternatively, instructors could ask students to complete this step outside of class by reading the sources entirely and summarizing them in 2-3 paragraphs each.

4. Finally, ask students to analyze how each source engages with the previously cited source the students found in each step (e.g., are the conclusions of the first source they review represented accurately in the source that it is cited in?).

Instructors may wish to demonstrate an example of following the conversation prior to the assignment. Our example from American Politics in Activity #1 may work. However, in that case the articles were published at essentially the same time and speak directly to one another. The first two steps of this activity will work better if the instructor uses a line of research that spans a longer time frame (i.e., a scholarly conversation drawn out over several years). One such example from comparative politics is literature on bargaining delay in the formation of coalition governments. Begin with the following article:


Martin and Vanberg (2003) demonstrate that factors related to the complexity of the bargaining process increase delay in coalition government formation. However, following the conversation backward leads to an earlier article:

In this article, Diermeier and van Roozendaal (1998) argue that bargaining complexity is *unrelated* to formation duration and show evidence supporting their claim. Thus, there is a disagreement between these first two articles. Finally, following both of them forward in time leads to a third article:


Golder (2010) provides a resolution to the debate, arguing that complexity *can* increase bargaining delay, but only when there is “sufficient uncertainty” among the parties involved in the coalition.

This example is a useful illustration because it clearly shows three articles engaged in the same conversation at three distinct points in time. In particular, Martin and Vanberg (2003) discuss Diermeier and van Roozendaal (1998) at length and Golder (2010) draws heavily from both of the other articles. Thus, students can clearly see how scholars engage one another in conversation in the communication of research over an extended length of time. However, all three articles in this example come from academic journals. Students might note, for instance, that the perspectives of current or former members of parliamentary governments who have engaged in such bargaining are absent.

**Full class questions**
After students have completed the assignment, begin a class discussion focusing on the following questions. For large classes, students may respond to the questions (and each other’s responses) in an online forum in the course management system. Alternatively, these questions can be used by the instructor to guide a class lecture after asking the students to complete the previous steps of the activity outside of class.

1. What connections are there among these documents?
2. How do scholars build from each other’s work?
3. What perspectives or viewpoints can you identify as represented in the sources you are analyzing?
4. Are there other viewpoints or perspectives you think should be included but are not yet? How and where might you have to search to find those other perspectives (e.g., where outside the scholarly record might you have to look)?

**Optional Extension**
For upper-division undergraduate courses, spend time discussing student responses to the following questions:
1. How might you see yourself as a scholar entering into the conversation when you write?
2. How can you put these various scholars into conversation with each other, and what additional ideas, questions, or thoughts would you add?

Considerations
Challenge students to go beyond summarizing what individual articles say. Prompt them to examine closely how the authors interact with arguments made the article(s) they cite. Are they paying more attention to those arguments with which they already agree? Are they allowing themselves to be open to new arguments and ideas? Model the types of thoughts and questions researchers ask themselves when following a citation trail.

Additionally, students may need prompting to consider what perspectives are not represented in the citation trail they have examined. It can be challenging to notice what is not there. Further, they may need prompting to consider where else they may need to look to find additional perspectives (e.g., blogs, social media feeds, community newsletters, or other publications).
Activity #3: Who is an Authority?

1. Present the following questions to students in class and ask them to respond in writing. This step can be completed in an online forum in the course management system, which may be especially useful for large classes.

- Think of an area in which you are an expert. What makes you an expert?
- What does this specific expertise tell you about expertise in general?
- What characteristics might define an expert in [the discipline or the course]?

2. Then, ask students to share the criteria they came up with, and discuss as a class the similarities and differences in those criteria. Discussion can begin with students turning and talking to others near them. Then the instructor can ask a few students to share out to the whole class (even a large one) what they discussed. In large classes, instructors can solicit responses to questions from students using an online polling platform, such as Mentimeter. Possible discussion questions at this stage include the following.

- Can there be different types of experts on this topic (e.g., a researcher, someone personally affected by an issue, a government official, a CEO)? Does an expert have to be someone with an elite status or certain credentials?
- If someone is an authority or expert in one area, does that authority transfer to other areas? What are the limits of that transfer?

In the course of the discussion, students should challenge the authority of the imagined experts by pointing to potential contrary opinions. Wrap up by noting that authority is sometimes not a given criterion dependent on degree or education but is specific to the context of the information or the research being conducted.

3. Prior to the class period, assign readings on a topic, such as articles or book chapters, that come from authors with varying backgrounds and/or perspectives. The more that the readings focus on one particular topic, the better. Additionally, it may be helpful to find readings in which there is some agreement and some disagreement among the various authors. As one illustrative example, consider the following readings on the global impacts of the end of the Cold War. The first two of these sources are books, from which an instructor might want to select specific chapters.


The set of authors of these readings include a mix of practitioners and academics, each bringing different viewpoints to the discussion on the end of the Cold War. In class, focus students’ attention on this diversity with the following discussion questions.

• What is the source of each author’s expertise in these readings? Before you read them, did one author seem more credible than the others?

• What evidence does each source use and how does this evidence connect to the authority of the author(s)?

• After completing the readings, which perspective do you find more trustworthy, and why?

Additionally, instructors might want to choose specific substantive points—such as areas of agreement or disagreement—to guide additional questioning.

4. End with a reflective question to the class. Students can write a response to this reflective question on their own, following the format of a 1-minute paper. The instructor can choose whether or not these responses are turned in, either through a digital platform or hard copy. Even if the responses are not turned in, there is merit to giving the students time to reflect and respond.

• Has this discussion changed the way you view authority? Why or why not?

**Optional Extension**

For upper-division undergraduate courses completing a research paper as a part of the course, ask the students to consider the following question:

• As an author of a future research paper, what will your authority on the subject be based on?

This question requires advanced students to think of themselves as holding some authority and contributing to a conversation.
Considerations
It may take time for undergraduate students to better understand the markers of authority within the discipline. It can be helpful for instructors to model their thought processes when they decide whether or person or a source is authoritative. At the same time, instructors can use this as an opportunity to challenge the current structures that grant authority in the discipline. In what ways do these structures keep certain voices out? This question is particularly difficult because it might challenge the traditional academic power structure (i.e., should we grant authority to someone without a Ph.D?). Additionally, it sometimes requires students to observe the absence of some perspective rather than simply react to a perspective that is present.
**Activity #4: Assessing a Source (Article/Chapter Worksheet)**

This worksheet is meant to guide students during the initial stages of the research process. After completing it outside of class, they can bring it with them to the next class session and talk with another student sitting near them about what they learned from answering these questions. This approach works in both large and small classes. In particular, students could consider the following questions.

1. Did you learn anything surprising by reading through this source?
2. Did any of the information in this source shift the course of your research or change the way you think about their topic?

Students should be able to keep their completed sheets after the discussion, as they can be helpful for them to refer back to as they continue on with their research.

**Optional Extension**
For upper-division undergraduate courses, instructors might consider asking students to use the structure and questions on this worksheet to interrogate a different type of source (e.g., a dataset), perhaps with modified questions. Ask them to comment on how (or if) this changes their thinking.

**Considerations**
Students may find that working through this process shifts their original research plan. This is a natural part of the research process, and students should be encouraged to follow this new direction. It can be helpful for instructors to share their experience with a research process following a different path than originally planned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s):</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article/Chapter Title:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title and Volume of Journal/Book:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information, such as editor or series (for books):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of publication:</td>
<td>Pages:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of publication (for books):</td>
<td>Publisher (for books):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What is the main argument of this article/chapter?** (1-2 sentences)
What are the main topics discussed? If you quote from the article/chapter, be sure to record the page number.

**How does this article/chapter inform your curiosity?** (1-2 sentences)
How does it help to answer, respond to, or refine your research question(s)?
### How do you think this information fits into your research process? (1-4 sentences)
Is the evidence convincing? Do you agree with the author? Does it help you to refocus your overall topic or question?

### How does this information relate to, compare, or contrast with other information you’ve read on this topic? (1-3 sentences)
What additional questions does this information raise for you?

### Identify a source in this article/chapter’s bibliography that might be useful for your research.

---

“Article/Chapter Worksheet” by the Hesburgh Libraries is a derivative of the Inquiry Worksheet (https://www.slideshare.net/GinaCaliaLotz/inquiry-worksheet) by Gina Calia-Lotz and Laura Fox of Harford Community College and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.