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Beyond the Checklist Approach: Teaching Students to Think about How They Will Use Information

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From Checklist to Holistic Approach to Information Evaluation



Lenker, Mark. "Developmentalism: Learning as the Basis for Evaluating Information."
Portal: Libraries and the Academy 17 (2017): 721-737.

FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE



Belmont University

- Private, Christian, 8,000 students, Nashville, liberal arts and professional programs





Information Literacy @ Belmont University

- First Year Seminar
 - All freshmen take first semester
 - Theme: “ways of knowing”
 - 70 sections
 - IL instruction focused on information evaluation for an argument paper
 - “The paper must use at least five **substantial** sources, which relate, in a credible way, to the topic and thesis. The cited sources should advance the argument, not merely give background information.”



What Makes a Source Substantial?

Checklist approach



- Small group activity
- We provide sample topic
- We provide a source or pairs of sources that groups of students evaluate:
 - Who wrote it? What expertise or authority do they have?
 - Is it original or repackaged or shared information?
 - How much time and effort did it take to create it
 - Was there a review or editing process?



What Makes a Source Substantial?

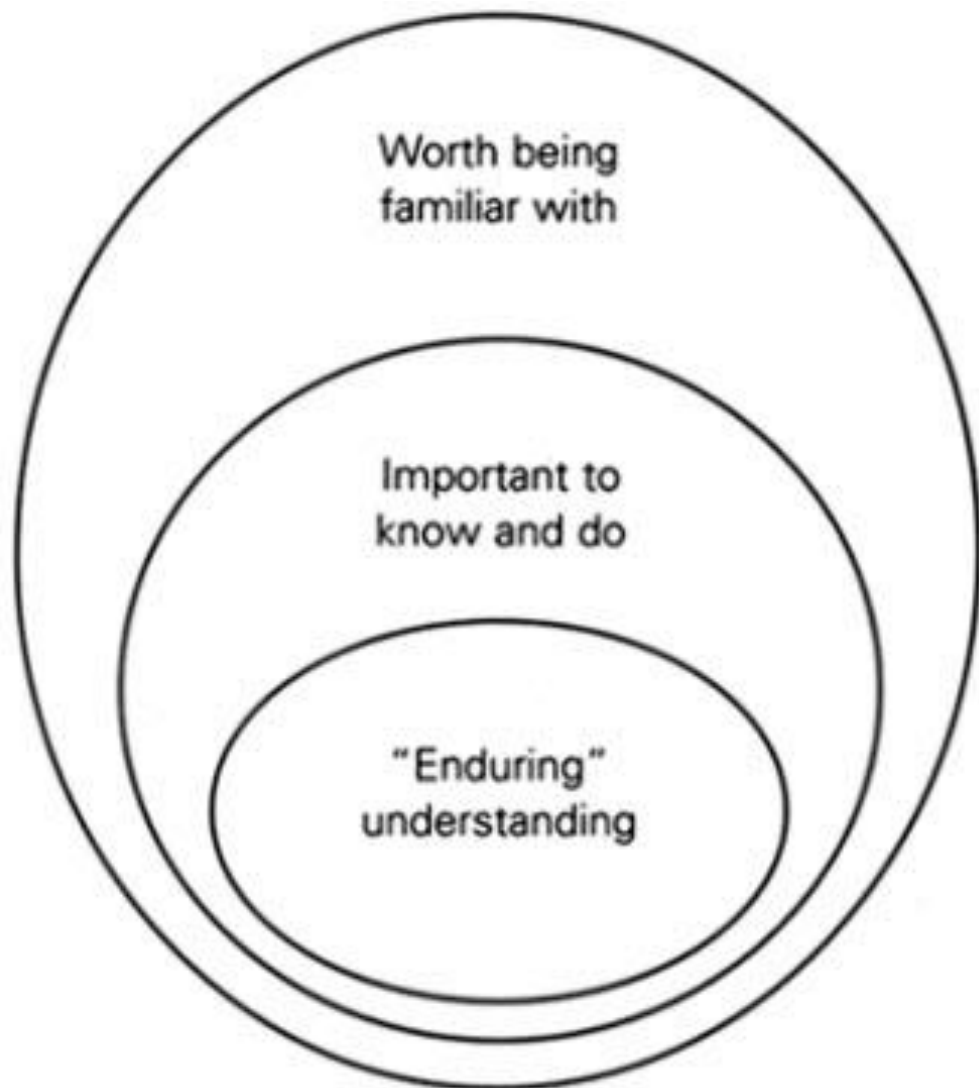
Checklist approach



- Drawbacks
 - Students going through the motions
 - Anticipating what we want them to say
 - Not invested with the pre-selected sources
 - Not engaging with sources
 - No practice searching/using library tools



Backward Re-Design



- OneSearch
- Google Scholar
- Citation tools

- Apply a trust-based evaluation of information
- Apply a use-based evaluation of information

- Evaluating information is complex, and depending on your info need, there are many factors to consider



What Makes a Source Substantial?

Holistic Approach



Evaluate the outside markers of quality

- Author
- Source
- Date
- Agenda/Bias
- Trustworthiness

Evaluate the source for usefulness

- How does it help address your specific research question?
- How will it help your argument? Affirm, refute, extend?
- Will you use it as background information, as an example, as a main argument source?
- Does it provide a good example to help make your case?



BEAM Method

B	Background	used for general information, facts, to provide context
E	Exhibit	used as an example for explication, analysis, or interpretation
A	Argument	used to engage in an existing argument by another writer and which You will affirm, dispute, refine, or extend the argument.
M	Method	used as a template. For example, using a similar style or copying the research methods. May not be used until upper division courses.

Bizup, J. (2008). BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing. *Rhetoric Review*, 27(1), 72-86.

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Preparing Student for Holistic Analysis

- Use complex sample research questions
- Let students select their own sources to analyze
- Use the language of BEAM for probing questions



Sample Research Questions

- Do we have a moral obligation to study African American history?
- What does participation in youth sports teach children about success and failure?
- Should high school graduates be required to take a year off to pursue community service projects before entering college?
- How are food costs, especially meal plan contracts, affecting college students?



In-Class Group Activity

- Groups of 3-4 students (5-6 groups total)
- All groups given the same sample research question
- Groups instructed to use different search engines (Library's Primo OneSearch, Google, Google Scholar)

[Activity Worksheet](#)



In-Class Group Activity

Questions:

- What did you learn about this topic from the source? How did it help you answer the research question?
- Why is the information trustworthy?
- Would you consider this a substantial source of information? Why or why not?



Common themes

- Students can identify a peer-reviewed article. Not great at reading abstracts, determining the main purpose/argument of the article
- By viewing variety of sources, see different types of information and angles they might take – avoiding the ‘perfect source’
- Students need help evaluating websites
- Google Scholar new to many
- Can point out good to know skills along the way



Challenges

- Student driven – loss of control
- Giving constructive feedback
- 50 minute classes
- Technology barriers



Results

A total of **697** survey responses were collected. Of the percentage of patrons surveyed who either **agreed or strongly agreed** that they benefited from the service or program:

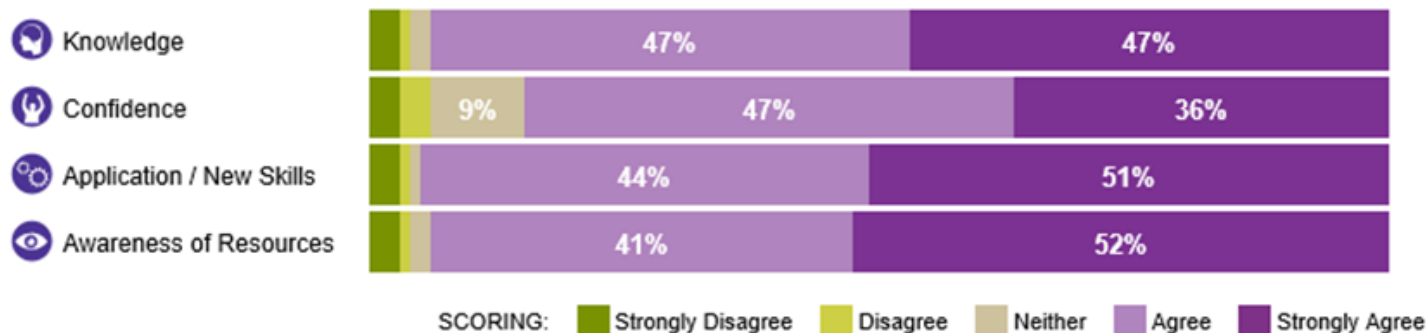
94% learned something new to help succeed in classes

95% intend to apply what they learned

83% felt more confident about completing assignment(s)

93% were more aware of resources and services provide by the library

The full results of the survey(s) are shown below. (Note that due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%)



	Selected Criteria Average		Instruction Topic Averages			
	Library		Library	Carnegie	National	Total
Knowledge	4.3		4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4
Confidence	4.1		4.2	4.2	4.2	4.2
Application / New Skills	4.4		4.4	4.5	4.4	4.4
Awareness of Resources	4.4		4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4

AVERAGES: Ranges from 1.0 (Strongly Disagree) to 5.0 (Strongly Agree)

Survey topic averages represent all data under the survey topic and type. Selected criteria average represents data under any additional criteria applied to the report, such as date range, program or survey name.



Student Feedback

- “I liked that we practiced finding credible sources on multiple search engines.”
- “I liked getting to try out the resources and see how each works and how to find reliable sources.”
- “The thing I liked the most from this session was that we actually had the chance to get into some sources and look at what was good and bad.”



Next Steps

- Consultations with instructors on design of argument paper
- Follow-up assignments
- Provide feedback to students



References

Bizup, Joseph. "BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing." *Rhetoric Review* 27 (2008): 72-86.

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Towlson, Kaye, Mike Leigh, and Lucy Mathers. "The Information Source Evaluation Matrix: a quick, easy and transferable content evaluation tool." *SCONUL Focus* 47 (2009): 15-19.

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Questions?



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