

CRITICAL SOURCE ANALYSIS: REVITALIZING RESEARCH WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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Writing teachers and those coming from across the disciplines constantly examine ways to initiate students into specialized languages and discursive practices effectively (Buzzi et al. 481; Craig et al. 310; Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 281). The continual search for adequate pedagogies provides impetus for more sophisticated (and in some cases, technologically-driven) classroom techniques in order to disclose the rhetorical styles and linguistic features of a given field. Successful approaches allow formal introduction to differences in various disciplinary writing characteristics, and classroom activities that boost these types of acquisition have become apparent. In addition, knowing how to build effective writing assignments and reflecting on their successes and/or failures have set adroit composition instructors apart from others, including the ability to strategize what can be fairly expected from writing students (Condon 31). These may be familiar expectations but ones that require careful, strategic planning.

Classroom strategies for writing courses evolve with innovative research and expanding theories, and educators are always employing new techniques in hopes of improving student performance and writing proficiencies. For instance, trying out cutting-edge approaches is encouraged in practices that involve teaching writing with computers to support fundamental pedagogies. Promoting new schemes for engagement using electronic communication or social media platforms

has gained traction among first-year writing courses that continue the traditional practice of assigning field-specific research papers to promote disciplinary literacy. In spite of these recent developments, research-based assignments still engender classroom affordances and definitive exercises within the framework of writing across the curriculum (WAC) since the process of research enables undergraduate writers to probe the delivery and/or message of a given body of knowledge: “When students try to practice the linguistic features of disciplinary genres, they must seek at the same time the kinds of substantive information those genres convey” (Linton et al. 169). With better instruction and classroom activities, students not only engage in comprehending researched sources but also acquire the reasoning and conventions of a specific discourse community that enable meaningful classroom discussions and develop authority.

To foster this acquisition, I argue that first-year writing and advanced major courses implement more assignments based on critical source analysis to complement annotated bibliographies and prompt field-specific research papers as well as enhance mastery of rhetorical principles, language use, conventions, format, and presentations of discipline-specific texts. Writing critical source analyses will bolster student preparation for term papers, senior theses, or capstone research through specialized knowledge and language acquisition, especially if intermediate writing and upper-division major courses intentionally promote these assignments in the curriculum and across the disciplines. In a sense, gaining momentum toward cross-disciplinary collaborations on campus from a WAC perspective sustains the conversation for developing writing proficiencies. The interactive model of the analytical assignment will give room for many student voices to participate in knowledge construction and further its progressive and collaborative processes.

Assignment Overview: Critical Source Analysis

Rationale

The purpose of this project is to keep integrating WAC into first-year writing courses and/or the English department since students

get initial writing instructions from these programs (McLeod, “Writing Across” 8). They train students how to compose focused, organized, and well-developed academic papers as represented in most theme-based/discipline-specific/‘writing-about-writing’ curricula; but the truth of the matter is that in order for students to prepare for writing in their courses and careers, they also need more purposeful disciplinary discourse interactions through research “in order for meaningful learning—and writing—to take place in academia” (Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 294). Such cross-disciplinary research practices foster student initiation into various discourse communities that will serve them well in the years ahead.

David Russell, in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines*, clarifies that WAC practices should start with English composition teachers connecting with other disciplines (293-94). Collegial networking is necessary in this respect as the demands for disciplinary writing go beyond intermediate writing classes. To encourage these types of connections, the value and learning outcomes of WAC might be channeled through multifaceted support systems, including institutional teaching and learning conferences, faculty professional development programs, college/university writing assessment committees, campus Writing Centers, undergraduate research programs, mentoring program initiatives (e.g., capstone), and informal meetings over brown bag lunches. Admittedly, the conflict mostly lies within institutional expectations of writing faculty rarely held accountable for introducing students into the discourse of their disciplines (Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 28). Some critics even challenge composition specialists not to be remiss or derelict of their obligation to student-writers (Zorn 284). In response, I posit that we need to consciously set a trend to revitalize research within the framework of WAC in first-year writing courses.

Assigning critical source analysis to complement annotated bibliographies situates research-based writing within this plan. Because students need to recognize the continuity of knowledge construction and debate, rhetorical analysis of texts through source critiques is incumbent on establishing authority and writing proficiency as opposed to mere repetitions of researched information (Penrose

and Geisler 517). Ann M. Penrose and Cheryl Geisler call for an alternative to this “information-transfer model” that goes beyond relying on one’s personal knowledge acquisition towards actively analyzing texts and author motives to accommodate students’ individual voices (517). Working from the standpoint of disciplinary writing through research makes rhetorical analysis even more compatible with initiating first-year writers into discourse communities. Students become active participants (vs. passive observers) and have more opportunities to review and critique researched sources, thus developing their own views on a subject matter as most experts do. In support of promoting active engagement through student dialogues in academic writing, Deborah F. Rossen-Knill and Tatyana Bakhmetyeva articulate salient principles that also serve as the rationale for the critical source analysis assignment:

General Principle: In academic writing, ideas exist dialectically within a community through dialogue (written or spoken).

Principle 1: Knowledge is created through authentic questioning.

Principle 2: New ideas—our answers to our questions—are formulated and tested through authentic dialogue, both internal and external.

Principle 3: The mind state of each person is unique, so that communication of an idea necessarily involves interpretation.

Principle 4a: A thought may be realized through language in an infinite number of ways, each of which constitutes a unique meaning.

Principle 4b: The writer’s sentence-level choices simultaneously establish and—more or less effectively—respond to readers’ expectations. (Rossen-Knill and Bakhmetyeva 29)

On a conceptual level, restructuring writing assignments toward source critiques helps first-year writing students take part in academic dialogues necessary to promote their agency of knowledge/idea construction. This approach surpasses the ‘writing-about-writing’ trend common in most first-year writing courses since the student corpus here is based on writing in the disciplines (WID). On the other hand, students who are undecided or under curricula to wait until the second year to declare a major or who have interdisciplinary majors or majors in different disciplines will still profit from the critical source analysis assignment. Choosing a research topic from a particular discipline in their first-year writing class will not be entirely futile as the general principle for writing for a specific discipline and writing for several or all disciplines remains the same with “members of academic communities produc[ing] new knowledge in response to and through interactions with other scholars” (Rossen-Knill and Bakhmetyeva 30).

From this angle, when novice writers continue to question, test, interpret, and internalize the contents and/or language of disciplinary sources, they are more likely to join various academic discourse communities with success using the same armament for pre-research that goes above and beyond the practice of simply transferring research information from one text to another.

The Writing Assignment

At the time of writing this manuscript, first-year students under the general education curriculum of a southwestern university are required to take two 3-credit composition courses—English 1010: *Introduction to Writing* and English 2010: *Intermediate Writing*. The second writing course (English 2010) is primarily research-based, and one of its final requirements is a 10-12 page research paper preceded by an annotated bibliography. The critical source analysis is a modified version of this annotated bibliography assignment where students write source critiques about a topic of their choice related to a specific discipline or their major. I strongly recommend that upper-division research courses continue to assign this type of preliminary task in

support of annotated bibliographies for sustainable development in field-specific discursive practices.

Aside from proposals, abstracts, reviews, software presentations, lab or business reports, undergraduate research papers or long reports from first-year composition to upper-division core courses are commonly assigned. Students are primed to compose the critical source analysis assignment after having written academic essays in first-year composition and are ready to take on longer research projects. Writing teachers might clarify that this critique-based task will set up writing across the curriculum, so students must first identify an issue related to their discipline (or, for undecided majors, any topic related to a discipline) before finding related sources to compose annotated bibliographies and/or source critiques. In turn, this same topic and source annotations/critiques will be expanded into a full-blown 10-12 page research paper later in the semester.

In this vein, the critical source analysis assignment becomes a systematic evaluation of sources (at least six or more) in relation to a disciplinary topic/issue. Complete with bibliographic information, students are expected to compose a short critical analysis of at least two paragraphs for each source to provide their readers with a full understanding of the article being critiqued, its intended meaning, and its merits and faults based on content, structure, and style. Most importantly, they are also expected to provide a well-developed introduction section (e.g., at least two pages) that synthesizes and connects all critiqued sources toward an overall thesis or common theme. The main goal of this task is for students to see the relationship between genre conventions and knowledge construction and become active (and authoritative) participants of academic discourse.

Figure 1 shows a prototype of this source critique assignment; note that the organization and length of this type of assignment may be *flexible* and different for each class context and/or instructor's curriculum.

Here's what you need to do. Please follow the order for each step to meet the overall goal of seeing the relationship between genre conventions and how knowledge is made within a discipline.

1st—Upon deciding on a particular topic/issue related to your discipline, locate credible sources related to this topic/issue. These sources must be a combination of online or print scholarly journal articles, book chapters, and so forth.

2nd—Then, critique your sources based on the guidelines for writing critiques from our course textbook, *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum* (Behrens and Rosen 68):

- Introduce
- Summarize
- Assess the presentation
- Respond to the presentation
- Conclude

Do not forget to condense each guideline to briefly assess each source into two (2) paragraphs. Thus, **each source critique** should have the following:

1. Bibliographic information for each source entry (author, title of article, main title of source, etc.); **and**
2. A two-paragraph source critique based on the following (Behrens and Rosen 68):
 - Introduction of the source's background material
 - Summary of the author's main points and purpose
 - Assessment/Evaluation of the author's views according to specific criteria, such as:
 - **Accuracy** of information [based on cross-references]
 - **Significance** of information [to your chosen topic focus]
 - **Clarity** of the terms used [with explanations]
 - **Fairness** of information presented [or balanced with opposing views]
 - **Logic** of the argument [and well-supported]
 - Your response to the author's views
 - Conclusion that assesses the overall validity of the source

TIP: Do this for all six (6) sources you find.

3rd—Write a two-page Introduction based on the following:

- Identify the topic/issue for this assignment and the discipline/field this topic belongs to.
- State the common theme of all your sources based on their patterns. This common theme will be your thesis.

- Discuss your sources' similarities and/or differences. As mentioned above, this is a chance to showcase your synthesis/connecting skills based on your critical evaluation.
- Talk about how you plan to use each source in your research paper—the operating word is “plan” so don't sweat it as this might change in the actual paper.

TIP: This two-page Introduction might be comparable to the chapter introductions of our textbook's reading anthology.

4th—Finally, organize your writing assignment as follows:

- a. Title of your research
- b. Two-page Introduction
- c. Two-paragraph critique for each source

Suggested Length and Format:

There is *no* approximate number of pages for this assignment, except that you should have at least two (2) pages double-spaced of Introduction, at least two (2) paragraphs for each source/bibliographic entry, and a total of six (6) sources critiqued. Use proper source citations and documentation format, one-inch margins on all sides, and a standard 12-point Times New Roman font.

Due Dates:

Rough Draft for Peer Review _____
 Final Draft _____

Figure 1: Prototype of Instructions for the Critical Source Analysis Assignment

Scaffolding Activities

WAC moves away from the lecture mode of teaching to active student engagement with materials and genres of disciplinary writing (McLeod and Miraglia 5). In effect, classroom activities that support WAC pedagogy encourage ungraded writing or discussion exercises to encourage students to think further and substantiate their knowledge. If WAC-related tasks are spread throughout the course in a sequence of activities, more students will value and improve their writing skills with more engagement in the classroom. Steve Graham and Dolores Perin support the positive effects of writing to learn (WTL) tasks on adolescents that involve “inquiry activities,

process writing approach, study of models, and writing for content learning” (4-5). As important expressions of WAC, they recognize that these activities improve student writing and student engagement for college preparation while Aaron Thornburg et al., reporting on the visibility of a WAC program at Eastern Oregon University, focus on the benefits of both WTL and WID to rally behind course and career preparations (WAC Group 1-2). Reflective teaching in this case prompts writing teachers to shift away from *what* students need to know about writing to *how* student writers develop pertinent writing skills. This notion means we need to be more mindful of transforming our objectives from “what to teach to how to teach the material” (Ostergaard 154) and enable intentional skills development.

To enhance instruction for the critical source analysis assignment, the following samples of WAC-related scaffolding activities aim to boost the student-writers’ discovery and critical thinking processes as they explore different writing styles and conventions of various discourse communities:

1. *Richard Coe’s “Metaheur” Group Activity*. Richard Coe’s seminal article “Advanced Composition as a Fishing Pole” originally implemented this activity as a writing assignment to analyze specific types of writing and learn how to produce them (212). In this group activity, students analyze various writing samples and describe the framework of producing discipline-specific texts based on a set of heuristics. They explore specialized rhetorical conventions, writing contexts, and structure/stylistics while reinforcing the concept of joining a discourse community (see Appendix).
2. *Critical Source Analysis Prewriting Worksheet*. Within two to three 50-minute class sessions, recording source ideas is a good way for students to initially engage in the material and jumpstart the critical source analysis assignment. Using the same information in Figure 1, students conduct a prewriting activity that allows them to explore possible sources and

source ideas before drafting their work. Through this exercise, students develop not only their note-taking ability, but also their critical thinking skills. The act of jotting down preliminary ideas for their short paragraph critiques and introduction section enables them to provide their audience with a full understanding of the articles being critiqued, their intended meanings, and their merits and faults.

3. *Critical Source Analysis Peer Review Sheet*. During peer reviews, the 50-minute class period turns into a writer's workshop as students evaluate rough drafts using the composition guidelines in Figure 1. Student comments and suggestions as peer reviewers are valuable not only for revisions, but also for student learning and skills development. Because they are a part of the audience to which their classmate writes, they are in a position to offer feedback on the writing, organization, and presentation of the assignment.

Evaluation Standards

When evaluating critical source analysis assignments, a few major criteria may be used by instructors to gauge their success. These criteria may include audience (e.g., appropriateness of audience addressed, tone/writer's voice, title); organization (e.g., thesis clarity, organizational framework, focus of discussion); development (e.g., 2-paragraph source critiques, 2-page introduction); and local issues assessing format, vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar/mechanics.

Composition instructors who may not be familiar with different disciplines need specific criteria to evaluate critique-based tasks from a rhetorical perspective. On the other hand, upper-division faculty from across the disciplines who assign this type of writing assignment on top of research papers or long reports may need specific criteria to determine if student writers have developed critical thinking skills within their field. In this vein, specific

guidelines in the source critique assignment may serve as a starting point for assessment and may also expand into other benchmarks based on course learning outcomes and/or context-specific curricula.

General Reflections: Success, Pitfall, and Solution

This project was not without difficulties, but with clarity of purpose and ardent resolve, it can be effectively implemented in any writing course that has a research component. An important indication for the success of this assignment is that students learn to write with authority on a topic of their choice by critiquing sources based on motives, intention, information, etc. Instead of looking at sources as definitive, they treat each source as one distinct voice in a corpus of other sources with multiple viewpoints in conversation with each other. This concept further promotes knowledge construction within the disciplines through discursive practices, and the act of rhetorically analyzing sources allows the students to dissect and examine the authors' arguments, domains, and rhetorical styles.

Following the assignment sheet in Figure 1, Figure 2 illustrates a source critique of an article by Saskia De Melker on media and the hypersexualization of women in the fields of communication studies and psychology.¹ Though much is desired, the student here does not simply report on what was read as a rookie would, but carefully weighs in on the source's view of the topic. The student begins with an introduction and summary of the article in the first paragraph and moves on to evaluate the source based on its accuracy, significance, and fairness in the first three sentences of the second paragraph (*"The information is accurate and gathered either from interviews with these psychologists or statistics direct from their reports..."*). Then, the student finishes with a personal response (*"I find the article to be..."*) and concluding remark on the total validity of the source, which suggests active engagement with the material precedent to composing research-based essays. This exercise provides an opportunity for student writers to join the conversation with their own perspectives on the subject matter, and to synthesize their sources'

common themes/similarities and differences. Most of them initially lack authority prior to this assignment, but when they realize that different authors have varying intentions and approaches, and that “texts and knowledge claims are authored and negotiable” (Penrose and Geisler 507), students tend to adopt a more confident tone in their synthesis of multiple sources. They try to become active participants of knowledge construction in their field tantamount to Rossen-Knill and Bakhmetyeva’s principles.

De Melker, Saskia. “Researchers Measure Increasing Sexualization of Images in Magazines.” PBS, NewsHour Productions LLC, 21 Dec. 2013, www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/social_issues-july-dec13-sexualization_12-21/.

This article is a [summary] and collection of professional thoughts by author Saskia De Melker on studies conducted by psychologists at Kenyon College, Wesleyan University, and University of Buffalo. The author addresses the studies’ importance and the scientific proof behind the outlandish over-sexualization of women in media throughout the years. She discusses a system [...] that was created by these professionals to test the sexuality of a photo. The purpose of the article is to inform readers about the current issue regarding the forced sexuality of girls and women.

The information is accurate and gathered either from interviews with these psychologists or statistics direct from their reports. The scientific data gathered is significant [...] to the question of whether this issue is intentional or existent. The information gathered is scientific and unbiased, therefore making excellent support [for] an essay. I find the article to be spot on and an important wake up call to anyone who is unaware of the blatant and intentional trend of viewing women as sex objects. It is a valid source with significant information and proof.

Figure 2: Source Critique Sample

To show how student writers incorporate ideas from source critiques to the final paper, Figure 3 shows a research paper’s introduction and synthesis excerpts from the same student who critiqued De Melker’s article in Figure 2. In this final paper, the student did not merely repeat researched information but engaged in promoting a distinct view about women’s objectification in the media: “From the moment a young girl begins to [consume] media, she is bombarded with messages that influence her self-worth and body image. Her

From the moment a young girl begins to [consume] media, she is bombarded with messages that influence her self-worth and body image. Her healthy mental development is stunted while she is inundated with society's ideas of what constitutes a desirable woman. With the amount of advertisements received by a single person each day numbering in the thousands, this harmful occurrence is more common than one may think. It's impossible to look at a rack of magazines without seeing scantily clad women posing on the front covers. It's difficult to watch television without viewing an ad featuring a sultry lady sashaying across the set. Movies often feature various female tropes who are little more than eye candy for the male viewer. All of these are examples of hyper-sexualization, which is defined by the American Psychological Association as occurrence where "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior to the exclusion of other characteristics" (De Melker). The messages these portrayals of hyper-sexualization are sending may oftentimes be subtle, but their effect on the psyche of the viewer certainly is not. Women are commonly portrayed as nothing more than sexy inserts, and this damaging phenomenon occurs every day in every home with a television or internet connection. Though these bombardments of sexuality often go unnoticed or ignored, as they are very much to be the "norm" of today's world, they are affecting every person who watches, sees, and witnesses them. One would only have to open up a magazine or look up to a billboard to see this issue in action, and it is only growing worse with time. Yes, to those who have woken up to this tragic state of affairs, it is abundantly clear that women are hyper-sexualized in the media.

*Sarah Murnen, a social psychologist, has been studying the sexualization of women for over twenty-five years. She and her partners at Kenyon College conducted research and examined Seventeen Magazine, a magazine intended for the teenage girl demographic. They reviewed the featured articles and advertisements found therein, and discovered that the amount of sexual characteristics per issue had tripled over three decades (De Melker). This is a print source aimed at those approaching adulthood [who] are being taught and trained while still in their youth to be sexual and desirable creatures. **Another research group at Wesleyan University affirms this same pattern discussed in [De Melker's] article.** When viewing advertisements featured in around fifty of America's most well known magazines from the year 2013, they found that more than half of them showed women as sex objects (Anglin). Importance has shifted from a happy and strong woman to a simply sexy woman. It is undeniable. Sexualization has grown worse as time goes by. It is frightening to predict where it will be in twenty more years.*

Figure 3: Introduction and Synthesis Excerpts from a Final/ Research Paper

healthy mental development is stunted while she is inundated with society's ideas of what constitutes a desirable woman." We then see the student providing specific examples to support the negative effects of such hypersexualization in advertisements, magazines, television, movies, and billboards. I surmise the previous source critique assignment helped the student treat sources as meaningful parts of a given whole in dialogue with one another. This dynamic exchange of ideas

might have also led the student to do two things: first, select an important nugget of information from one of the sources in the critical source analysis assignment (e.g., the American Psychological Association’s definition of “hypersexualization” in De Melker’s article) and second, present the final paper’s thesis statement with tenacity at the end of the paragraph (“*women are hypersexualized in the media*”).

In addition, the synthesis excerpt refers to social psychologist Sarah Murnen of Kenyon College and her team, whose statistic regarding the increase of advertisements objectifying women in popular magazines supports the findings of another research team at Wesleyan University. This sample source connection between De Melker and Anglin respectively, coupled with the closing statements “*Sexualization [of women] has grown worse as time goes by. It is frightening to predict where it will be in twenty more years,*” indicates careful analysis of source arguments, rhetorical purpose, and a general understanding of their overall implications. Writing source critiques might have enabled this student to become more familiar with the issues and contexts of the topic and observe multiple voices/sources, and as a result of authentic questioning and interpretation, the student then builds on something new in the final paper.

Referring to the critical source analysis assignment, Figure 4 exhibits an introduction where the student analyzed the topic, synthesized the source critiques, and formulated a final/research paper plan based on the subject matter’s rhetorical context. This sample introduction further demonstrates the joint venture between writing source critiques and the final paper.

The topic of this research essay is a [...] prevalent issue in the [fields] of psychology [and communication studies], the hypersexualization of women [in] media. It is an issue that has been discussed for years, yet only seems to be getting progressively worse. Many argue that the way women and even girls are portrayed in media is extremely harmful to not only females but males as well [...] this issue at hand gets bigger by the year and the studies behind it prove that the subject is no laughing matter.

The common theme found among [sic] all articles is the simple fact that women are very much overtly sexualized in the media. This is always acknowledged whether an author believes it is harmful or not. All parties agree that in comparison to men, women are far more likely to be depicted and viewed as

sexual and are therefore objectified. The reports and writings of the authors and studies all show that this is a prevalent and pressing issue in society everywhere. They discuss the effects it has on everyone, which includes men, women, and children.

Most of the articles are similar in that they argue that this extreme [sic] sexualization of women is very harmful to all who view it. Almost all back up their claims and writings with scientific proof from studies conducted by reputable psychologists from various universities. Some simply write their own professional thoughts and opinions on the matter at hand. They write that women are being harmed by this trend not only mentally, but physically. The psych professionals and journalists claim that if this trend is not fought against and protested, it will only get progressively worse. Some offer solutions and advice to those who wish to combat this troubling issue, others simply inform [...]

All in all, these articles provide [...] professional opinions, facts, and evidence [for] my research paper. I plan to incorporate mostly the evidence and studies presented by the authors [...] Their opinions as professionals are valuable and hold ground against contradictory arguments. I also plan to use the Forbes article as a counterargument or perhaps just as a differing point of view. I intend to prove the point that women in fact are sexualized in media and that it is very harmful and prevalent. Every article has valuable information and comments that prove this point of view and illustrate just how

Figure 4: Sample Introduction from a Critical Source Analysis Assignment

As a planning method for the research paper, the introduction of the critical source analysis begins with the student's selected topic/discipline, identifies the common theme of all sources with a discussion of their similarities and/or differences (i.e., synthesis), and ends with an overall plan for the next assignment: the final/research paper. This WTL strategy also entails a communicative function as the writer produces a research proposal from the sources read and critiqued. As writing teachers, it may be considered a desirable gain to have students carefully establish a topic with authority: "The topic of this research essay is a [...] prevalent issue in the [fields] of psychology [and communication studies], the hypersexualization of women [in] media. It is an issue that has been discussed for years, yet only seems to be getting progressively worse." In addition, arriving at a common theme and drawing source connections display holistic interpretations of knowledge: "The common theme found among [sic] all articles is the simple fact that women are very much overtly sexualized in the media [...] All parties agree that in comparison to men, women are far more likely to be depicted and viewed as sexual and are therefore objectified." Though initial attempts here may be riddled with errors

or ineptitude, such effort would be satisfactory from a learner's standpoint as the student breaks through to the other, more academic, side of writing. Critical evaluations provide an opening for students to assume authority, make informed statements, and participate in academic dialogues that typically lead to focused research papers. The following sentences from Figure 4 also showcase the student writer's source integration, planned contributions, and authoritative grit in pursuing the same research topic for the final paper:

Most of the articles are similar in that they argue that this extreme [sic] sexualization of women is very harmful to all who view it ... The psych professionals and journalists claim that if this trend is not fought against and protested, it will only get progressively worse ... All in all, these articles provide [...] professional opinions, facts, and evidence [for] my research paper [...] I intend to prove the point that women in fact are sexualized in media and that it is very harmful and prevalent ... this is, unfortunately, normalized in our society.

However, a typical pitfall to avoid when writing source critiques is an inclination to comment only on whether or not students agree or disagree with an author's idea(s). The problem with this analytical strategy is that agreement or disagreement with an author does not necessarily translate to the source's reliability or credibility unless backed by textual evidence, source connections, or idea testing. Most of the time, student writers need to learn how to first suspend their personal judgment of an article's content before re-reading it for better comprehension, and with substantial research using other sources on the same topic, they may then distinguish multiple perspectives for cross-reference and decide when and how to incorporate their own voice in the analysis. Because knowledge claims are created by authors and are debatable, WAC proponents must help students see themselves as meaning-making participants with classroom activities that allow them to perform close rhetorical readings of texts. Toward this goal, I found that Coe's "Metaheur" group activity from the scaffolding activities section above assisted my students in this regard to help them grasp an assignment's

purpose prior to the drafting stage; this collaborative work gave them the opportunity to freely explore and discuss in class a sample text's subject matter, rhetorical context, and structure/style. Even the prewriting and peer review scaffolding exercises also proved to be beneficial in reinforcing an assignment's writing process.

Moreover, I observed that the evaluation standards section above needs adequate class introduction from the get-go for students to focus their textual critiques on the effectiveness of an author's argument and its transmission. For instance, writers might want to assess whether or not a source is accurate, significant, clear, fair, and logical (Behrens and Rosen 68). Critically engaging with source materials would promote better understanding of a writer's intent and the multiple contexts leading to textual production. Because expectations were clearly defined, my students' critical reflections at the end of the semester seem to exhibit a more demystified nuance of academic writing and message delivery in specialized ways (e.g., synthesis, organization, development, diction, format).

Figure 5 is a sample reflection of how synthesizing sources first came to be for the student writer featured in Figures 2-4. From this angle, the traditional approach of helping students enter academic conversations solely through knowledge acquisition in order to transfer more information into their papers no longer holds true. Evaluating sources, synthesizing them, creating knowledge based on these connections and/or gaps, etc.—all while following the conventions of academic writing—are necessary rhetorical skills that require proper guidance and adequate practice. Penrose and Geisler argue that “[students] need to understand the development of knowledge as a communal and continual process... [so] more interactive models of education in which a genuine rhetorical perspective [should] not only be taught but enacted” (517). Therefore, successfully initiating student writers into a discourse community necessitates the acquisition of disciplinary conventions through sustained research activities that involve rhetorical analysis of field-specific texts. Only after carefully unpacking the merits of an argument or information and its rhetorical conventions would a

writer be able to give personal responses to the views of the authors.

[In the] beginning [of] my English 2010 class, I knew nothing about academic synthesis. I was a stranger to the idea how to use sources in that particular way to strengthen my paper. When Dr. Bacabac mentioned synthesis of sources and how it would play a key role in our papers for the semester, I was very uncomfortable. I had no idea what synthesis was, let alone how it applied to using sources. I did not look forward to having to learn an entirely new way of writing. But as we read through the required textbook, my understanding and knowledge of synthesis began to grow. I was interested to try it out myself and see how it changed my arguments and ideas [...] By the time I completed my critical source analysis and research paper, my synthesis was as strong as ever. I was praised on my use of synthesis in my research, and it was again listed as one of my papers' strengths. My paper had notes informing me that my sources and synthesis were strong. After trying very hard to nail this new idea, I was able to accomplish just that. I am incredibly glad to have learned this technique. I feel that it not only gives me more to speak on when writing about a subject, but it boosts my argument's credibility. My papers appear much more professional.

Figure 5: Student Reflection Excerpt

From Research to Practice Within a WAC Conceptual Framework

Russell states that academics have yet to formulate an analysis of ways for writing to be meaningfully integrated into discipline-specific learning activities (*Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 281). Blending meaningful, process-oriented writing practices with WAC principles can stimulate specialized knowledge and disciplinary discourse. Different disciplines have distinct ways of communicating knowledge so students need to learn how to engage in cogent practices through academic research writing to allow them to identify “what is important to pay attention to ... how texts are organized, how sentences are constructed, and so on” (Hynd-Shanahan 94). The complexity of acquiring rhetorical knowledge across the disciplines through research inspires effective writing teachers to continually exact discussion of and familiarity with technical subjects to develop strong writers (Fisher and Frey 100).

Instructors from various disciplines, as well as writing instructors, need to make room for dynamic approaches that sustain continual growth for student writers with good research assignments. To such a degree, the critical source analysis assignment discussed above

meets the following criteria and revitalizes research within the framework of WAC:

Acquisition of specialized knowledge. Though not the only criterion, a good writing task serves as an archetype of discourse analysis that parallels the acquisition of specialized knowledge through critical reading. When composing source critiques, for example, students are given the opportunity to read sources for information and “observe disciplinary patterns in the way discourse is structured... [and] understand the various rhetorical moves that are accepted within particular discourse communities... [with] conventions of reference and of language” (McLeod, “The Pedagogy” 154). Writing a companion introductory piece after source critiques cements the acquisition of disciplinary content and discursive practices by recognizing common themes drawn from various critical evaluations. The entire procedure views writing as a strategy or “way of knowing” within the framework of a discipline (Carter, “Ways of Knowing” 213).

Moreover, the development of disciplinary expertise only comes from writing experiences on specialized knowledge (Carter, “What is *Advanced*” 72), so a good writing assignment also propels students to meet this goal. The critical source analysis complementing annotated bibliographies fulfills this purpose since students are encouraged to connect cognitive processes, texts, and language and observe how knowledge is organized and presented within specific subjects and disciplines (Fenwick 282). When students write source critiques and become more adept with the discourse, practices, and norms of a particular discipline (Pytash 528), then acquisition of specialized knowledge is admissible.

Exploration of disciplinary language. A valuable assignment also functions as a pre-research strategy in which students record questions/reviews about the content or structure of specialized texts to enable their familiarity with discourse conventions and pertinent social, historical, or normative contexts. Instead of simply reading and annotating sources when composing a research paper, for instance,

students who write source critiques before drafting actual research papers come to understand the importance of critical discourse analysis and the political implications of why various discourse communities use the language they use (Bizzell 388). Since all written texts are inherently ideological, students should know how to understand the writers' intent and social-historical-political contexts (Fang 106). Through critical thinking exercises, intermediate and advanced courses will then increase research/writing competencies. Corollary to this is the fact that critical writing assignments also promote dexterity through textual reflections/applications (Gazza and Hunker 280).

Close reading of discipline-specific texts enables student initiation to a disciplinary discourse community through academic research writing. The practice itself requires students to critique elements of a rhetorical frame; also called rhetorical reading, students unravel textual connotations by looking at the "author's identity, his or her purpose, the discursive or situational context to which the text is responding, and the intended audience" (Warren 393-95). First-year writing and upper-division course assignments should encourage rhetorical reading and/or exploration of linguistic practices to understand how writers represent disciplinary worldviews. While composition instructors outside a student's intended major will not be able to accurately evaluate what is or isn't successful disciplinary writing, they are still expected to help students acquire academic research writing skills to lay the groundwork for disciplinary literacy within discrete communities in the academy. Instructors in upper-division research courses continue by promoting content area literacy through more sophisticated, discipline-specific examinations of language and literacy so students will benefit from tasks that allow them to read, analyze, and emulate good models of specialized writing (Pytash 527-29).

Initiation into the discourse community. As a result, student initiation into the discipline or profession of the student choice becomes more imminent due to these types of exploratory exercises. Exposing them to "what's out there" and "why/to whom/how things are said"

in relation to a specialized topic would help them become more knowledgeable of not only the content, but also linguistic conventions of these texts. Students are encouraged to wrestle with the sources they find to join the discourse community and, in the process, understand pre-existing dialogues to get a good sense of specialized conversations upon their entrance. And providing several ways of engagement in disciplinary texts would allow their appropriation to, as David Bartholomae puts it, a specialized discourse (528). Bakhtinian scholar Don Bialostosky affirms that those who try to interpret, clarify, interrupt, or expose ambiguities of these texts actively take part in the dialogue themselves (187-96). Students also appreciate the importance of knowing “cultural codes” (Bean 173) as they attempt to practice newly-acquired skills through continuous field-specific writing habits in college. The textual connections, questions, and syntheses students produce during critical annotations are valuable skills for development and mastery from first-year writing to upper-division core courses.

Emphasis on the writing process. As part of the research process, students need to explore disciplinary language through various activities, including assigned exploratory writing tasks, critical annotations of specialized sources, and critical reflections on what constitutes effective or ineffective academic writing. The latter suggests a process analysis that sets up the transfer of any knowledge and/or skill acquired to subsequent writing (Smith et al. 48) and allows students to voice their own thoughts to establish their authority. After submitting the critical source analysis assignment, students might be allowed to interview faculty in the disciplines to further explore topic selections and source annotations to aid their reflection pieces and/or research papers. These types of engagements with field experts enable student initiation into discourse communities.

Altogether, these pedagogical techniques combine two complementary approaches of WAC: writing to learn *and* writing to communicate (McLeod, “The Pedagogy” 151). Annotated bibliographies, critical source analysis, and other exploratory

writing tasks or reflection assignments typically comprise the WTL component, though they may also assume communicative functions at certain points depending on the assignment context; on the other hand, writing research papers, long reports, and multimodal/final presentations embody writing to communicate. Russell notes a British WAC research project led by James Britton and his associates where students had sparse opportunities to do expressive writing (or WTL) and stunted their abilities to develop naturally (*Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 278). In this vein, introduction to stylistic WID would be inherent if larger writing assignments are broken into “smaller, sequenced assignments that logically build toward the final assignment. . . [with] feedback at multiple points in the sequencing process” (Gazza and Hunker 280). Providing opportunities for prewrites and peer reviews as shown in the Scaffolding Activities section above enhances the process approach of WAC and helps demystify disciplinary discourse with appropriate ways of addressing a specialized audience. To make overt the analysis of language use, discourse features, and rhetorical patterns of discipline-specific texts, scaffolding activities must be explored to enable collaborative discussions and train student writers to be more mindful of distinct writing patterns based on heuristics.

These attributes of a WAC assignment help student writers become more familiar with the discourse conventions of the academy and their field. Researching about a disciplinary topic bolsters a student’s acquisition of specialized knowledge while facilitating exposure to its conventions through various sources. The student then becomes more comfortable with the content and communicative modes of disciplinary writers and slowly gets initiated into the discourse community. Concurrently, the writing processes do not only highlight our students’ content and skills acquisition, but also reinforce their confidence to join discourse communities and argue thesis statements with authority when writing field-specific papers. If this strategy starts at the first-year level and continues on to upper-division courses, much is to be gained from the critical source analysis assignment.

Conclusion

In terms of pedagogy, I believe that faculty who designate this source critique assignment would help sustain disciplinary literacy breakthroughs through research. Previous studies that examine student writing practices have been influenced by discourse-analyses of how professionals write/learn to write (Russell, “Where Do the Naturalistic Studies” 262). The proposed critical source analysis assignment contributes to the value of research in WAC pedagogy with its central goal of promoting the acquisition of specialized languages and academic discourse conventions. As students try to join discipline-specific conversations from a locus of inquiries, a pre-research task that facilitates exposure to competent thinking and writing helps them become more familiar with specialized subject matters and rhetorical modes before drafting an actual research paper. Writing assignments that involve reading comprehension and critical analysis certainly mediate existing barriers for student writers to enter and engage in professional treatises more adequately.

Traditional forms of instruction, especially involving research, become less pedantic with critical discussions and writing exercises. Because students are actively engaged in reading/critiquing source materials, classes emerge as “less stiff, formal, and dependent on lectures” (Fulwiler 61). Students need to acquire the basic principles of field-specific thinking and writing to participate in a discourse community, and I believe that assigning critical source analysis is a necessary component in the research process.

From a WAC curriculum standpoint, we need to ascertain multiple techniques to drive our program and help our students join the conversations of professional discourse communities: “In what ways will graduates of our institutions use language, and how shall we teach them to use it in those ways?” (Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 307). This charge ultimately reinforces our job as teachers employing WAC methods to create learning spaces that take learner autonomy to the next level. In other words, we can seize opportunities to implement the heart and philosophy of WAC, which is to help students become more active, independent learners

(Panitz viii). The main problem among several WAC programs, though, is the lack of sustained professional development efforts to inform faculty with updated WAC strategies that address “how writing can be used to teach critical and disciplinary thinking, how writing both shapes and defines a field, and how students can use writing to read and enter these fields as well as others” (Mullin 195). Our mission to continually shift our methodologies and teaching paradigms needs to happen with engaged faculty across the disciplines and with institutional support.

Because critical source analysis is endorsed here to play a nascent role in first-year writing and undergraduate research, composition teachers and faculty across the disciplines can share their WAC experiences as they implement this assignment to complement annotated bibliographies. Effective instructional practice for cross-disciplinary skills development is vital for WAC programs, so collegial conversations on learning and teaching scholarship will continually improve our students’ writing habits and uphold our collective sense of academic identity (Buzzi et al. 480-81; Jones and Thomas 58). When implementing this exercise in first-year writing and/or upper-level major courses, we can maintain flexibility and openness to foster pedagogical understandings in the midst of interdisciplinary conversations (Mullin 197). In effect, students might actually piece together their research tasks as parts of a whole due to consistent WAC program requirements (Townsend 549). These linkages will allow both composition specialists and disciplinary experts to operate hand in hand in nurturing WAC principles for student growth.

Finally, what is described here is the potential of critical source analysis in first-year writing and advanced major courses to prompt field-specific research and enhance the acquisition of disciplinary writing. Since this approach aims to bolster student preparation for term papers, senior theses, or capstone research, I suggest that future research be done (e.g., case studies or content analysis using grounded theory method) to further substantiate its success. These data on student performance in research situations will certainly

promote the application of WAC principles across the disciplines and revitalize undergraduate research as a whole.

Note

¹This study was considered exempt from the Institutional Review Board of Dixie State University. Student work in Figures 2 to 5 is reproduced by permission.

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APPENDIX
INSTRUCTIONS FOR RICHARD COE'S "METAHEUR" GROUP ACTIVITY
(ADAPTED AND MODIFIED FROM COE, 1996)

Length Two 50-minute class sessions

Materials

- Four groups in a class
- Four different types of specialized writing samples—e.g., a feature article from popular magazines, an academic journal article, a cookbook recipe, a technical writing document (manual, proposal, policy, etc.) → *Note*: For non-computer lab classrooms, the number of photocopies for each type will depend on the number of members per group (OR upload .pdf copies in a course management system if class is taught in a computer-mediated room)
- Overhead projector
- A blank transparency and marker for each group OR a group discussion thread in a course management system (if class is taught in a computer-mediated room)

Suggested Outline

First Session

Distribute one writing sample for each group and allow a few minutes for students to read. For non-computer lab classrooms, each group member should have one photocopy each OR download .pdf if class is taught in a computer-mediated room.

After reading, distribute a heuristic list based on Richard Coe's "Metaheur" writing assignment. Here are some items from the article "Advanced Composition as a Fishing Pole" in *Landmark Essays on Advanced Composition* (Coe 213-14):

- Subject Matter—What kind of material is usually treated? How is the writing focused in this discourse? Are there certain key terms, root metaphors, or standard analogies that recur in this discourse?
- Rhetorical Context—What basic purpose does the writing serve? Who reads this type of writing? Why? Where is this type of writing usually published?
- Structure and Style—Is there a standard format or typical structure for the whole writing or any part of it? How long is the writing in your sample? Are there any structures that are noticeably avoided? What other significant features characterize this type of writing?

Second Session (continuation)

1. Direct students to go to their groups or form small circles for group discussion.
2. Ask groups to re-read/scan the writing sample within their groups and discuss their ideas to respond to the heuristic guidelines (a member assigned to read aloud to the whole group is encouraged).
3. Each group will create a mini-manual for people who might want to do that type of specialized writing. They should rely on their analyses of the sample discourse assigned to their group. Each group writes down the highlights of their responses to the heuristic, either on transparencies *OR* on group discussion threads.
4. Each group will present their work to the class. Whole class discussion follows as the teacher emphasizes main points brought up for each specific type of writing.

