Critical Thinking 101: An information literacy module for undergraduate seminars

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# LITERACY LESSON & PRESENTATION: CRITICAL THINKING 101

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COURSE OVERVIEW

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS
The audience for this course is undergraduate freshmen at the college or university level. Undergraduate students are a diverse body made up of the traditional middle class American high-school graduate, as well as adult learners, first-generation students, veterans, and international students. Many exhibit difficulties in understanding the research and writing process required at the college level, and have not yet acquired the critical information skills necessary for school, work or personal life. Undergraduates tend to be familiar with the Internet, and turn to the web as a resource of first choice to find information, particularly relying on Google, but are unfamiliar with the wealth of other resources available through the library and university, and have no idea of how to critically examine the information that they do find. Moreover, many students have been implicitly educated not to transgress boundaries, although it is through the questioning of societal norms that societies and individuals are transformed. The course will be limited to 15 students. It is the intention to embed the development of these skills within the context of critical discussion of broadly applicable scientific, cultural, and socio-political issues.

LITERACY NEEDS
Learners lack the information literacy skills required at the college level i.e. “the 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.\(^\)"

LEARNING GOALS
1. Encourage the broad exploration and appraisal of scientific, cultural, and socio-political issues*
2. Encourage independent, critical research and reading and use of diverse, credible resources+
3. Promote the skills of rational thought, persuasion, analysis, interpretation and evaluation*
4. Promote maturity of thought and clarity of expression*
5. Encourage critical self-reflection
6. Build self-actualization
7. Empower and prepare learners to deal with complexity, diversity and change#

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Students will:
1. Learn to identify issues and formulate queries and hypotheses
2. Make a research plan for a particular topic
3. Search for information and data from books, scholarly articles, and various internet resources, using databases, print and web resources
4. Determine the relevance of search results
5. Evaluate the credibility of sources and recognize bias
6. Organize the information collected and analyze and evaluate arguments
7. Synthesize the information, process understanding and draw conclusions
8. Communicate ideas, arguments and reflections, rationally and clearly, in a variety of formats
9. Effectively engage with or challenge existing understandings to make meaning for themselves

STANDARDS – ACRL INFORMATION LITERACY FRAMEWORK
1. Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
2. Information Creation as a Process
3. Information Has Value
4. Research as Inquiry
5. Scholarship as Conversation
6. Searching as Strategic Exploration


\(^\)ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education
MY RESOURCES


UNIT DESIGN - USER

BIG IDEA
Each one of us is capable and indeed responsible for identifying and fulfilling our own information needs. We each have a role to play in a community of learners, and in progressing towards a thinking, just society. This unit contains 5 lessons which are to be taught by an academic librarian. The unit introduces information literacy skills in a learning environment that is focused on change, complexity and diversity. Using a scaffolding technique, each lesson builds on skills learned in the previous lesson to foster the desired learning outcomes. The lesson plans pre-suppose the existence of a previous week’s lesson where the instructor introduces the syllabus to the class, explains expectations, conducts icebreaker exercises, introduces initial work (brief lecture on subject, polling views), carries out an initial assessment of learners’ existing knowledge, interests and special needs, and introduces the librarian and the role he/she will play. The course will continue with the instructor after the 5 lessons and the librarian serving as a resource for the instructor and the students.

UNDERSTAND
Identified Need - Incoming freshmen lack basic information literacy skills. This is a normative need that is explicitly recognized in the ACRL Framework, and which has been identified by a number of research studies.

Learner Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Prior Knowledge</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Freshmen</td>
<td>Do enough to pass/graduate</td>
<td>*Exposure in high school courses to some history/ current affairs</td>
<td>Low intrinsic motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short attention span</td>
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<td>Subject matter seen as low priority</td>
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<td>Diverse backgrounds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May not view course as substantive</td>
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<tr>
<td>interests &amp; learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Little to no experience writing research papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>styles</td>
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STRUCTURE

Target
- Identify and articulate an issue or problem of significance (whether practical, theoretical, philosophical, social, political, or cultural),
- Recognize that problems can be examined from a multiplicity of perspectives.
- Conduct independent research
- Evaluate sources for credibility.
- Synthesize and critique information and draw conclusions.

Involve and Extend
Use a variety of strategies

1. Tactile
2. Audio-visual (Aesthetic)
3. Group work
4. Direct Instruction
5. Class Discussion
ENGAGE

Message

We live in a diverse society, and that society is stronger when a multiplicity of experiences and perspectives are acknowledged and integrated into the way we live and learn. Developing information literacy allows us to evaluate diverse perspectives critically and ethically, and make meaningful decisions about how to live.

Materials – Lesson overviews

LESSON 1 (Week 2) - Scholarship is a Conversation
Looking at things from different perspectives to identify and solve problems

This lesson is designed to teach the ACRL Information Literacy Framework threshold concept “Scholarship is a Conversation”, within the context that we live in a diverse society and need to listen to diverse viewpoints in identifying and solving problems. The anticipatory set includes a video explores culture as a lens and reinforces the idea that diversity of perspective is beneficial, and exercises that demonstrate the point that persons from different backgrounds utilize different approaches. The text gives a historical picture of diversity and conflict in American society. The main exercise, done in groups compares two articles around a single topic. Students are asked to identify the author and his credentials, as well as the sources used for each article as an introductory step to specific information literacy skills (identification of an issue, understanding sources). In asking students to identify the author and his credentials the ACRL Information Literacy Framework threshold concept ‘Authority is Constructed and Contextual’ is touched on. A chart is then created on the whiteboard of this information and students are asked how many persons are ‘speaking’ in these two articles, to illustrate that scholarship is a conversation, and each writer engages with the work of others to produce new knowledge or critique existing ways of problem solving. The Patterson article, in particular, deals with how diverse ways of thinking about a particular problem are useful reinforcing the underlying idea of diversity both in society and scholarship. The exit exercise tests whether learners can identify and articulate an issue and grounds this exercise in their own personal experience. The Homework Assignment builds on information literacy skill of understanding sources, by exposing learners to research databases, and results in a curated list of databases by topic, available to the entire class.

Prep: Read
Text: Chapters 13 (The Cold War and the American Century (or The Russians Are Coming, The Russians are Coming)) and 14 (New Challenges for a Changing America (or Cut Your Hair and Turn Down That Music)).

- Erick Eckholm: Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn
- Orlando Patterson: A Poverty of the Mind

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Students will understand Scholarship as Conversation by examining two articles on a related topic and identifying the sources cited by the writers as well as the writer’s authority. Through this exercise, students will appreciate that 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. Students will come to appreciate that the USA is a diverse society and different ways of thinking must be brought together to solve problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Instruction</td>
<td>On the Bus Exercise - England vs. America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Activity</td>
<td>Seattle umbrella example</td>
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<td>Direct Instruction</td>
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### Instructional Input & Modeling

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak briefly about the content of the assigned readings and explain the authority of the author.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Focusing on Chapter 14 <em>New Challenges for a Changing America</em> (or <em>Cut Your Hair and Turn Down That Music</em>) point out the sources he uses to bring across the points he is making:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- MLK I have a dream speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Legislation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Case Law</td>
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### Checking for Understanding & Guided Practice

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<th>Activity: Group Exercise and Class Discussion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erick Eckholm: Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orlando Patterson: A Poverty of the Mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Half of the class will look at one article each, explain the identity of the writer, identify the sources cited and make a list. The list will be shared with the class and then we will discuss how many people are “speaking” on this issue to reinforce that Scholarship is a conversation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential Discussion Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What role do author’s own opinions and experience?</td>
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<td>- What do we learn about American society?</td>
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### Individual Practice

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<th>Exercise – Diversity wheel</th>
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<tr>
<td>A class of students is asked to write a research paper on ‘How to succeed in life’. Choose a facet of diversity from the inner or outer wheel that has applies to you personally and write a single paragraph on how it might affect your experience in carrying out the assignment? Share with the class orally.</td>
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### Homework Assignment

- Tomorrow you will be assigned to groups based on the topics you wrote about. Make an appointment with a librarian to identify the best research resources for the aspects of diversity that you wrote about. All group members must attend this meeting.

- The group must write a short discussion post recommending 2 resources. The post should:
  1. be written clearly in a digital format 450-700 words long.
  2. include a summary of each resource;
  3. give an explanation of how the group chose these resources;
  4. include a statement explaining why the group chose these resources, and how to access them (e.g. a link to the resource).
  5. 1 group member must post the paper to the discussion board, no later than 5 pm the day prior to next week’s class.
  6. In class each person will be required to have an article or similar resource from each database that provides insight on one aspect of diversity that you chose in this week’s session.
LESSON 2 (Week 3) - Evaluating Information

This lesson on “Evaluating Information” builds on the prior skill of understanding sources. The preparatory reading gives students an overview of what constitutes primary and secondary sources. In class, students are asked to start a KWL chart to explain what they know about sources and what they want to learn - the KWL chart will be completed in the course management software anonymously. This is followed by a lecture introducing and explaining the difference between primary and secondary sources with specific examples of primary sources, and using the list of databases built from the homework assignment as the basis for understanding secondary sources. Following this, the teacher introduces students to the CRAAP test and models its application using the Patterson article from the previous class. To check for understanding a short online quiz is given (not graded/not anonymous) which tests students’ understanding of secondary sources and the CRAAP test. As an exit exercise, students complete the “what have you learned” section on the KWL chart.

Prep: Review the module 1 at https://www.library.illinois.edu/village/primarysource/mod1/pg15.htm

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<th>Activity</th>
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| Objectives             | 1. Students will learn the different types of sources by an interactive class discussion on primary sources, and completing an online quiz on secondary sources.  
2. Students will learn to evaluate information using the CRAAP test. |      |
| Anticipatory Set       | KWL Chart – K What do you know about sources?  
KWL CHART – W What do you want to know about sources | 5    |
| Individual Work        | Powerpoint presentation covering the following:  
Primary Source - a record (document, photograph, video, interview, speech, original film footage, research data etc.) providing firsthand testimony or direct evidence about a topic or question under investigation. Secondary Source: a work that is produced based on primary sources, usually later in time e.g. books, encyclopaedias, scholarly articles and newspaper articles. Images of and links to the following examples will be shown -  
• University of Iowa Special Collections holds several written demands by students signed in blood not to allow recruiting for the Vietnam War on the campus  
• The State Historical Society of Iowa holds Personal Collections of WWII Service Personnel between 1942-1946  
• The African American Museum of Iowa’s collection the Only One – As part of its 2011 exhibit with the Johnson County Historical Society, the AAMI captured oral histories that focused on the experience of being the only one in the classroom, on a sports team, in the office, and more – listen to some of the oral histories. | 15   |
| Instructional Input    |                                |      |
| • Aesthetic Instruction|                                                                               |
| • Interactive Class Discussion|                                                                               |
| Guided Practice        | Demonstrate the CRAAP Test http://library.csuchico.edu/help/source-or-information-good on Orlando Patterson ‘A Poverty of the Mind’.  
Students will have worksheets to follow along, and evaluate the article/resource each student brought to class. | 10   |
| Checking for Understanding| Online quiz: Using the article/resource you brought to class from one of the databases, identify what type of source it is, why it is useful for research on your topic and if it passes the CRAAP test. | 15   |
| Individual Work        | Wrap up Exercise – COMPLETE KWL CHART – L What have you learned about sources from today’s lesson? | 5    |
LESSON 3 (Week 4) – Research as Inquiry

This lesson is designed to teach the ACRL Information Literacy Framework threshold concept “Research as Inquiry”. The anticipatory set uses videos from the Oklahoma State University online learning series “Inform Your Thinking”. The second video uses the topic of climate change as an example, and the core activity of this lesson takes this further, with the class making a research plan led by the teacher around the topic formatted as a typical essay question. Exemplifying the inquiry-based nature of research, the videos and the collaborative research planning exercise demonstrate the formulation of research questions, diverse approaches in considering the topic, and the process of research that can branch off into disparate questions, and the narrowing of focus to consider one or a few questions as devices to interrogate the topic. Implicitly the ACRL Information Literacy Framework threshold concept ‘Searching as Strategic Exploration’ is touched on. Students are then given 20 minutes of class time to start work on their research plan for the Literature Review assignment which is to be submitted after the conclusion of the unit. The teacher uses this time to provide guidance to each student.

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<th>Activity</th>
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| Objective                       | 1. Students will learn how to make a research plan by building one together as a class, guided by the teacher.  
2. Students will prepare a research plan for a topic of their choosing |      |
| Anticipatory Set & Instructional Input | Watch –  
• Inform Your Thinking: Episode 4 – It’s All about the questions [https://youtu.be/PDsAjP3tNzk](https://youtu.be/PDsAjP3tNzk)  
• Inform Your Thinking: Episode 6 – Search Smarter [https://youtu.be/SreCuGxQlI](https://youtu.be/SreCuGxQlI) | 10   |
| Instructional Input & Modelling | Class discussion  
Build a research plan together around this topic:  
In 2016 Thomas L. Friedman reported Monique Barbut, who heads the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification, as saying “Desertification acts as the trigger, and climate change acts as an amplifier of the political challenges we are witnessing today: economic migrants, interethnic conflicts and extremism.” He further reported the view of Adamou Chaifou, Niger’s minister of environment that it “is a consequence of climate change” — caused, he adds, primarily by emissions from the industrial North, not from Niger or its neighbors.” Are their conclusions justified?  
• What is the time-period under consideration?  
• Where can we find preliminary reading?  
• What are the perspectives and disciplines that might inform our questions?  
• What are our search questions? What additional questions arise?  
• How can we narrow these questions to a set of closely related questions?  
• Can we write a single question that brings these together?  
• What are our potential sources for deeper reading?  
• What sources are cited in our initial sources?  
• Are there any governmental or international organizations that publish information on our topic?  
Discuss  
1. Quoting  
2. Paraphrasing  
3. Summarizing  
4. Citation and formats | 30   |
| Guided Practice & Checking for Understanding | Start work on your research plan for your Literature review to be submitted at the end of the unit. The Literature review may be on one the topics you chose from the diversity wheel or another topic of your choice. **The Research Plan is to be submitted by 5 pm before the next class.** Feedback will be provided by the day before Week 6 class. | 20   |
LESSON 4 (Week 5) – Credibility and Bias

This lesson uses the hyperdoc model (further explanation, if desired is set out in Document 4), and is designed to teach the ACRL Information Literacy Framework threshold concept “Information has Value”. The context will be the electoral process, and, in particular, the issue of fake news in the 2016 presidential election. The readings from the text deals with historical US elections, and yellow journalism, with further background provided by the Elections Timeline. The class includes a lecture covering the importance of evaluating internet resources for credibility and bias, a class exercise around credibility of sources about issues that arose in the 2016 election, and a group assignment designed to identify bias in various media outlets. Each group submits an outline at the end of class which will be used as a framework for a group presentation in the following class. A media literacy quiz is used as an exit survey. Extension and reflection are provided with a video and reading assigned for after the class, and online discussion board questions for each student to answer.

Prep – Read Chapters 1-3 and 5 of the text plus pages 169-172. Review Elections Timeline

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instructional Content</th>
<th>Time</th>
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| Objective | 1. Students will understand that information has value and can be used to achieve particular outcomes, by reviewing historical examples of how journalism influenced behavior in the American public sphere, and comparing it to how various sources of information influenced the 2016 US election.  
2. Students will develop the skill of evaluating information for bias by hands on review of reports on the same topic from national newspapers of different leanings.  
3. Students will be exposed to other societal factors that influence elections and policy, by reviewing a video and article over the week following the class session. | |
| Engage | Lecture on why evaluating Credibility and Bias is important in using internet sources [https://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/evaluating-web-resources/](https://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/evaluating-web-resources/) | 25 |
| Explore | [https://twitter.com/vlotero/status/809098741647077376?lang=en](https://twitter.com/vlotero/status/809098741647077376?lang=en) (may be omitted) | |
| Explain | How People are Persuaded  
1. List 3 issues that were important in the 2016 election  
2. List sources where people sought information – credible (e.g. BBC) Why would you classify a source as credible or not credible. What tool learned earlier in this module can you use to assess the credibility of sources? | 10 |
| Elaborate | Group work (3 groups of 5/6 students). I will give each group links to articles around the same topic in 3 nationally recognized newspapers of different leanings (e.g. Wall Street Journal – conservative; New York Times – liberal; Dallas Morning News – center), and ask them to submit an outline on the articles at the end of class and a Powerpoint presentation at the beginning of the next class.  
o Provide a proper citation of and link to the stories.  
o Identify the author and his credentials  
o Summarize the central idea(s) in your own words  
o Identify the arguments put forward in each article  
o Identify what the arguments are based on - Is there any bias? Is this a credible source? | 20 |
| Evaluate | Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 49 68 46 to answer the media literacy survey | 5 |
| Extend Review at home | 1. Watch Video [What Influences Policy](https://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/evaluating-web-resources/)  
| Reflect | Does the average citizen comprehend how and what influences elections and policy decisions and make appropriate decisions accordingly? What kind of literacy do we need to confront the challenges presented? Post your answer to the online discussion board | |
**LESSON 5 (Week 6) – Communication**

Lesson 5 – Communication Skills are practiced in this lesson. Each group makes a 10-minute presentation on the topic and news outlets they assessed in the previous class. Research plans are returned to the students with the teacher's feedback. The remainder of class time is used as lab time for students to work on their Literature Review with the teacher providing guidance to each student during this time.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>1. Students will learn how to organize information by preparing a Powerpoint presentation covering 2. Students will learn how to work collaboratively by working with a group to prepare the presentation. 3. Students will develop oral communication skills by presenting before an audience of their peers. 4. Students will understand that in carrying out scholarly research they are embarking on a process of inquiry and entering a conversation that started before them by carrying out research for a literature review. 5. Students will demonstrate their ability to use the skills taught in previous lessons on conducting research, evaluating sources, and analysing information by researching for and writing a literature review. 6. Students will develop written communication skills by writing a literature review.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Group Presentations**

| Individual Work: | Lab Time for Homework Assignment – Write a Literature review covering 3 credible sources on a topic of your choice. You may use the diversity topic chosen earlier in the module or choose an entirely new topic. Students will use their research plan, modifying it as appropriate, to guide their research, and refer to the list of databases and KWL chart as resources. Students should also utilize the library databases generally, in addition to those in the discussion post. The Librarian and Instructor will consult with each student during this time. To help evaluate your sources use the rubric here [http://lis101.com/research-skills-and-exercises/](http://lis101.com/research-skills-and-exercises/). Homework Assignment to be submitted by 5 pm the day before next week’s class. |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Identify the central idea. |                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 20   |
| 2. Discuss the arguments raised. |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |      |
| 3. Analyze and evaluate the information. |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |      |
| 4. State your conclusions |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |      |

**DESIRED INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES**

By the conclusion of the unit students should appreciate:

1. Scholarship as Conversation
2. Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
3. Research as Inquiry
4. Searching as Strategic Exploration
5. Information Has Value

and, as a result should also understand Information Creation as a Process.
REFLECT
The original plan was to design this as a 3-lesson unit. However, after teaching a portion of lesson 1, it’s clear that sufficient time needs to be afforded for learners to go through the material and truly grasp the concept. I have therefore deleted some portions of some lessons, and extended the unit to 5 lessons. While these lessons scaffold on each other, I am confident that each of lessons 1-4 can be taught as an individual unit for specific skills to be learned.

Lesson 1 – After teaching a portion of this lesson, it’s clear that 15 minutes is not sufficient for the Group Activity, so I have extended this to 20 minutes in the final lesson plan. The exit exercise tests whether learners can identify and articulate an issue in an oral presentation format. The paragraph they present orally is also to be posted to the discussion board in the course management system, so it can provide an opportunity to reflect and revise for the following lessons.

Lesson 2 – The KWL Chart indicates whether learners have gained valuable knowledge about research and critique of sources. This will be done in the course management system and will provide an opportunity to see any continuing gaps in the learners’ understanding of sources which can be addressed in follow up sessions or one to one with students outside of class time.

Lesson 3 – Learners are asked to work on a written research plan. This will show the development in learners’ skills for making a plan for finding information, and understanding of the type of sources, and the need to use a diversity of resources. This is done in a guided practice session so the teacher can see exactly what kind of level of help each student needs.

Lesson 4 – The outline will demonstrate whether learners have grasped basic skills needed to evaluate information. Since this is group work submitted it will give an indication of where the class has reached in their understanding of how to evaluate information, and be used to tweak the unit for further cohorts.

Lesson 5 – The presentation showcases teamwork and communication skills and the Literature Review tests whether students have built on prior knowledge to develop critical analysis skills. The course lecturer and the librarian can use these as reflection points for developing future lessons and assignments.

Self-Reflection after each lesson
1. What were the weaknesses of the lesson?
2. What were the strengths of the lesson?
3. Did the objective concur with the lesson taught?
4. Did the class make the connections between the objectives and the lesson taught?
5. Was the content and time frame appropriate (too much time; too little content)?
6. Did the activities fit the content being taught?
7. Did the assessment used in the lesson provide adequate information about the learning?
8. Were the classroom management techniques appropriate?
9. What would you have changed about the lesson?
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


In her 1993 work on insurgent educational theory bell hooks advocates passionately for the use of education to transform the lives of learners, by equipping them with tools to engage with their ‘lived realities’. Casting her net widely for learners, hooks deliberately writes in a style accessible beyond academia. She candidly shares personal experiences, even painful episodes and failures, inviting the reader into her own lived experience as a teacher, intellectual and feminist activist. Central to her pedagogy are 1) the importance of seeing a learner as whole person and teaching that person, rather than merely imparting a uniform unit of information to be stored and retrieved (characterized by her mentor Paolo Freire as the ‘banking model’ of education); and 2) giving students agency and voice rather than establishing an authoritarian and hierarchical learning structure in the classroom. Important messages in this book include the need to value theory/intellectualism and to unite this with concrete practice by conveying it in a manner that can be universally understood; the importance of understanding members of marginalized groups as complex and differentiated persons rather than viewing such groups in an essentialist and monolithic manner; and the need to develop a practice of mutual understanding, growth and common effort in place of totalizing generalizations based on one’s individual experience. Deliberately, bell hooks tackles the power structures and inscribed hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality in academia, to work toward a passionate and liberatory pedagogy. Ironically, writing over two decades ago, hooks states specifically that ‘the growing fascism in the world, even in so-called “liberal” circles, reminds us that our lives, our work, must be an example’. This work would benefit from an update to further explore and theorize on the tensions that inevitably arise between advocating for a particular group (African-Americans, women, black women etc.) and addressing broad social inequities on a principled basis. Nonetheless, in forcefully contending that we cannot divorce the intellectual enterprise from what is actually happening in our society, our nation, and our world, Teaching to Transgress offers a point of view that is now more important than ever for those who wish to fashion a model of US collegiate education that has the potential to transform society. This work strongly influenced the design of this unit as a contextual learning experience.


Bales’ history text provides an insightful examination of the growth and development of US society. Taking a humorous approach to its content, at no time does Bales sacrifice fact, thoroughness, or credible source material. The chapters in the text, though wry at times, bring to life the circumstances and situations that a new nation and those within and outside it found themselves confronted with. Bales does not shy away from the more uncomfortable aspects of US history but confronts them head on, showing the making of a diverse US society. The inclusion of assessment exercises at the end of each chapter provide material from which to draw discussion or assignment questions from. This text would be appropriate for inclusion in a wide variety of college teaching settings, including history, sociology, literacy and philosophy. The accessible writing style would also make it a good resource for public libraries and high schools. This Open Access text is freely available through CUNY Academic Works and forms part of the United States History Commons.


The Cambridge International A/AS Level Syllabus is for the multidisciplinary ‘General Paper’ course aimed at developing students’ ‘thinking and reasoning skills, and maturity of thought’. While emphasizing that the General Paper is not a test of general knowledge, the design of the syllabus is targeted at enabling students to become lifelong learners and critical thinkers. With clear, concise aims and objectives, and a wide range of suggested topics for exploration, this Syllabus is a valuable resource for anyone interested in teaching information literacy or critical analysis skills to a body of learners. The Syllabus was invaluable in developing the learning goals for this unit. Having benefited from instruction preparing me for the Cambridge International A Level General Paper Exam 1995, I highly recommend this resource.
Patterson’s Op-Ed piece in the New York Times back in 2006 provides an interesting perspective on scholarship. He argues that in seeking to solve social problems, sociologists should embrace perspectives from disciplines beyond socioeconomics. In particular, Patterson points to cultural studies as an area that has long been ignored by social scientists and economists. Patterson willingly concedes that cultural attitudes explain only a part of the problem and argues that “[i]n academia, we need a new, multidisciplinary approach”. Drawing on a wide variety of sources to make his point, and advocating for a diversity of perspective, Patterson’s article provides an excellent teaching tool on diversity in society and scholarship. This article, as well as the previous article to which it formed a rebuttal (Eckholm, Erick. "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn". New York Times March 20, 2006 (accessed November 10, 2017) http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/20/us/plight-deepens-for-black-men-studies-warn.html) provides the core activity for Lesson 1 of this unit – Scholarship is a Conversation.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) offers a comprehensive set of resources for teaching information literacy. The Framework’s starting point is a set of ‘interconnected core concepts’ with sound theory underlying these, and is expanded to a range of non-prescriptive knowledge practices and dispositions that can enhance learning for students. Aptly named, this resource provides a framework for the development of curricula and instructional objects for librarians or for librarians to collaborate with faculty. Building on this, a toolkit accompanies the framework, containing a wide variety of learning objects and lesson plans, found in the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox – a repository for these tools. The Framework is freely available for use in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.