Pedagogical Strategies for Supporting Students Working with Source Material

Issues to consider:
- There is a continuum of student practice ranging from submitting someone else’s work as one’s own to unintentional misuse of sources (which happens for a variety of reasons).
- Source-based writing is socially situated, discipline-specific, and learned over time.
- Expectations for essays and research papers are often unspoken in the classroom—from format and style to specifics about citation systems in use (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.).
- Learning to cite is not just about understanding where to put periods and quotation marks; it’s also about understanding the deeper disciplinary conversations that citations signal. Further, there are different cultural and contextual expectations for source use.
- Students often mis-hear citation “rules” that they believe to be true.

Preparation:

*Remember that no one thing we do will be enough to help all students use sources properly. What we can do is combine various approaches, and focus on student learning. We can use strategies that help students know what TO do, not just what NOT to do.*

1. **Make your expectations and policies clear** (both in your syllabus and through class discussion).

2. **Provide explicit opportunities for students to understand the reasons to care about source use and what good source use looks like in your discipline**
   - Discuss a piece of your own writing with students (describe where and why you used sources and how you chose them)
   - Discuss a journal article in your field, paying specific attention to the use of sources (instead of, or in addition to, the content of the article); have students analyze the information found in each bibliographic citation and why it is there.
   - Discuss a variety of examples of citation practice (from poor to good) and the criteria one can use to determine if sources have been cited properly.

3. **Provide students with strategic practice**
   - Give students discrete, low-stakes opportunities to develop their ability to quote, paraphrase, summarize, and cite correctly
     - For example, the American Historical Society has developed a series of exercises that can be adapted for use in other disciplines as appropriate (attached).

4. **Construct assignments to minimize the opportunity for plagiarism**
   - Use specific, concrete assignments that fit into the context of your course (this will minimize the chance students can download generic papers from a paper mill website or get all their source material from Wikipedia)
   - Stage research papers: require proposals, annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, and/or rough drafts.
Feedback:

Perhaps most important is the timing of our feedback—if we can offer students a sense of their source use during the writing process, then they have a chance to revise their work.

1. When students write, provide them with feedback and tools to check their own use of sources

   - Provide teacher feedback to students on source-use and content in drafts and/or sections of an assignment, then provide only a grade with minimal feedback on final essays/projects.
   
   - Require peer review of drafts to provide authors’ feedback about their source use.
     - The "Crayons/Highlighters and Sources" exercise (attached) helps students to identify the different "voices" in their writing and to see how well they've integrated sources and woven them together.
   
   - Support students in using SafeAssign to identify potential source-use problems in their writing.

2. Utilize resources outside of the classroom

   - The Boise State Writing Center can work with students in your classes on assignments in general and on source use in particular. (If you have certain requirements for a paper and are unsure how the Writing Center can help, contact Clyde Moneyhun, Writing Center Director: clydemoneyhun@boisestate.edu or 426-3585. The more he and the consultants in the Center know about an assignment and a discipline's conventions, the better prepared they will be to work with your students.)

   - Albertsons Library: Reference librarians can be very helpful in supporting your students in finding a wide variety of useful sources for their assignments.
Giving Students Practice with Source-Use in Their Writing

An example from the American Historical Association
This is an example of one exercise that might be adapted; others are found on the website.

http://www.historians.org/governance/pd/Curriculum/plagiarism_exercises.htm#undergra

Exercise 1: Summarizing, Paraphrasing, Quoting, and Citing
The exercise below provides students with a text and asks them to paraphrase, summarize, and cite it. The instructor must then evaluate their work. To give students more control over the assignment, instructors can ask them to work with an Internet text of their own choosing. Students must understand the difference between paraphrasing and summarizing before attempting the assignment.

Pretend that you are writing an essay on how the frontier experience shaped the development of the United States. While researching, you come across the following passage written by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner:

From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The work of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and acquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. (Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 37.)

You decide to include a paraphrase or summary of the entire passage in your essay. Remember that a paraphrase records all the important details of a passage, and a summary condenses a passage to the main ideas.

1. In your own words, write the best **paraphrase** you can of Turner’s passage. Write a citation for your paraphrase.

2. In your own words, write the best **summary** you can of Turner’s passage. Write a citation for your summary.

3. Rewrite your summary or paraphrase to include a **quotation** from Turner’s passage. What is the best way to cite both the summary or paraphrase and the quotation?

4. Purposely write a **poor paraphrase** and **summary** of the above passage with poor quotations and citations, and make a short list of the characteristics that make them poor.
CRAYONS AND SOURCES

This exercise helps students to identify the different "voices" in their writing and to see how well they've integrated sources and woven them together.

Materials Needed:
-Draft of research paper/documentary essay, with Works Cited page
-Box of Crayola Crayons (best to have at least 48, although the sharpener comes with 64)
-Students

Directions:
Have the students exchange papers, and have each student take a few crayons.

On the first page, the reader should underline the author's name with one color of crayon. On the Works Cited page, the reader should underline each source with a different color of crayon.

Once the "voices" are color coded, the reader works through the essay and underlines each part of the essay according to who is speaking.

For instance, a direct quotation from one source would be underlined in that source's color. Any opinions that stem directly from the author, or signal phrases of the author's choosing, are indicated with the author color. For paraphrasing, when the author is summarizing a source in her own words, two colors should be used: the source's and the author's.

When the reader is finished, the whole essay should be underlined.

If a student has trouble determining what color should be used at any time (distinguishing between paraphrasing and the author's original thinking, for example) he should point that out to the author.

When everyone is done, initiate a discussion about how the papers look, and how students think they should look.

Most students agree that the colors should be woven together, and the discussion should underscore the goal of an interweaving of voices, which signals an ability to move from various sources to their own thinking and back again, and an ability to combine paraphrasing and direct quotation. If they have blocks of the colors, without any blending, discuss ways to mix the voices.

One useful suggestion is to remind students that there should be some of the author’s color in every sentence. If they are quoting someone, they should at least have a signal phrase in the sentence. In other words, this is their paper, and they must be in control of all the voices.

Variations:

Take an outside essay, preferably one they like, and have students color that essay in the same manner. They can then see how another author blends voices, and can apply that knowledge to their own papers.

Require that students color code their own draft.

Original compiled by Michael Mattison, Boise State University

1 This activity could also be done on a computer or tablet mobile device with an electronic document and the means to electronically “highlight” text.