

# Embedding the New Information Literacy Framework in Undergraduate Political Science Courses

## Supplementary Materials

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### **Summary**

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

## *Activity #1: The Scholarly Dialogue*

### Preliminary reading (homework)

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

- Hajnal, Zoltan, Nazita Lajevardi, and Lindsay Nielson. 2017. “Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes.” *Journal of Politics* 79(2): 363-379.
- Grimmer, Justin, Eitan Hersh, Marc Meredith, Jonathan Mummolo, and Clayton Nall. 2018. “Obstacles to Estimating Voter ID Laws’ Effect on Turnout.” *Journal of Politics* 80(3): 1045-1051.
- Hajnal, Zoltan, John Kuk, and Nazita Lajevardi. 2018. “We All Agree: Strict Voter ID Laws Disproportionately Burden Minorities.” *Journal of Politics* 80(3): 1052-1059.

### Small group questions

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

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

### Full class questions

Bring the full class back together and discuss the following questions. For large classes, students may respond to the questions (and each other’s responses) in an online forum in the course management system. Alternatively, these questions can be used by the instructor to guide a class lecture after asking the students to complete the previous steps of the activity outside of class.

1. How does a scholarly conversation like this one help us better understand the research?
2. What problems might arise from publishing a back-and-forth dialogue?
3. Are there perspectives we are missing from this format?

### Optional Extension

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

### Considerations

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

## *Activity #2: Follow the Conversation*

### Citation assignment (in class or outside of class)

1. Ask students to search for and acquire a citation that interests them from the reference list of an assigned reading. This will most likely be an academic book or journal article, but could also be a different type of source. Refer to this step as “following the conversation backward.” If necessary, the instructor could demonstrate for students how to find the full text of a source in the references list using databases available through the library.
2. Next, ask students to search for the original assigned reading in Google Scholar and find another work that has cited that reading using the “cited by” link. This step is “following the conversation forward.”
3. Ask students to write a brief summary of the citations they found. This summary can be very short based on the abstracts. Alternatively, instructors could ask students to complete this step outside of class by reading the sources entirely and summarizing them in 2-3 paragraphs each.
4. Finally, ask students to analyze how each source engages with the previously cited source the students found in each step (e.g., are the conclusions of the first source they review represented accurately in the source that it is cited in?).

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

- Martin, Lanny W. and Georg Vanberg. 2003. “Wasting Time? The Impact of Ideology and Size on Delay in Coalition Formation.” *British Journal of Political Science* 33(2): 323-344.

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

- Diermeier, Daniel and Peter van Roozendaal. 1998. “The Duration of Cabinet Formation Processes in Western Multi-party Democracies.” *British Journal of Political Science* 28(4): 609-626.

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

- Golder, Sona N. 2010. “Bargaining Delays in the Government Formation Process.” *Comparative Political Studies* 43(1): 3-32.

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

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

#### Full class questions

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

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

#### Optional Extension

For upper-division undergraduate courses, spend time discussing student responses to the following questions:

1. How might you see yourself as a scholar entering into the conversation when you write?
2. How can you put these various scholars into conversation with each other, and what additional ideas, questions, or thoughts would you add?

### Considerations

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

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

*Activity #3: Who is an Authority?*

1. Present the following questions to students in class and ask them to respond in writing. This step can be completed in an online forum in the course management system, which may be especially useful for large classes.
  - Think of an area in which you are an expert. What makes you an expert?
  - What does this specific expertise tell you about expertise in general?
  - What characteristics might define an expert in [the discipline or the course]?
  
2. Then, ask students to share the criteria they came up with, and discuss as a class the similarities and differences in those criteria. Discussion can begin with students turning and talking to others near them. Then the instructor can ask a few students to share out to the whole class (even a large one) what they discussed. In large classes, instructors can solicit responses to questions from students using an online polling platform, such as [Mentimeter](#). Possible discussion questions at this stage include the following.
  - Can there be different types of experts on this topic (e.g., a researcher, someone personally affected by an issue, a government official, a CEO)? Does an expert have to be someone with an elite status or certain credentials?
  - If someone is an authority or expert in one area, does that authority transfer to other areas? What are the limits of that transfer?

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

3. Prior to the class period, assign readings on a topic, such as articles or book chapters, that come from authors with varying backgrounds and/or perspectives. The more that the readings focus on one particular topic, the better. Additionally, it may be helpful to find readings in which there is some agreement and some disagreement among the various authors. As one illustrative example, consider the following readings on the global impacts of the end of the Cold War. The first two of these sources are books, from which an instructor might want to select specific chapters.
  - Zelikow, Philip and Condoleeza Rice. 2019. *To Build a Better World: Choices to End the Cold War and Create a Global Commonwealth*. New York: Twelve Publishing.

- Sarotte, Mary Elise. 2014. *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Shiffrin, Joshua R. Itzkowitz. 2016. “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion.” *International Security* 40(4): 7-44.

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

- What is the source of each author’s expertise in these readings? Before you read them, did one author seem more credible than the others?
- What evidence does each source use and how does this evidence connect to the authority of the author(s)?
- After completing the readings, which perspective do you find more trustworthy, and why?

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

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

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

### Optional Extension

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

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

This question requires advanced students to think of themselves as holding some authority and contributing to a conversation.



### Considerations

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

#### *Activity #4: Assessing a Source (Article/Chapter Worksheet)*

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

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

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

#### Optional Extension

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

#### Considerations

Students may find that working through this process shifts their original research plan. This is a natural part of the research process, and students should be encouraged to follow this new direction. It can be helpful for instructors to share their experience with a research process following a different path than originally planned.

Author(s):			
Article/Chapter Title:			
Title and Volume of Journal/Book:			
Other information, such as editor or series (for books):			
Date of publication:		Pages:	
Place of publication (for books):		Publisher (for books):	

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

<p><b>How does this article/chapter inform your curiosity? (1-2) sentences</b>          How does it help to answer, respond to, or refine your research question(s)?</p>

**How do you think this information fits into your research process? (1-4 sentences)**

Is the evidence convincing? Do you agree with the author? Does it help you to refocus your overall topic or question?

**How does this information relate to, compare, or contrast with other information you've read on this topic? (1-3 sentences)**

What additional questions does this information raise for you?

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

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