



## Analysis & Synthesis

The Semester is about half over; students may have already researched for their final papers.  
 What challenges are students most likely facing at this point?

### What is the Problem?

**Critical Reading Skills:** Students may have poor reading habits. If they do not know how to critically read sources, they may not fully engage in the whole picture surrounding their topic. In fact, “70 percent of student citations come from the first or second page of the source” (p. 190). Sometimes students simply copy and paste from the abstract. (Warner, J. [2018]. *Why they can't write: Killing the five-paragraph essay and other necessities*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.)

**Analysis, Evaluation, and Synthesis:** If our students are fairly new in college, they are likely not ready to excel in advanced scholarly writing. Their essays tend to have “little synthesis and analysis,” which often results in the “traditional research report.” (Wilder, L., & Yagelski, R. P. Describing cross-disciplinary analytic moves in first-year college student writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 52(4), 382-403.)  
 Students are likely to simply copy from sources rather than analyze and synthesize the material (pp. 384-385).

**Discipline Community Methods of Communication:** A third problem arises when students are being asked to “record and recall large amounts of material” in a discipline that is not yet familiar. Students are still learning to analyze, synthesize, think critically, etc., and are not prepared to do all at the same time (p. 19). (Gottschalk, K., & Hjortshoj, K. (2004). *The elements of teaching writing: A resource for instructors in all disciplines*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martins.)

**Upper Level Students with Insufficient Writing Skills:** It may be even more frustrating when upper level students are still struggling with basic writing skills:

Because students enrolled in capstone courses are nearing the end of their psychology matriculation, we expect that our curriculum has provided them with a certain set of skills and a significant knowledge base in psychology. However, this is not always the case.

In particular, a lack of integration/synthesis skills is troubling: We often believe that because students have completed many hours of course work in psychology, they should be able to discuss and write about psychological concepts in a way that incorporates material from their previous courses.

Furthermore, students should be able to apply psychological concepts learned in other courses to issues we discuss in the capstone course. In reality, students may not be functioning at this advanced level or have the skills to integrate material from the diverse set of courses they have taken as psychology majors. We may need to explicitly teach integration and synthesis skills, like any others. (Zin, T. E., Reis-Bergan, M. J., & Baker, S. C. in Dunn, D. S., Beins, B. C., McCarthy, M. A., & Hill, G. W. [Eds.]. [2010]. *Best practices for teaching beginnings and endings in the psychology major: Research, cases, and recommendations*. Oxford: University Press, p. 239).

## One Way to Help Students at this point of the Semester is Explicit Instruction

**Critical Reading Skills:** Students need help to understand what to look for as they critically read texts in our disciplines. Otherwise, they may simply highlight everything or they may “fake read.” They may read the words but have no understanding of what the text means (pp. 107, 136-137). [Hewitt, B. L. (2015). *Reading to learn and writing to teach: Literacy strategies for online writing instruction*. Bedford/St. Martin’s.] Hewitt also emphasizes the importance of establishing what students have already learned and what they need to know in a new context or setting (p. 81).

Like good disciplinary writing, students need help with critical reading of scholarly texts: “Explicit strategy instruction includes four stages: direct instruction of the strategy, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice” (Nokes, 2013, p. 43).

**Analysis, Evaluation, and Synthesis:** Perhaps the biggest complaint we have about student writing in the FHSS College is that students simply summarize what they read and do no actual thinking on their own. Students need to be taught overtly how to synthesize: “Without the ability to synthesize, students are left to repeat others’ thoughts and cannot claim to be thinking on their own. Synthesis requires that they draw together information from various sources so they can learn, unlearn, and relearn what they think and know about a subject” (Hewitt, 2015, p. 161).

Our own Jeff Nokes emphasizes that “Simply providing students with the right text . . . is not enough to build . . . literacies. Students must be taught strategies for working with texts” (p. 32). In fact, students need “a repertoire of strategies that they can employ to improve their comprehension and use of texts” (p. 34). [Jeffery D. Nokes (2013). *Building Students’ Historical Literacies: Learning to Read and Reason with Historical Texts and Evidence*. New York: Routledge.]

**Discipline Community Methods of Communication:** It is particularly difficult to move from the skill of summarizing to synthesizing multiple scholarly sources, in addition to learning to read disciplinary articles and to write in new genres. Instead of “transforming, integrating, synthesizing, and critically writing” about evidence, students coming from high school typically use “knowledge-telling” strategies, rather than analysis or argument. The student relies on the text for form and content. It is simply a “report” of what he or she reads, with no interpretation and no “distinctive point of view” (p. 124). [Galbraith & Rijlaarsdam, as cited in Hauptman, S., Rosenfeld, M., & Tamir, R. (1999). Assessing academic discourse levels of competence in handling knowledge from sources. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 1(2), 123-145.]

**Upper Level Students with Insufficient Writing Skills:** Researchers suggest that students need explicit instruction for discipline-specific arguments and critical thinking so they will be empowered to write about them (Wilder & Yagelski. 2018. p. 397).

In addition, students often view scholarly articles as “truth.” “Help students develop a healthy . . . skepticism toward all texts, including textbooks, viewing them as the products of imperfect individuals with limited perspectives and specific purposes for producing them” (Nokes, 2013, p. 134).

**If your students are experiencing any of these problems, the student advisors in the Writing Lab may be able to help.**

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