

Research and Inquiry

Writing instructors help students....

Engage with primary, scholarly, and public sources to enrich a process of inquiry and inform students' writing.

Primary sources: original research or data, or firsthand accounts of events or phenomena without additional analysis. What counts as a "primary" source will depend on context and discipline.

Scholarly sources: can be primary or secondary sources, but these are sources that have gone through the scholarly peer review process before being published in an academic journal, or as a book by an academic or university press.

Public sources: sources that have been produced either for a general public, or a specific, non-academic audience and have not been through a scholarly peer-review process.

Process of Inquiry: the word "inquiry" is another way of saying an "investigation," so a "process of inquiry" in the context of first-year writing is the process of reading multiple perspectives on a topic, tracking the questions that others (including authors, classmates, the instructor) in the discourse community have asked on the topic, and deciding what subsequent questions are most important to explore as a writer. A process of inquiry does involve offering well-reasoned and evidence-supported answers to key questions, but the emphasis in first-year writing is primarily on understanding how to ask clear and effective questions. Writing itself is a form of inquiry.

Why is this objective important? For students, for the program?

Inquiry is a foundational goal of a research university like the University of Oregon and students will be expected to understand and perform academic and professional inquiry throughout their time at UO. Engaging in discovery and knowledge-making also helps to differentiate a postsecondary education from vocational training. Inquiry-based learning is correlated with positive student success outcomes and first-year writing is where we help students build the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in both individual and shared inquiry both at UO and beyond.

Example Learning Activities:

Help students understand that different types of questions exist and can lead to different types of answers – even when focused on the same general topic. Introduce students to stasis questions (Questions of Definition, of Fact, of Interpretation, of Value, of Consequence, and of Policy) and briefly define them with simple examples. Then, choose a simple topic (often

something unrelated to the course's main theme or concerns), like "Batman" or "college football," or anything broad and familiar enough that students in the class can brainstorm different types of questions for that subject. Split students into small groups where they are responsible for coming up with one question for each type on the subject and then share out to the entire class. Write the shared examples on the board or share over the projector so each type has a representative example that all students can see. Then ask students to discuss:

- For which questions is there likely to be disagreement or controversy over the answer? Why those questions?
- Pick a question that's likely to generate disagreement about the answer: how would students go about answering that question? What types of sources/evidence would they look for to best answer the question?
- End the activity by asking students to similarly create one question for each type for the topic they are thinking about using for an upcoming essay. When they finish brainstorming, which question are they most interested in trying to answer in their essay? Why? Discuss in small groups.