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**The Collision of Two Lexicons: Librarians, Composition Instructors and the Vocabulary of Source Evaluation**

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – The study has two aims. The first is to identify words and phrases from information literacy and rhetoric and composition that students used to justify the comparability of two sources. The second is to interpret the effectiveness of students’ application of these evaluative vocabularies and explore the implications for librarians and first-year composition instructors’ collaborations.

**Methods** – A librarian and a first-year composition instructor taught a class on source evaluation using the language of information literacy, composition, and rhetorical analysis (i.e., classical, Aristotelian, rhetorical appeals). Students applied the information learned from the instruction session to help them locate and select two sources of comparable genre and rigor for the purpose

of an essay assignment. The authors assessed this writing assignment for students' evaluative diction to identify how they could improve their understanding of each other's discourse.

**Results** – The authors' analysis of the student writing sample exposes struggles in how students understand, apply, and integrate the jargon of information literacy and rhetoric and composition. Assessment shows that students chose the language of rhetoric and composition rather than the language of information literacy, they selected the broadest and/or vaguest terms to evaluate their sources, and they applied circular reasoning when justifying their choices. When introduced to analogous concepts or terms between the two discourses, students cherry-picked the terms that allowed for the easiest, albeit, least-meaningful evaluations.

**Conclusion** – The authors found that their unfamiliarity with each other's discourse revealed itself in both the class and the student writing. They discovered that these miscommunications affected students' language use in their written source evaluations. In fact, the authors conclude that this oversight in addressing the subtle differences between the two vocabularies was detrimental to student learning. To improve communication and students' source evaluation, the authors consider developing a common vocabulary for more consistency between the two lexicons.

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## Introduction

Phrases such as *library jargon*, *library terminology*, and *library vocabulary* evoke references to services and objects, such as circulation desks, monographs, and reserves. Much has been written about librarians' efforts to help patrons understand this language (Adedibu & Ajala, 2011; Ayre, Smith, & Cleeve, 2006; Chaudhry & Choo, 2001; Dewey, 1999; Doran, 1998; Foster, 2010; Houdyshell, 1998; Hutcherson, 2004; Imler & Eichelberger, 2014; Naismith & Stein, 1989; Pinto, Cordon, & Gómez Diaz, 2010; Sonstebly & DeJonghe, 2013; Spivey, 2000; Swanson & Green, 2011). Rather than alluding to tangible objects and services, *information literacy jargon*, on the other hand, may elicit abstract thoughts and actions that require a higher-degree of critical thinking to comprehend and apply (Pinto, Cordon, & Gómez Diaz, 2010). Possibly due to time limitations or misconceptions of students' prior knowledge, librarians can easily overwhelm first-year composition students with this terminology during library instruction classes. For instance, in a "source evaluation" session, a librarian might hand students a

checklist that describes evaluative criteria such as *authority*, *accuracy*, *currency*, *purpose*, *relevancy*, *objectivity/bias*, among others. In addition to exposing students to this laundry list of terms, checklists neglect the complexities and nuances of source evaluation; they fail to consider information need and encourage a dichotomous assessment of information (Benjas-Small, Archer, Tucker, Vassady, & Resor Whicker, 2013; Burkholder, 2010; Meola, 2004). This "checklist" approach has been under increased scrutiny since the creation of the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy* (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015). The *Framework* encourages a more holistic and authentic pedagogy which focuses on the information-creation process, and how this process affects credibility and the appropriateness of a source. Despite this gradual departure from "checklists," librarians continue to use the same or similar words to teach evaluation skills, and students must still understand the meanings and usages of such terms as *authority*, *purpose*, and *bias*.

The casual blending of librarians' language with that of composition instructors can further

confuse a discussion on source evaluation. In a one-shot library session, librarians tend to approach source evaluation as locating and identifying a “credible” source that meets the students’ information needs. Librarians teach students to evaluate a source’s authority, purpose, audience, and so forth. A first-year composition instructor might concur with this pedagogy, but could have different ideas of what makes a source “credible”, “reliable,” “reputable,” etc., than that of the librarian. Further, instructors view source evaluation through the lens of rhetorical analysis – a concept that requires students to evaluate the author’s argument, in addition to the credibility of the source from which it is found (Mazziotti & Grettano, 2011). Students must consider authors’ logic, persuasiveness, and ethos. These subtle distinctions in purposes may not be obvious to librarian and instructor, and this oversight can spill over into their use of language in the classroom. Through the examination of students’ written work, the authors of this paper – an instruction librarian and an instructor of first-year composition – illustrate how inconsistencies in language-use and meaning between these two groups can negatively affect student learning. We consider the development of a common vocabulary as a possible solution.

## **Background**

Auburn University is a land, sea, and space grant university in east Alabama with an enrollment of approximately 26,000 students. The English composition program serves about 4,000 undergraduate students in nearly 250 classes each fall and spring. ENGL1100 is the introductory course on academic reading and writing and focuses on the development of writing processes and rhetorical awareness of audience and style. Taking up the writing skills from ENGL1100, ENGL1120 emphasizes argumentative writing and academic research that requires library instruction sessions. ENGL1120 is based on a scaffolded curriculum, in which students write several shorter essays

throughout the semester, culminating in a final research paper. Each ENGL1120 class takes part in 2 to 3 library sessions, which make up the bulk of the 600-700 information literacy classes taught each year by the university librarians. This is also where the majority of assessment for the core curriculum’s information literacy student learning outcome occurs. Sessions concentrate on basic information literacy concepts such as keyword development, search strategies, and source evaluation.

## **Literature Review**

Collaborations between librarians and composition instructors, the inherent relationship between information literacy and writing, and the concept of information literacy as a situated literacy within composition have all received substantial coverage in the literature (Barclay & Barclay, 1994; Birmingham et al., 2008; Bowles-Terry, Davis, & Holliday, 2010; Fister, 1992; Hlavaty & Townsend, 2010; Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009; Mazziotti & Grettano, 2011; Mounce, 2009; Palsson & McDade, 2014; Shields, 2014; Sult & Mills, 2006; White-Farnham & Caffrey Gardner, 2014). This review focuses on a few additional works that most closely relate to our research.

About a little over a decade ago, Rolf Norgaard (2003) contended that incorporating concepts from rhetoric and composition into information literacy “would help yield a more situated, process-oriented literacy relevant to a broad range of rhetorical and intellectual activities” (p. 125). He insisted that this collaboration would help to transform information literacy practices from skills-based into a more dynamic practice of intellectual and contextual inquiry (2003, p.125; 2004, p.221). In exchange, Norgaard believed information literacy would help to legitimize the study of rhetoric and composition, usually viewed as part of the Ivory Tower, by investing it in real-world actions (2004, p. 225). Norgaard argued that blending information literary and rhetoric and composition would help strengthen instruction and contribute to the

development of a “situated” or “rhetorized” information literacy (2004, p. 221). For Norgaard, these adaptations would help both fields move beyond surface features and rote search tasks (e.g., grammar and citation) into new territories of mutual, disciplinary growth.

In this “provocation” for an integrated approach to information literacy, Norgaard (2004) touches on mutual benefits for each discipline (p. 225) without entertaining, in depth, potential shortcomings. One possible complication from this collaborative approach comes out of Norgaard’s discussion of the language of information literacy. He explained that instructors of composition and librarians both seek to make research accessible, relevant, and transparent for students. Considering that jargon occludes this entry and command of information literacy, he asserted that framing literacy practices in ordinary language would help to establish common ground for the complex work that instructors of composition and librarians do together (2003, p. 126). However, using the language of everyday speech to draw the fields together and enrich each other, we contend, is far more complex than sharing theories and pedagogies in mutually respectful teaching and research environments. Librarians and composition instructors may speak the same language, but in a manner of speaking, they do not. For students, overlapping vocabularies produce confusing and sometimes competing conceptions of how to access and evaluate information.

Research into student evaluative skills primarily comes from studies of composition and linguistics, in particular the work of Siew Mei Wu. Assessing the language of evaluation in argumentative essays by student writers, Wu and Allison (2005) found student writers who supported their thesis statements with clear, evaluative expression performed better academically than those who relied primarily on exposition. As students who performed poorly tended to discuss a topic rather than develop an argument, Wu and Allison found that “the high-

rated essay writers tend to maintain a more dialogically expansive stance to soften the assertiveness level of the claims” (p. 124). In part, this “dialogical expanse” develops through fluid integration of sources that supports clear assertions from the student writer. Examining another sample of student argumentative writing, Wu (2008) explained that student writers often lack the disciplinary discourse and jargon to assess and form their own arguments in writing, but assignments often require them to read the discourse, understand it, and participate in that academic conversation (p. 59). Students not only have to comprehend the discourse of the documents that they assess but also understand the language of evaluation used in the classroom. In general, the implications of Wu’s research (2008) suggest that students who “situated” their arguments outperformed those who provided vague details and explanations, namely those who used the language of evaluation discretely (p. 71). The language of evaluative expression reflects criteria (e.g., bias, citation, credibility) from both rhetoric and composition and information literacy. These studies indicate that academic readers assess the quality of an argument through evaluative language, underscoring the importance of consistent vocabulary and conceptual frameworks in this process.

As Wu (2008) points out the complex web of discourses that students try to untangle in order to analyze and evaluate information, Holliday and Rogers (2013) – in a librarian and writing instructor’s collaboration – report on the language of information literacy used in the classroom (i.e., by them and by students) and how that affects students’ engagement with information. They suggest the language of evaluation used by the two groups alike affects student ability to achieve meaningful and coherent source evaluation. They assert that the “[i]nstructional discourse” at play between the librarian and the writing instructor contribute to student researchers and student writers producing artificial evaluations (p. 259). The authors propose a shift in both language and

“instructional attention” in the classroom from “finding sources” to a focus on “learning about” sources (p.268). Our study also examines discourse, but we focus on how two languages come together – that of information literacy and rhetoric and composition – and how this union affects how students evaluate sources in their written work.

One of the goals of information literacy and composition is to teach students methods of source evaluation, applicable to many assignments and situations in order to assess the quality of a text and its argument. These goals seem mutually beneficial and congruent, but we contend that our language gets in the way of student uptake and application. To borrow a metaphor from Holliday and Rogers (2013), these heuristics (e.g., “checklist method”) for source evaluation are tools that we intend for students to learn and apply in their research and writing (p. 259). However, we claim that combining information literacy and rhetoric and composition is like dumping two boxes of tools onto our students; instead of a smooth and soluble integration, merging discourses produces a pile of symbolic tools, some similar, some different, some redundant, and some incomprehensible, that all parties involved need to sort through.

### **Aims**

We conducted a semester-long study of one ENGL1120 class, in order to assess how well students transferred the skills and concepts learned in course-integrated library instruction sessions to their assignments. From the assessments, we hoped to identify outcomes for which the librarian could train the instructor to further discuss with students after the sessions. The unpredictable nature of assessment led us down a different path, however.

Examination of topic proposals written after a class on source evaluation revealed students’ reliance on rhetoric and composition vocabulary to evaluate information; this occurred, despite

explicit instructions to consider what they had learned from the librarian. The few “information literacy” words used were closely woven within rhetoric and composition terminology, although most often ineffectively. We realized that during our planning session for the class, we had omitted a thorough discussion of each other’s source evaluation discourse. We contend that this resulted in muddled and superficial evaluations by students. The discussion below examines how students appropriated the diction and vocabulary of information literacy and rhetoric and composition following a session on source evaluation. We share the consequences of a glossed-over understanding of each other’s language – a somewhat inconspicuous topic that needs more attention in the literature.

### **Methods**

The ENGL1120 class that is the focus of this study consisted of 27 students: 20 freshmen, 6 sophomores, and 1 junior with majors in the liberal arts, science and math, engineering, business, education, and nursing. The first major essay of this course was a rhetorical analysis of one text, and did not require a library session. The second essay asked students to locate two texts that were of comparable *genre* and *rigor* on a topic related to cultural diversity. The instructor hoped that setting limits on the types of sources that students could compare would help eliminate weak and unbalanced comparisons that he had graded in previous classes (for instance, comparing arguments in a peer-reviewed article to the opinions of a blogger). Students would analyze the sources’ rhetoric guided by instructions provided in the assignment prompt and explain which author made the better argument and why. Before students began this essay, the instructor assigned a topic proposal assignment in the form of a short writing (roughly 250-300 words) to determine whether students understood the expectations of the larger assignment. The topic proposal required students to 1) provide a brief summary of each of the authors’ claims; 2) justify why the articles were of comparable rigor

and genre (students were to consider the information from the library session); 3) defend the better argument and include the criteria they used to determine this; and, 4) include a plan to support their (the students') argument and ideas. The instructor kept the word count low to ensure succinct and well-thought out evaluations.

During our pre-class meeting, we outlined a team-taught library session on source evaluation to coincide with this assignment. In an effort to deemphasize the evaluation "checklist" and the superficial assessment of information that it encourages, the librarian suggested a lesson plan centered on the "information lifecycle." We also acknowledged and incorporated two terms on the assignment that the librarian normally did not use; *genre*, defined by the instructor as "a category of writing or art that share similarities in form and style" and *rigor*, "the *thoroughness* and *accuracy* of a source." Focus on *genre* would transform a dichotomous discussion of the differences in the format of "popular" and "scholarly" sources to a closer examination of both the way a source looks *and* the way it is written. *Rigor* would discourage the assessment of peer-reviewed articles as being the "best" type of source, but instead characterize the review process as a factor to consider – and one that should strengthen – as we moved around the information lifecycle. Throughout the semester, the instructor framed the concept of rhetorical analysis using the three Aristotelian, persuasive appeals: *logos* (e.g., logic, reasoning, evidence), *pathos* (e.g., emotionally charged language, anecdotes, narration), and *ethos* (e.g., credibility, diction, tone). The pre-class planning session did not include a discussion of this particular discourse and its relation to source evaluation. We phrased our learning outcome as follows: "students will learn that information is disseminated in different formats and that the accuracy and thoroughness (*rigor*) of information is often related to the length of time it takes to produce the information and the format in which it is reported" (Carter & Aldridge, 2015).

We began the library session with a review of the concept of *genre*, which the instructor had introduced in a previous class. He explained that sources within the same genres share comparable patterns of arguments, and provided characteristics to consider when identifying a genre: length, tone, sentence complexity, level of formality and informality, use of visuals, kinds of evidence, depth of research, and presence or absence of documentation (Ramage, Bean, & Johnson, 2010). The discussion included examples of types of genres, such as op-ed pieces and scholarly articles, and the librarian asked students from which genres they might find sources for their assignment.

The librarian next introduced a current event in cultural diversity that would serve as a class topic. She placed students in groups of two, and then distributed to each group a piece of paper with a pre-selected source written on it. The sources represented a variety of genres: broadcast news, online and print newspapers, magazines, trade magazines, scholarly journals, and books. Keeping the example topic in mind, students answered worksheet questions about their source that addressed the information creation process. Prior to class, the librarian had set up five stations around the classroom that represented a point in the information lifecycle. She had labeled the stations "one day," "one week," "one month," "one year," and "longer than one year." After they completed the worksheet, she asked each group to tape their source at the station along the information lifecycle that most closely matched its speed of publication. She then led a discussion about the *rigor* of each as they moved around the room, and essentially around the information lifecycle. The discussion incorporated familiar terms such as *authority*, *accuracy*, and *purpose*, but not in conjunction with a checklist. For a revised version of this lesson plan, see Carter & Aldridge (2015). The class concluded with an introduction to the Academic Search Premier database and time for the students to search. After class, the instructor shared the completed

topic proposals with the librarian, and they met several times to discuss the results. Approval from the university's Institutional Review Board was required to conduct the study, and age of consent in Alabama is 19. This library session occurred early in the semester, before approximately half of the students turned 19. Therefore, out of the 27 students, we are only able to report on the artifacts of 13 students.

Apart from one another, we each assessed the topic proposal assignments that students completed after the library session with the use of two simple rubrics. The first rubric measured student success at finding articles of similar genre and rigor. If we graded a paper as "sufficient" or "accomplished" at this task, we each applied the second rubric to determine how well they justified their choices. To earn an "accomplished" rating on this second task, a student "succeeded in convincingly justifying their selections," while a "sufficient" rating indicated that the student tried to justify their selections, but fell short. We reserved "insufficient" ratings for those students who put forth little effort. Then we came together to discuss each other's results. We found that we had each applied the rubric similarly, informally norming the rubric. In an effort to conduct an organized review of word choices, we identified categories of evaluative language that the students used in their topic proposals. The categories listed here were developed through our discussion of the patterns that each of us identified when we read through the proposals separate from one another: logic (logos, evidence, facts, organization, reasoning); emotion (pathos, personal stories, anecdotes, charged language); credibility (ethos, ethics, credentials, character, authority); surface features (mention of length of article, credentials mentioned without analysis, bias, citations/references); genre (identified a specific genre). We then read through the papers one last time separately, color-coding for each of the categories. This enhanced our later discussions by providing a visualization of the vocabulary patterns.

## Results and Discussion

While most students could locate the "right" types of sources (of similar rigor and genre), the majority of their attempts to evaluate the sources involved sweeping statements using the broadest terminology possible. This strategy did not result in what we considered accomplished evaluations, and we identified three possible reasons for this poor performance: 1) flawed assignment design – students were asked to do too much with too few words, therefore could not be as precise as we would have liked; 2) an ineffective information literacy session; and/or 3) a lack of clear understanding of evaluative language. While all three represent crucial pieces of the puzzle, language-use rose to the top for us as the most stimulating finding of this assessment. We thought this focus would touch on the other two potential factors as well.

We moved forward by labeling each evaluative word choice as either an "information literacy" or "rhetoric and composition" term. We based these labels on the language each of us most commonly used in our respective classes. Table 1 illustrates students' choice of words divided by the authors into these two categories.

The majority these evaluative word choices fell into three categories: logic, emotion, and credibility. Our discussion below is based on this framework.

### Logic

Figure 1 shows the words students chose when referring to the logic of an author. The librarian discussed *reference lists* and *citing sources* in the information literacy session, and the importance of each in determining *authority* and *accuracy*. However, students mostly chose less-specific concepts found in their composition reader.

For example, rather than explaining that an author had "cited sources," students preferred the term "evidence." This may seem like a trivial difference, until the applications of the word

Table 1  
Word Choices Related To Information Literacy Or Rhetoric And Composition

Information Literacy	Rhetoric and Composition
Credibility	Logic
Authority	Evidence
Format-related features (e.g., length, credentials, citations)	Facts
	Organization
	Reasoning
	Emotion
	Pathos
	The use of personal stories
	The use of "charged" language
	Character
	Genre

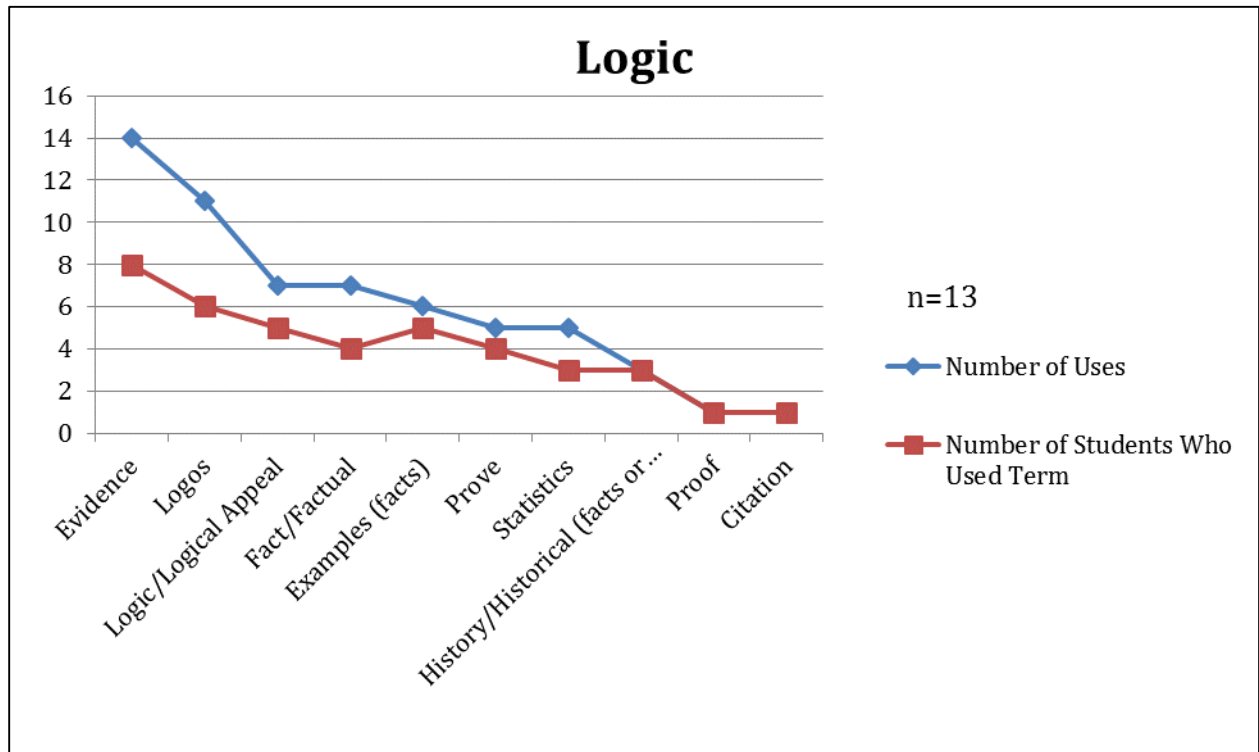


Figure 1  
Student word choices related to logic.

and its effect on student performance is considered. Student 1 in our sample used the word evidence three separate times. The student describes, “[The author] begins by explaining he first believed that gun control was a positive move forward, but later changed *his thesis after*

*considering evidence*. Although the student impressively applies the language of rhetorical analysis (e.g, “his thesis”), he or she makes no clear point about what type of evidence swayed the author to change positions. Evidence seems like whatever material the author uses to



support his or her point. Later, the student gets somewhat more specific, adding adjectival modifiers to differentiate types of evidence: “[Both articles] support their evidence *through historical evidence*.” This seems like a firm step toward specific evaluative analysis. Narrowing evidence into manageable categories begins to demonstrate the student’s awareness of different types of evidence and their potential uses. However, the student made up this category of evidence on the spot, since it was not introduced in discussions during the library session or during writing class. What constitutes historical evidence and why it matters in evaluating the author and the source’s effectiveness are simply mentioned and then abandoned. Next, the student continues to bring the discussion into more focus: “[The author] uses some *factual based evidence*, but lacking a *proper amount of citation and logical appeal*.” Factual-based evidence seems like a straightforward categorization – it’s evidence based on facts. Questions remain, however, and many go unanswered or unaddressed about the nature and origin of those facts. What, moreover, is the “proper amount of citation” to appeal logically and appropriately to the audience? Why is that the case? Why are some facts more persuasive, reliable, and fitting for one audience over others? How and why? It’s repetitive questioning, no doubt, but important for evaluating a source beyond its surface functions, parts, and pieces. Those deep level analytical questions are left in favor of shallow responses. This student’s identifications of evidence capture a dominant trend that runs through the entire sample – students disregarded the suasive function of the types of evidence used to describe the article. If it has evidence, it is a good source. If it has more evidence than the other source, it is likely better. There is little mention of the quality of evidence, or sources, consulted. Immersing students in this vague terminology provided them with the flexibility to make words mean what they wanted them to mean – it required less thoughtful evaluation and less critical thinking.

### *Emotion*

As we identified parallels within our two lexicons, we ran into a discrepancy when considering *pathos* and *emotion*. The librarian considered emotion to be connected to *bias*, while the composition instructor argued that *bias*, although it might be included under *pathos*, primarily falls within *ethos* and speaks to the *credibility* of an author. This in itself serves as a valuable illustration of lexical mismatch. For the purposes of this discussion, we favor the composition instructor’s view. As seen in Figure 2, students pulled from a limited vocabulary when discussing *pathos*.

Although students generally made empty evaluations of *pathos* (similar to those discussed in the *logos* section), they found a lack of emotional appeal as a real problem. Beyond unsound logic, unreasonable beliefs, or tenuous support, students often condemned an author who failed to move readers emotionally. One student claimed that strong *pathos* was the crucial evaluative element between his or her authors: “The main point I will make in my essay, though, is the lack of *pathos* in [the author’s] article. [The other author] fills his article with emotional appeal, which makes it very strong.” Although the students made clear claims about the effectiveness of *pathos*, what their proposals leave out are specific details. *How* do these authors affect readers? *Why* is that specific method weak or strong or persuasive? These questions we both want to know.

However, one student stood out from this sample. This student often leads with generalities, most of the writers from our sample do, but he or she steps toward specific evaluation through analysis. Analyzing and evaluating two sources about the legalization of marijuana, the student starts with a vague statement, introducing the rhetorical category: “[‘Article Title’] will be addressed by showing [the author’s] lack of logical evidence and no emotional appeal to his audience.” The student’s claim to “no emotional appeal” is sweeping and

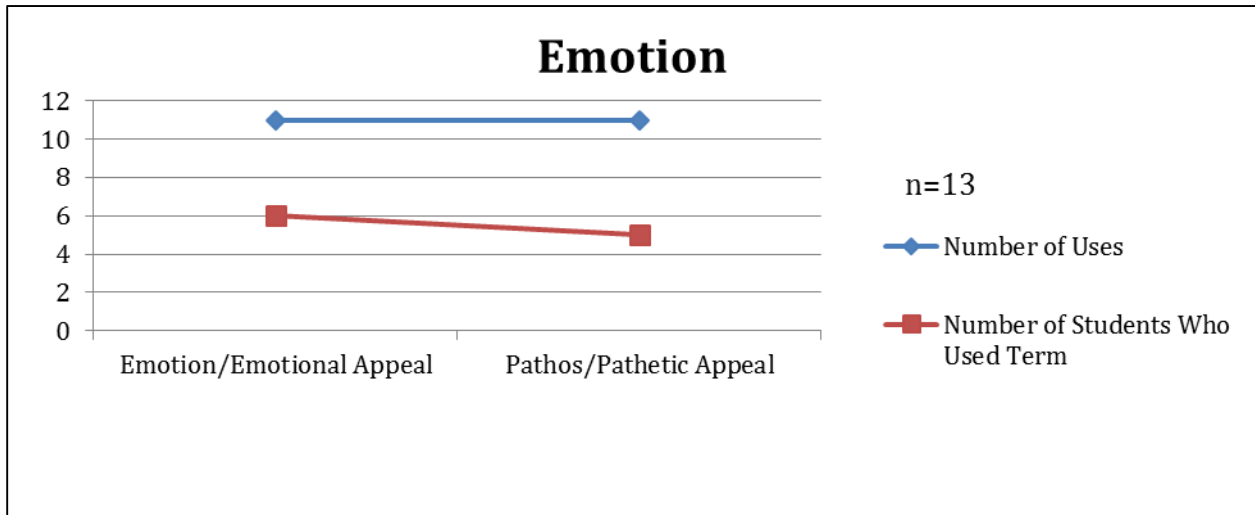


Figure 2  
Student word choices related to emotion.

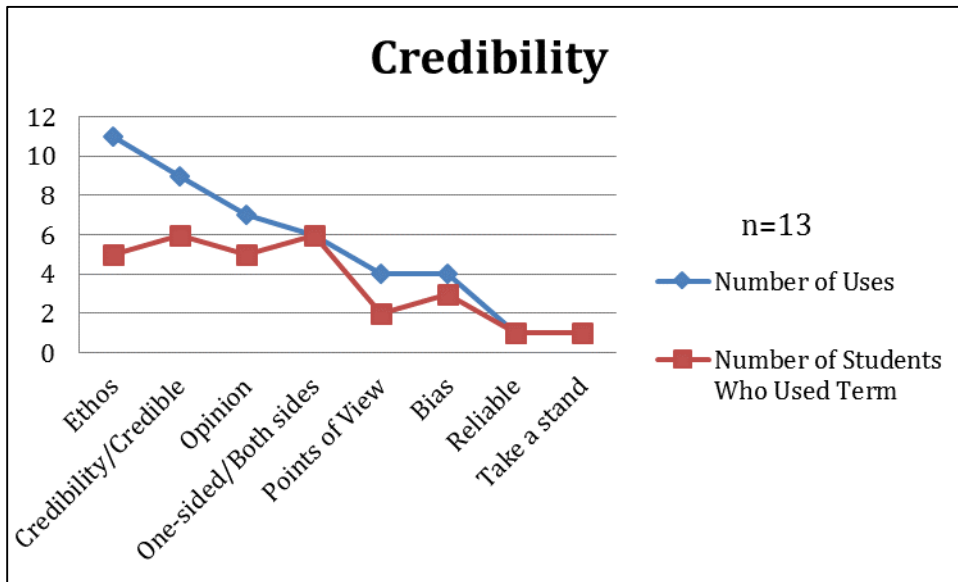


Figure 3  
Student word choices related to credibility.

inaccurate, since no document completely lacks the ability to affect an audience, even if it produces boredom or contempt. He restates this position further: “[The Author] also does nothing to connect with the people that don’t use the drug while he is arguing against the legalization of marijuana thus showing his lack of emotional appeal.” Although the student

made weak claims about pathos of the article considered rhetorically weaker, he or she treated the source considered rhetorically effective more precisely. “[The other author’s] article is more effective than ineffective because of his use of strong emotional appeal and his use of situations that his intended audience can easily relate to.” The student doesn’t connect that “his

use of situations” are a facet of “strong emotional appeal,” which is an enormous category. He reiterates later, “[the author’s] use of situations that make his argument easy to relate to.” By situations, the student means to describe narratives, anecdotes, or descriptions that the author uses to concretize the policies for which he argues. In addition to identifying a specific emotional strategy used by the author, this student reaches a solid conclusion regarding the emotions that the author intends to elicit from the audience: “He also evokes sympathy and happiness at different times as he shows the marijuana dispensaries being shut down and the excitement of citizens in states where the drug was legalized.” The mention of “sympathy and happiness” seems like small steps and still somewhat vague, yet, unlike most of our sample, this student actually proposed specific emotions rather than simply mentioning “appeals to emotion” or “uses pathos.” This is the type of evaluation and analysis that we encourage in student evaluation because it, at the very least, displays a measure of critical, evaluative thinking.

The many emphatic criticisms levied against an author’s pathos suggest that students may need instruction on how to distance their personal point of view during source evaluation yet register their reactions to emotive language carefully. That they produce circular evaluations about pathos might seem removed from the librarian’s goals, but the student’s fixation on emotional appeal and swift criticism of the lack thereof might suggest that they are not thinking critically about finding and evaluating the best sources. In fact, their examinations of and references to pathos suggest that affective language may influence student source decisions in a detrimental way.

### *Credibility*

Arguing for an author’s *ethos*, *authority*, *credibility*, under whatever name, eluded many students from our sample. A factor contributing to students’ poor performance could be our two

similar but competing definitions of *authority*. The librarian took a traditional (albeit changing) approach to teaching authority by focusing on an author’s credentials. For composition, *ethos* takes this oversimplified view into consideration, but also requires evaluating how an author exhibits authority through proper diction and ethical claims. Furthermore, a *credible* author should present counterarguments fairly, and if he or she does not, then their manipulation of information or *bias* might compromise their *ethos*, their *credibility*. The information literacy approach promoted a surface-level evaluation, while the rhetorical analysis of *authority* required a thorough reading and comprehension of the source. Students applied the librarian’s definition of authority and tried to make it fit the rhetorical analysis *ethos*-framework. Rather than using the term *authority*, however, they chose to use *credible* – a word not formally defined in class, but rather tossed around loosely by the librarian without considering the implications for student understanding.

For example, one student acknowledged, “Both of the authors appeal to *ethos* almost equally due to their *credibility* and background.” Another student remarked, “The author in article one has many *ethos* that help to [sic] his argument which make him *credible*.” Essentially, the students decided that the author is credible because he or she is credible. Although they show awareness of credibility and its importance for evaluating sources, their circular arguments demonstrate missing analytical tools for identifying specific appeals to credibility.

Few students constructed nuanced analyses and evaluation of credibility. These examples, however, indicate awareness of the implicit nature of *ethos* assembled by the parts of writing. One student claims, “Throughout the article she [the author] is *very sincere* and *seems to really care* that texting while driving should be banned.” This student reaches a conclusion based on synthesizing the parts of the argument. This may seem vague, but his or her point

speaks to the tone and voice of the author in the article, rather than the external factors, like credentials or publisher, on which most students remarked. The same student states, “[The other author] uses ways of relating to both sides,” an instrumental gesture for conveying fairness and comprehension in an argument. Had the student identified what specific components of writing and argument made this first author appear “very sincere” or seeming “to really care” or what “ways of relating to both sides” used by the second author, he or she would advance toward strong evaluation of ethos. That he or she sees beyond the surface, beyond the literal demonstrates analysis and evaluation that we encourage and endeavor to replicate in student scholars. Another student, writing about atheism and theism, drew out that one of his or her author’s was more persuasive than the other because of her “understanding and placating tone, and her experience with both sides of a theistic existence.” This student recognizes the author’s intention of forging common ground over a contentious topic with a potentially hostile audience comes through how she writes and not simply what. His or her evaluation of the author’s ethos, though minor, stands out from our sample because the student compresses several dimensions of ethical credibility into one single sentence. However, these evaluative statements were the exception and not the rule.

In addition, limited class time meant that some crucial points were glossed over. Unfortunately, students walked away with the impression that bias was bad, and could most often be identified as *one-sided*. They ignored discussions of *bias* led by the instructor throughout the semester in which he presented *one-sided* as arguments slanted toward an audience in favor of the topic (e.g., arguing for a better football stadium to football fans) as well as an argument without consideration or acknowledgement of counterarguments. For instance, one student, comparing argumentative articles on the issue of abortion, accuses an author of a pro-life argument to be “rhetorically ineffective”

because of “presenting a *one-sided* argument.” This conclusion may be the building block of a strong, detailed evaluation. However, in comparing the two articles, the student concludes, “They have similar genres in which the author has a *one-sided* point of view and uses specific detail to argue pro-life or pro-choice.” In the same paper, the student changes use of the term “one-sided,” maintaining it as a point of comparison between the two sources. For this student writer, the “one-sided” approach clarifies the author’s argument and intention, forgoing engagement with counterarguments or introducing alternative perspectives in a fair and comprehensive manner. The phrase contributed to dichotomous evaluation of information.

### Limitations of Study

In consideration of the problems with our instruction, one issue stands above the rest. The composition instructor’s assignment asked students to say too much in very few words. The instructor had intended for students to demonstrate basic understanding of the major essay’s purpose and show that they had, in fact, started the writing and researching process. However, compressing a summary, a justification, and a developing argument into 250 to 300 words, simply could not be done well. Rather than increase word count, it may be more productive to cut the objectives and focus the assignment on justifying their choices. This might yield more developed and thoughtful conclusions. Having said this, we believe if provided with a larger sample, we would most likely see similar trends as seen in Figures 2, 3, and 4 – students’ inclination to use broad, somewhat meaningless words. We cannot prove this with our data, however, but hope others will take up this research and move it forward.

That the language of information literacy was mostly missing from their analyses raises an important question. How effective was the instruction session when most of the information literacy terms were never used in the students’ writing? Is it realistic to expect

students to remember a multitude of terms, comprehend the meanings of these terms, and apply them appropriately after a 50-minute information literacy session? Instruction prior to and during the information literacy session may have steered students in the wrong direction. Before the session, the composition instructor presented information on genre to students using genres that he hypothesized they were familiar with (e.g., action films, teen dystopian novels, etc.) as a way to help them approach analyzing and evaluating more conventional college-level sources (e.g., op-ed pieces, peer-reviewed articles, etc.). Using examples from popular culture *only* to build common ground for understanding the concept of genre, however, may have stunted students' ability to see the transferability of these skills to the evaluation of academic sources. Moreover, the librarian fell short in her attempt to fully move away from the "checklist approach" by encouraging students to rely on author's credentials for authority, rather than considering information need, or the instructor's definition of authority.

### Implications and Conclusion

Reflecting back on our project, students spent more time with the instructor and had more incentive to use his language given that he graded their work. Our research showed that the words used by the instructor – ethos, evidence, so forth – took on different forms for the librarian, such as sources, references, etc. It may seem that the instructor and librarian were saying the same things, but just using different words. Based on the students' writing and the instructor and librarian's consultations afterwards, however, these seemingly similar words had different meanings. It seems like we're arguing semantics here, which is commonly seen as nitpicky and frustrating. But, in this case, semantics matter. Are our languages similar enough that we can have a common vocabulary or do we need a better understanding of our languages so we're not working at cross-purposes? Are we enabling

students to take the easy way out because of the inconsistencies in the languages that we use?

We contend that both sides' concept of sources could serve as a starting point for a more blended discourse. In the information literacy session discussed above, the word *genre* replaced *source* and *format* in the traditional framework of popular versus scholarly sources. Through our post-class discussions, we learned that we both meant basically the same thing, but just expressed it differently. Burkholder (2010) speaks to this by arguing for the use of genre theory to redefine *sources* by "bridging the gap between what a form really is and what it is actually designed to do" (p. 2). Bizup (2008) argues in favor of a vocabulary to describe how writers use sources, rather than for types of sources (p. 75). This could be a perfect opportunity to combine ideas from rhetoric and composition and information literacy to create a mutually-endorsed descriptor. However, this requires a higher-level of understanding of each other's discourse. Siloing our thoughts and concepts into distinct teaching responsibilities (i.e., you teach this, I teach that) will no longer suffice. Composition represents only the beginning of the journey, as discourse becomes more complex as students' progress through their majors. Frank conversations with faculty about the purpose of information literacy instruction and their expectations of student performance must also include a discussion of disciplinary discourse. Clear language serves as the crux of comprehension.

At the end of our analysis, the paths forward split in many directions. One way is toward further standardization of conceptual vocabulary for source evaluation. If instructors of composition and librarians shared identical language and methods, confusions and redundancies in our respective approaches and wordings would likely decrease. However, another way forward is to keep going in the same direction, stay the course, in other words. Composition instructors and librarians join together and meld their methods organically.

Though this process may be messy, the results may better mirror the challenge for our students who have to navigate through the unfamiliar terrain of source evaluation in the information age. Standardization may strip away our students' creative edge needed to cut away ambiguity and fabrication of authority during a time when information flows as freely as air and can likely be as insubstantial. By bringing various languages of source evaluation together, our process becomes one of many methods, not *the* method but *a* method, available to students who need to learn to adapt to varying audiences and demands in order to evaluate work in meaningful ways, rather than blankly repeating vocabulary.

The endless flexibility in and between different academic disciplines challenges first-year students. When the language of rhetoric and composition and information literacy collide in the classroom, expect a crash in the students' minds. They have to learn to adapt to multiple discourses, sets of words and principles of knowing, in a single classroom for each assignment. Assuming a "fake-it-until-you-make-it" voice in their academic writing helps them gesture toward the clear and specific evaluations that we strive to teach our students. Despite the limitations of our study, we feel as though we have stumbled upon an issue relevant to all librarians who communicate with students, composition instructors, and disciplinary faculty. Understanding the role discourse plays in student learning should be embedded in our advocacy for information literacy.

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