

Organize Information Collected from Sources

Utilizing information from sources is a common expectation across the K-12 spectrum. And while many teachers spend ample time teaching students to identify and cite credible sources, organizing the information collected is an assumed skill. It's important to teach students how to track what specific information came from which particular source.

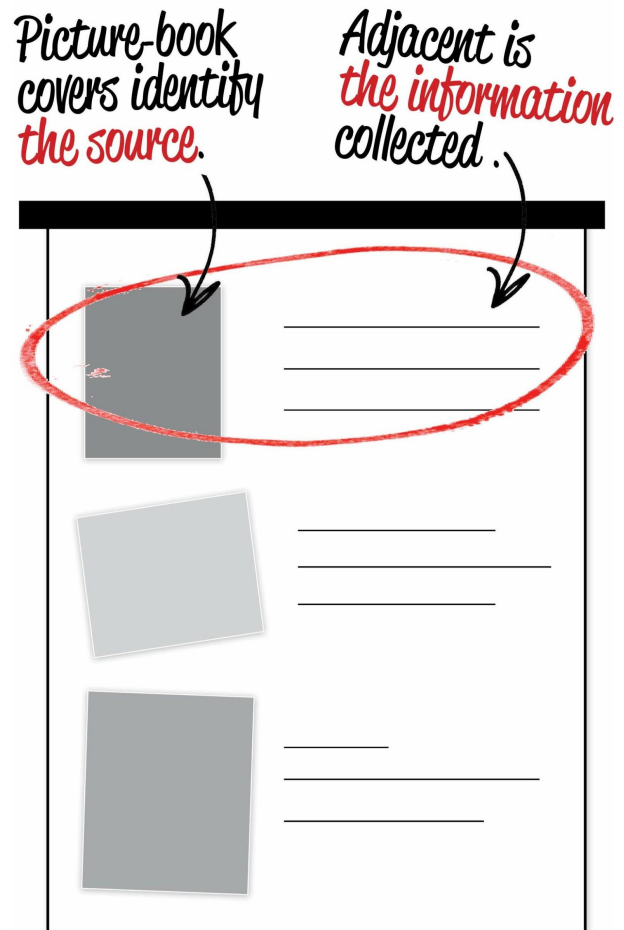
Begin the lesson by clarifying the importance of tracking information tied to its source.

1. **Give credit.** Inquire if students ever experienced someone saying something was *his* idea, when in fact it was *theirs*. Compare this to plagiarism; it's an academic crime.
2. **Demonstrate depth.** Motivate students to diligently track all of their sources, as the more sources they cite, the more effort and expertise they demonstrate to the reader.
3. **Provide citations.** Explain that if research habits before writing are strong, then providing a bibliography or Works Cited document *after* writing will be easy. The opposite is true, too. A lack of organization on the front end will cause anxiety and frustration on the back end.

For primary and special education students, these foundational lessons can be executed as a whole-class activity. In preparation for the lesson, the teacher selects 3-5 nonfiction texts on a particular topic. Photocopy the covers to each of these picture books/sources.

Then, after reading the first one, tape the photocopied cover to an anchor chart. Beside the cover, bullet the information students recall from that source. Read the next text, tape its cover to the chart, and write bullets to document corresponding information. List new details learned, but also information that was repeated/corroborated among sources.

As this activity will consume multiple days, continually remind students that they are learning to document what information they learned from which source. Keep the chart neatly organized. Point out how the bullets are adjacent to the text titles. Consider adding in lines or using different marker colors to visually distinguish the information that corresponds with each source.



NOTE: This whole-class fact-gathering does *not* have to culminate in students writing an informative piece. The instructional focus was only on gathering information and tracking sources.

In intermediate and secondary classrooms, the same 2-column chart is appropriate, although students will do this independently using a [blackline master](#). Students note the text title/author in the left column and the information collected in the right column.

As this process becomes more automatic to older students, offer additional instruction.

- **Increase the number of sources.** It's not hard to know where the information came from when there is only one text. However, older students are expected to reference numerous titles when writing about a single topic. This is when organization is key. So, move from collecting information from 2-3 texts to 10-15 different sources.
- **Transition to student-selected sources.** Initially, the teacher will provide the sources. (It is easier to support students who are just learning the importance of keeping everything organized, because ultimately, the teacher knows what sources they all utilized.) However, when students conduct their own research, then they are independently responsible for keeping track of their research and sourcing.
- **Incorporate technology.** After students master this skill using only paper and pencil, then reveal various tech tools (e.g., Evernote, Google.doc, and Easybib). But don't rush this. Keep the initial instructional focus on the process, rather than troubleshooting the software.