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Reverse Research

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HCOM 211: Reverse Research Assignment

Introduction

This is a two-part assignment that requires time from two consecutive class sessions. It proved to be the easiest and most direct way I have found to teach the process of research at the heart of academic writing and the uses and value of attribution.

Process

Assignment - Part 1
Students are asked to read an article, in this case, one based on a new farming method that would reduce methane gasses in soil [Moises Velasquez-Manoff, "Can Dirt Save the Earth?" *NYTimes Magazine*, April 18, 2018]. As they read, I ask them to highlight then make a list of each reference the author uses to support his claims: direct quotation, name of expert, agency, or method of research.

In class, we go through the article from beginning to end. I ask students to name sources in the order they appear. During this process, students are asked to correct their own lists as their peers call out omissions or errors.

Thereafter, I project my prepared list. Looking at the compiled list, students are able to readily appreciate the number and variety of sources the author uses to build his argument. (In the Velasquez-Manoff article, 27 sources are named.)

Assignment - Part 2
Students are asked to select ten sources from their list, being mindful to show variety in their choices. They are asked to research the person or agency then offer two forms of feedback:

1. Background information that conveys the author's credentials and status within their field of study or the significance of the research process or agency.
2. Briefly discuss, in their own words, the value of the source within the context of the primary article. They are asked to avoid generalization, to be specific.

To complete this portion of the assignment, I ask students to use our library One Search database. In this way, they experience discovery and process rudimentary research. [Note: I do not include authorial notes or a reference list at the end of the article I provide.]

In class, we discuss what the students have learned. Volunteers share their most insightful findings.

Language of the Prompt

Based on Moises Velasquez-Manoff's "Can Dirt Save the Earth" (New York Times Magazine, Ap 18, 2018)

Reverse Research Assignment, Part 1

Read Moises Valasquez-Manoff's "Can Dirt Save the Earth."

Notice the variety of evidence Moises Velasquez-Manoff uses and his manner of attributing information:

- Expert opinion in the form of direct quotes,
- Paraphrased information from experts, academics, and practitioners,
- References to agencies, and
- Observations of active studies.

As you read, jot down the names and titles, field of expertise, and names of those agencies he cites as a numbered list.

In class, be ready to respond to my questions and share your observations.

Reverse Research Assignment, Part 2

Research those experts and studies Rathmann and Wick consider as they modify their approach to land conservation as well as those Velasquez-Manoff cites as he builds and substantiates his argument.

Research ten of these sources, being mindful to select a variety of source types. For each, provide the following information:

- Number and name the source.
- Paste the quote from the text that uses the source.
- Paste the URL you used when you found a related source online.
- Offer two forms of written feedback:
    - Background information that conveys the author's credentials and status within their field of study, the significance of the research process, or the significance of the agency.
    - Briefly discuss, your own words, the value of the source within the context of Velasquez-Manoff's article. Avoid generalization; be very specific.

Source List, "Can Dirt Save the Earth?" by Moises Velasquez-Manoff

1. Jeff Creque, rangeland ecologist
2. Rattan Lal, soil scientist at Ohio State University
3. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2014 report
4. Carbon farming
5. Keith Paustian, soil scientist, University of Colorado; early author of IPCC report

6. Pete Smith, soil scientist at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland
7. James Hansen, climate scientist
8. United Nations report "that explores carbon-dioxide-removal technologies"
9. The French-led initiative, "Four per 1,000"
10. Whendee Silver, ecologist at the University of California, Berkeley
11. The US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
12. Darin Williams, a Kansas farmer
13. Gabe Brown, a North Dakota rancher and farmer
14. Mark Bradford, Professor of Soil Ecology, Yale University
15. William Schlesinger, an emeritus soil scientist at Duke University
16. Clean Power Plan (Obama v Trump)
17. Didi Barrett, New York State Assemblywoman: Legislation making "tax credits available to farmers who increase soil carbon"
18. Deborah Raphael, Director, San Francisco's Department of the Environment
19. Marin Carbon Project
20. Torri Estrada, Executive Director, Carbon Cycle Institute
21. California's Healthy Soil Initiative
22. Calla Rose Ostrander, Marin Carbon Project
23. Eric Toensmeier, author and lecturer, Yale
24. Jason Weller, NRCS
25. William Horwath, soil scientist at the University of California, Davis
26. Ian Monroe, lecturer on energy and climate, Stanford University
27. Fibershed