Synthesize & cite evidence from multiple sources

Synthesizing information from many sources is a common component within large-scale research writing projects. However, students need to be able to execute this same process during a simulated research task performed within a single testing session on a standardized reading assessment. Such simulated research tasks require students to read multiple texts and write an extended response citing evidence from all (or most) of the texts provided.

This is going to require that students utilize an extra level of organization during the reading, note-taking, and pre-writing processes. To support students in mastering this complex task, break down the instruction into a three-part mini-lesson series.

PART 1
When first teaching this skill, assign each text its own color. For example, details collected from Text A are represented in blue, Text B details are in pink, Text C details are in green, etc. When students take notes, they jot all the details on coordinating colored paper or sticky notes.

When it’s time to write the response, the color makes it easy for students to intentionally use details from every text. However, this is a short-term strategy. At some point, replace the colored paper with a graphic organizer.

PART 2
Using the two-column graphic organizer provided, note each text title in the far-left column using a different colored pen per source. As students collect relevant details, they note them in the corresponding right-hand column using the same colored pen. Again, students color-code their details when writing or typing to ensure that all texts are referenced within their evidence-based responses.
Explain the value of multiple sources

PART 3
Eventually, replace the provided graphic organizer with blank paper. Expect students to draw a chart with multiple rows—one per source. Titles are again listed on the left and their relevant details on the right. This time, using only a pencil, students mark details with circles and/or strikethroughs as they include them.

Juggling information from multiple sources is an essential part of the simulated research-writing process. This system allows students to quickly collect, select, and even attribute what details came from which sources.

“Change the teacher talk”

With each new text introduced in a unit, label it as a new source of information. Students need to know that a “one and done” approach to learning something is not good enough. Readers seek additional information from other places—other sources—in order to add to and deepen their understanding of the topic.
Define the advantages

Specifically, describe what readers gain from reading multiple sources. Additional texts:

- Introduce NEW facets of the subject that were not mentioned in the first text.
- Provide ADDITIONAL details on ideas that were only broadly mentioned in the first text.
- Reveal DIFFERENT perspectives and contradictory viewpoints to those described in the first text.

Value corroboration

Acknowledge that along with all this new information, additional sources on the same topic will also repeat some information learned from the first text. But this is also a good thing; it's a sign of corroboration. When different authors confirm the same facts, details, anecdotes, etc. that is evidence that the reader is learning accurate information.

Reading multiple texts within a unit or theme is not busy work. In fact, it's essential. Convince students that readers value multiple sources as a means of deepening their understanding on any topic.
BEST-PRACTICE STRATEGY:

Synthesize multiple texts

Bibliography

